

Guidelines for the Assessment of Student Professionalism

Approval body: MD Program Curriculum Committee

Date of original adoption: 7 December 2010

Date of last review: 20 June 2017

Date of last amendment: 20 June 2017

Date of next scheduled review: 20 June 2021

Application

Effective 2017-18, these *Guidelines* apply to all students registered in the MD Program.

Overview

Being a professional is one of the key attributes of being a physician. These guidelines for the assessment of MD student professionalism are informed by the University of Toronto's [Standards of Professional Practice Behaviour for all Health Professional Students](#) and the MD Program's [competency framework](#).

Assessment of student professionalism takes place through competency-based professionalism assessments, as described below.

Professionalism incidents that require immediate action are addressed through critical incident reports, also described below.

Suspected breaches of academic integrity are investigated and reported in accordance with the MD Program's [Academic Integrity Guidelines](#), which are informed by the University of Toronto's [Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters](#).

Competency-based Professionalism Assessments

In selected teaching and learning settings where teachers are in a position to make meaningful observations about students' professional behaviour, including small group settings and clinical learning environments, supervising teachers complete competency-based student professionalism assessment forms. This assessment exercise provides an opportunity for teachers to indicate both strengths and areas for improvement with respect to professionalism. It also allows the program to monitor whether individual students are exhibiting a pattern of unprofessional behaviour, possibly across multiple courses or multiple learning contexts.

The professionalism assessment form is organized according to six professionalism domains. Each domain includes criteria that reflect specific behaviours that characterize the respective domain, as follows:

- Altruism
 - Demonstrates sensitivity to patients' and others' needs, including taking time to comfort the sick patient
 - Listens with empathy to others
 - Prioritizes patients' interests appropriately
 - Balances group learning with his/her own
- Duty: Reliability and Responsibility
 - Fulfills obligations in a timely manner, including transfer of responsibility for patient care
 - Informs supervisor/colleagues when tasks are incomplete, mistakes or medical errors are made, or when faced with a conflict of interest
 - Provides appropriate reasons for lateness or absence in a timely fashion

- Prepared for academic and clinical encounters
- Actively participates in discussions
- Fulfills call duties
- Timely completion of MD Program and hospital registration requirements
- Excellence: Self-improvement and Adaptability
 - Accepts and provides constructive feedback
 - Incorporates feedback to make changes in behaviour
 - Recognizes own limits and seeks appropriate help
 - Prioritizes rounds, seminars and other learning events appropriately
- Respect for Others: Relationships with Students, Faculty and Staff
 - Maintains appropriate boundaries in work and educational settings
 - Establishes rapport with team members
 - Dresses in an appropriate manner (context specific)
 - Respects donated tissue; cadavers
 - Relates well to patients, colleagues, team members, laboratory staff, service, and administrative staff
- Honour and Integrity: Upholding Student and Professional Codes of Conduct
 - Accurately represents qualifications
 - Uses appropriate language in discussions about cases and with or about patients and colleagues
 - Behaves honestly
 - Resolves conflicts in a manner that respects the dignity of those involved
 - Maintains appropriate boundaries with patients
 - Respects confidentiality
 - Uses social media appropriately
 - Respects diversity of race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, age, disability, intelligence and socio-economic status
- Recognize and Respond to Ethical Issues in Practice
 - Recognizes ethical issues and dilemmas in case vignettes and in practice
 - Examines personal values in relation to challenges in educational and clinical settings
 - Applies ethical reasoning skills to case situations
 - Acts appropriately with respect to complex ethical issues
 - Understands options to respond to unprofessional and unethical behaviours of others

Teachers are asked to rank students from 1 to 5, with 5 being the highest score, for each of the six professionalism domains. The assessment of each domain is based on the criteria applicable to the student's learning activity. Teachers have the option of indicating if they were not in a position to assess one or more of the professionalism domains. Teachers are required to provide comments regarding any scores of 1 or 2, including those that are based on a critical incident (details regarding critical incident reports provided below).

Professionalism Standards of Achievement

Satisfactory professionalism competency is a requirement to achieve credit in every course, and assessment of professionalism competency is included in every course. Satisfactory professionalism competency is also required to progress from one year level to the next and to graduate from the program, in accordance with the MD Program's [*Standards for Grading and Promotion*](#).

