

Guidelines for the assessment of undergraduate medical trainees in academic difficulty – Foundations Curriculum

Approval body: MD Program Curriculum Committee

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1. Introduction

“Academic difficulty” is a comprehensive term used to refer to all students who are identified, in accordance with these *Guidelines*, as demonstrating less than satisfactory progress in the Foundations Curriculum. These *Guidelines* are intended to support and ensure student achievement of course objectives and program competencies, with the ultimate goal being promotion through and graduation from the MD program. For the purpose of these *Guidelines*, less than satisfactory progress in a course may be recorded as either “Partial Progress” or “Unsatisfactory Progress”, in accordance with the program’s *Standards for grading and promotion of undergraduate medical students in the Foundations Curriculum*.

2. Mechanisms for Identifying Partial Progress and Unsatisfactory Progress

There are two formal mechanisms for identifying Partial Progress and Unsatisfactory Progress, as follows:

- i. *Based on assessment results:* Each course in the Foundations Curriculum includes a series of multipoint assessments. Each assessment includes a threshold standard that defines satisfactory progress. In order to receive credit for a course, a student must satisfactorily complete all marked assessments for each of the four components as well as those for the longitudinal themes that constitute the course¹, and perform satisfactorily on all non-marked learning activities for that course. The threshold standards for each type of assessment in a course are provided in the course outline. A student who does not achieve the threshold standard for an assessment type or the course as a whole will be identified as being in academic difficulty. Procedures to address partial and unsatisfactory progress based on assessment results (excluding lapses in professional behaviour) are provided in Section 3.
- ii. *Based on lapses in professional behaviour:* A student may be identified as not satisfactorily progressing due to lapses in professionalism. Two or more minor lapses or a major lapse will trigger a process that can lead to the student failing to achieve credit in one or more courses, failure or a year, or dismissal from the program. Procedures to address unsatisfactory progress based on lapses in professional behaviour are provided in Section 4.

In addition to the formal mechanisms for identifying Partial Progress and Unsatisfactory Progress outlined above, the program is committed to the early, informal identification of students whose progression is not optimal. These informal mechanisms may include assessment-related observations by tutors, including Academy Scholars, as well as conversations between students and tutors, Academy Scholars and/or administrative staff. The purpose of early, informal identification is to ensure that such students have the opportunity to discuss their performance with the appropriate curriculum leader(s) and/or administrative staff in a safe and confidential environment, and that they are aware of the various supports available to them.

¹ The four major components of the Foundations Curriculum are: Toronto Patient-Centered Integrated Curriculum (TOPIC), Integrated Clinical Experience (ICE), Portfolio, and Health Science Research (HSR). The themes are organized in three major categories: those related to priority population groups, those related to CanMEDS roles, and those related to specific content areas.

3. Procedures to Address Partial and Unsatisfactory Progress Based on Assessment Results (excluding lapses in professional behaviour)

a. Student Meeting

Following the initial identification of Partial Progress based on assessment results (excluding lapses in professional behaviour), a Student Meeting will be held, as follows:

- i. The student will meet with the Foundations Director or delegate.
- ii. The student will be informed orally and/or in writing by the Foundations Director or delegate that they have not been satisfactorily progressing, that the Board of Examiners *may* be informed of this fact, and that their performance *may* be discussed at a meeting of the Board of Examiners.
- iii. 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 less than satisfactory progress and potential supports needed.
- iv. The Foundations Director will consult with the relevant course/component director(s) and other appropriate curriculum leaders to determine next steps, including the identification of any additional learning activities, assessments and/or academic supports and assessments that are appropriate to the situation, as well as the time period for completion and review of next steps.
- v. The Foundations Director will inform the student of next steps, which will be included in a Focused