A student may be identified as not satisfactorily progressing as follows:

- One or two scores of less than 3 on any combination of the six professionalism domains, including two scores of less than 3 on the same form, will trigger a student professionalism check-in process (see below for details).

- Three or more scores of less than 3 on any combination of the six professionalism domains, including 3 or more scores of less than 3 on the same form, will trigger a student in professionalism difficulty review process (see below for details).
- A critical incident report will trigger the student in professionalism difficulty review process. Critical incidents can be reported as part of a competency-based assessment or by any teacher, University staff member, or hospital staff member using the MD Program's Critical Incident Report Form. Further information about critical incident reports is provided below.

The student in professionalism difficulty review process will be re-triggered in cases where a student who has successfully completed (or is in the process of completing) a focused professionalism learning plan or program of professionalism remediation subsequently receives a score of less than 3 on one of the six professionalism domains.

Critical Incident Reports

Critical incident reports are intended to address situations where a student has put a patient or someone else at significant risk because of their behaviour, or situations in which a student has engaged in conduct unbecoming of a physician in training. Critical incidents of unprofessional behaviour include the following:

- Failure to keep proper medical records
- Falsification of medical records
- Breach of confidentiality
- Failure to acknowledge and manage appropriately a conflict of interest
- Being disrespectful to patients and others
- Failure to be available while responsible for contributing to patient care
- Failure to provide transfer of responsibility for patient care
- Providing treatment without appropriate supervision or authorization
- Referring to oneself as, or holding oneself to be, more professionally qualified than one is
- Being under the influence of alcohol or recreational drugs while participating in patient care
- Failure to respect the rights of patients and others, including contravention of the Ontario Human Rights Code
- Assaulting a patient or others, including any act that could be construed as mental or physical abuse
- Sexual abuse of a patient, as defined by the Province of Ontario *Regulated Health Professions Act*
- Stealing or misappropriating or misusing drugs, equipment, or other property
- Violation of the Criminal Code
- Any other conduct unbecoming of a physician in training

Please note that "patients and others" includes patients, families, staff, peers and others.

Critical incidents can be reported as part of a competency-based assessment, or by any teacher, University staff member, or hospital staff member using the MD Program's [Critical Incident Report Form](#). The person reporting a critical incident will be required to identify the area(s) of concern, the source(s) of information, provide details of the incident, and provide any relevant documentation. Critical incident reports are forwarded to the Foundations Director or Clerkship Director, as appropriate. Receipt of a critical incident report will trigger the student in professionalism difficulty review process, which is described below.

A substantiated critical incident report may lead to a program of remediation, which the student would be required to report to the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario (CPSO) and/or other provincial/territorial physician regulating bodies, as appropriate. A substantiated critical incident can also lead to failure to achieve credit in one or more courses, failure of a year, suspension, or dismissal from the program.

The MD Program's [*Protocol for MD students to report mistreatment and other kinds of unprofessional behaviour*](#) describes the principles and procedures for peer-to-peer critical incident reports.

Student Professionalism Check-in Process

One or two scores of less than 3 on any combination of the six professionalism domains, including two scores of less than 3 on the same form, will trigger the student professionalism check-in process. The check-in process is intended to ensure that students have the opportunity to discuss their performance, including consideration of comments provided on the professionalism assessment form, in a safe and confidential environment, and that they are aware of the various supports available to them.

The check-in procedures are as follows:

- i. The student is contacted in writing by and required to meet with the course or component director of the course or component in which the score of less than 3 was received. The course/component director may consult with the Foundations Director, Clerkship Director and/or other curriculum leaders prior to or following the check-in.
- ii. The check-in process normally results in one of three outcomes:
 - a. No voluntary professionalism activities are suggested by the course/component director. A record of the discussion is created by the course/component Director, reviewed by the student, and retained in the student file.
 - b. Voluntary professionalism activities are suggested by the course/component director. A record of the discussion is created by the course/component director, reviewed by the student, and retained in the student file.
 - c. The course/component director forwards the matter to the relevant curriculum (Foundations or Clerkship) director for further review. This action is taken only in exceptional circumstances, where the course/component director considers the professionalism issue serious enough to warrant further review. A record of the discussion is created by the course/component director, reviewed by the student, and forwarded to the relevant curriculum director. The student will meet with the curriculum director in accordance with the student in professionalism difficulty review process, described below.

See Appendix A for a check-in process flow chart.

Student in Professionalism Difficulty Review Process

The student in professionalism difficulty review process will be triggered if a student receives:

- Three or more scores of less than 3 on any combination of the six professionalism assessment domains, including 3 or more scores of less than 3 on the same form
- A critical incident report

A course or component director may decide to initiate the student in professionalism difficulty review process as the outcome of a check-in meeting. This action is taken only in exceptional circumstances, where the course/component director considers the professionalism issue serious enough to warrant further review.

The student in professionalism review process may lead to a program of remediation, which the student would be required to report to the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario (CPSO) and/or other provincial/territorial physician regulating bodies, as appropriate. The review can also lead to failure to achieve credit in one or more courses, failure of a year, or dismissal from the program, in accordance with the MD Program's [*Standards for Grading and Promotion*](#).

The student in professionalism difficulty review procedures are as follows:

A. Student Meeting

- i. The student is contacted in writing by and required to meet with the relevant curriculum director (i.e. Foundations Director or Clerkship Director), or delegate, to discuss the professionalism issues identified in the professionalism assessments and/or critical incident report. The student viewpoint as well as input from the course/component director and other curriculum leaders, as appropriate, will be considered during the meeting.
- ii. Reviews that involve a critical incident report will normally result in one of two outcomes:
 - a. The critical incident is *not* substantiated by the curriculum director, in which case no further action is required.
 - b. The critical incident is substantiated by curriculum director, in which case the review process proceeds.
- iii. The curriculum director, in consultation with the Faculty Lead, Ethics & Professionalism and other curriculum leaders, as appropriate, will determine next steps. The student's record of professionalism (including their professionalism assessments, substantiated critical incidents reports, and previous programs of professionalism remediation) and severity of the incidents (critical or otherwise) will inform next steps. The student's perspective and other background information will also be taken into account. Next steps will involve one of four outcomes:
 - a. No further action required
 - b. Focused Professionalism Learning Plan (See section B below)
 - c. Professionalism Remediation (See section C below)
 - d. Academic sanctions (See section D below)
- iv. The student may be required to meet with the Associate Dean, Health Professions Student Affairs or delegate for the purpose of exploring health-related or personal reasons for their unsatisfactory progress and potential supports needed.

B. Focused Professionalism Learning Plan

- i. The student will meet with the Faculty Lead, Ethics & Professionalism to develop a Focused Professionalism Learning Plan, including specific performance criteria that reflect the specific professionalism concern(s) at issue and time period for completion. The Faculty Lead has ultimate responsibility for approval of the learning plan details and timelines, in consultation with the student.
- ii. Following the time period specified for completion of the learning plan, the Faculty Lead will review the student's progress. The review may include consultation with relevant curriculum leaders. The outcome of this review will be a report provided by the Faculty Lead to the Foundations or Clerkship student progress committee.
- iii. The Foundations or Clerkship student progress committee will review the student's professionalism progress and decide whether the student is satisfactorily progressing in professionalism:
 - a. If the student progress committee decides that the student is satisfactorily progressing in professionalism, the student will be informed by the Faculty Lead that their learning plan has been successfully completed. A record of the learning plan, including its successful completion, will be retained in the student file.
 - b. If the student progress committee decides that the student is not satisfactorily progressing, a recommendation for professionalism remediation will normally be recommended, as described in section C below.

C. Professionalism Remediation

- i. Professionalism remediation may be recommended following unsuccessful completion of a Focused Professionalism Learning Plan or as an immediate outcome of the student meeting.

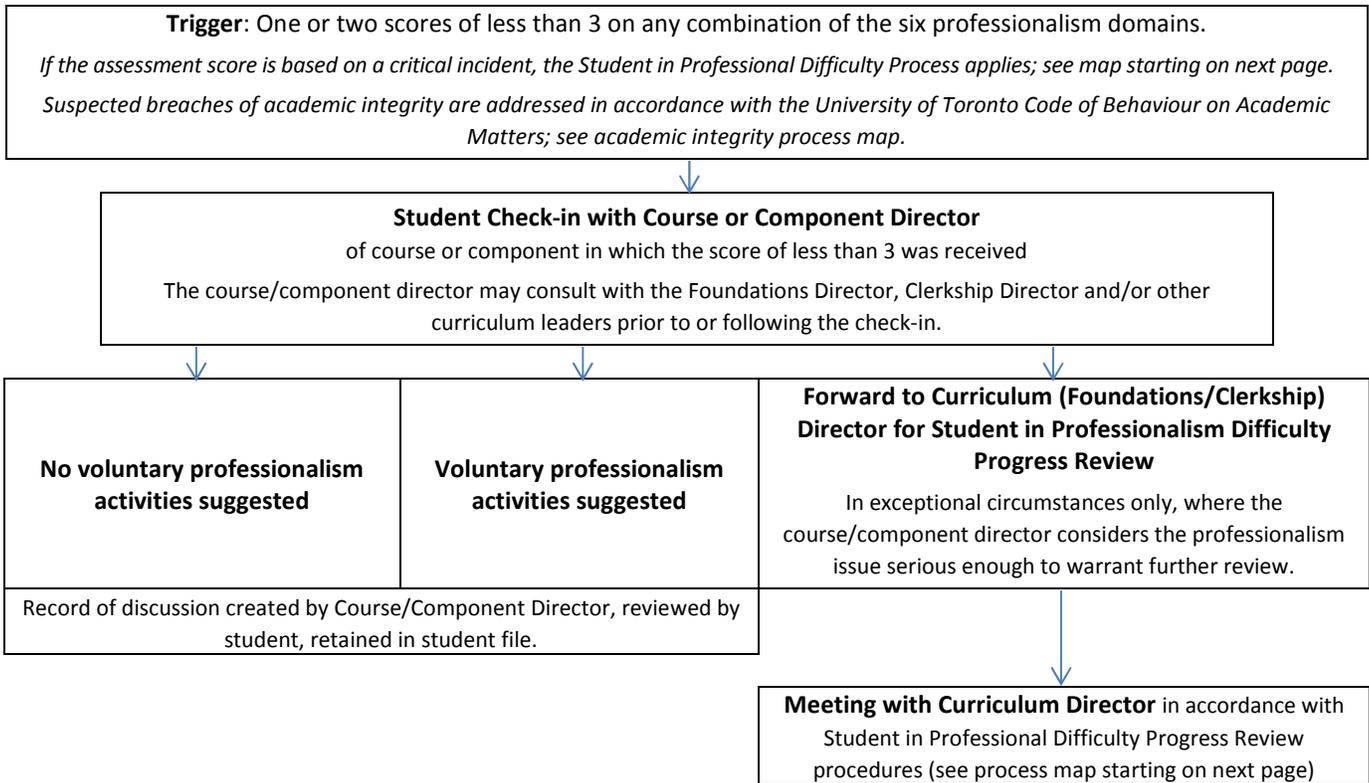
- ii. The student will be informed in writing by the relevant curriculum director or delegate that they are not satisfactorily progressing in professionalism, and that a recommendation for professionalism remediation will be made to the Board of Examiners. The student must be fully informed of their rights, including their right to provide a written submission to the Board of Examiners.
- iii. If the recommendation for formal professionalism remediation is approved by the Board of Examiners, a provincial MedSIS course grade of “Unsatisfactory Progress” (for Foundations) or “Conditional” (for Clerkship) will be assigned.
- iv. The Faculty Lead, Ethics & Professionalism will meet with the student and determine the appropriate program of remediation, including specific performance criteria that reflect the specific professionalism concern(s) at issue and time period for completion. Remediation may include repetition of a course(s), a year, and/or suspension from the program. Students will also be informed of the consequences of not successfully completing the required remediation, including in relation to the MD Program’s *Standards for grading and promotion*.
- v. Following the time period specified for completion of the professionalism remediation, the Faculty Lead will review the student’s progress. The review may include consultation with relevant curriculum leaders. The outcome of this review will be a report provided by the Faculty Lead to the Foundations or Clerkship student progress committee.
- vi. The Foundations or Clerkship student progress committee will review the student’s professionalism progress and decide whether the student is satisfactorily progressing in professionalism:
 - a. If the student progress committee decides that the student is satisfactorily progressing in professionalism, the student will be informed by the Faculty Lead that their professionalism remediation has been successfully completed. A record of the program of remediation, including its successful completion, will be retained in the student file.
 - b. If the student progress committee decides that the student is not satisfactorily progressing, a recommendation will be forwarded to the Board of Examiners. This recommendation will normally include academic sanctions, in accordance with the MD Program’s [Standards for Grading and Promotion](#).

D. Academic Sanctions

- i. Academic sanctions are normally recommended following unsuccessful completion of a program of professionalism remediation, in accordance with the MD Program’s [Standard’s for Grading and Promotion](#). In exceptional circumstances, the outcome of a student meeting involving a substantiated critical incident report may be the immediate recommendation for academic sanctions. Academic sanctions may include failure to achieve credit in one or more courses, failure of a year, suspension, or dismissal from the program.
- ii. The student will be informed in writing by the relevant curriculum director or delegate that they are not satisfactorily progressing in professionalism, and that a recommendation for academic sanctions will be made to the Board of Examiners. The student must be fully informed of their rights, including their right to provide a written submission to the Board of Examiners.

See Appendix A for a student in professionalism difficulty process flow chart.

MD Program Student Professionalism Check-in Process



MD Program Student in Professionalism Difficulty Progress Review

Triggers:

- Three or more scores of less than 3 on any combination of the six professionalism domains.
- A critical incident report, which can be reported via a Critical Incident Report Form or as part of a competency-based assessment
- Course/component director recommendation resulting from Student Professionalism Check-in Process

Suspected breaches of academic integrity are addressed in accordance with the University of Toronto Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters; see academic integrity process map.

Student Meeting with Curriculum (Foundations/Clerkship) Director

Low professionalism assessment score not based on critical incident	Low professionalism assessment score based on critical incident and/or separate critical incident report submission
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Critical incident substantiated by Curriculum Director	Critical incident not substantiated by Curriculum Director
	No further action required

Next Steps

Next steps determined by the curriculum director in consultation with Faculty Lead, Ethics & Professionalism and other appropriate curriculum leaders.

The student’s record of professionalism (including their professionalism assessments, substantiated critical incidents reports, and previous programs of professionalism remediation) and severity of the incidents (critical or otherwise) will inform next steps. The student’s perspective and other background information will also be taken into account.

The student may be required to meet with may be required to meet with the Associate Dean, Health Professions Student Affairs or delegate for the purpose of exploring health-related or personal reasons related to the critical incident and potential supports needed.

Recommendation from Curriculum Director to Foundations or Clerkship student progress committee.

No further action required	Focused Professionalism Learning Plan	Professionalism Remediation	Academic Sanctions*
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*Academic sanctions are normally recommended following unsuccessful completion of a program of professionalism remediation. In exceptional circumstances, the outcome of a student meeting involving a substantiated critical incident report may be the immediate recommendation for academic sanctions. Academic sanctions may include failure to achieve credit in one or more courses, failure of a year, suspension, or dismissal from the program.

MD Program Student in Professionalism Difficulty Progress Review (continued)

No further action required	Focused Professionalism Learning Plan	Professionalism Remediation	Academic Sanctions
<p>Faculty Lead, Ethics & Professionalism meets with student to develop Focused Professionalism Learning Plan, including performance criteria and timelines, and reports to student progress committee.</p>		<p>Foundations or Clerkship student progress committee presents recommendation to Board of Examiners (or refers back to Curriculum Director)</p>	

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Student Progress Committee	
Student is satisfactorily progressing in professionalism; no further action required	Student is not satisfactorily progressing in professionalism; next steps normally involve recommendation to BOE for professionalism remediation

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Board of Examiners (BOE)		
Remediation approved	Academic sanctions approved; no further steps required	Remediation/academic sanctions not approved; referred back to student progress committee

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Faculty Lead, Ethics & Professionalism meets with student to determine remediation plan, including performance criteria and timelines. Remediation plan may include repetition of a course(s), a year, and/or suspension from the program. Faculty Lead reports to Foundations or Clerkship student progress committee in accordance with timelines.

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Faculty Lead report to student progress committee	
Remediation successfully completed; no further steps required	Remediation not successfully completed

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Student progress committee makes recommendation to BOE in accordance with *Standards for grading and promotion*, which may include failure to achieve credit in one or more courses, failure of a year, suspension, or dismissal from the program.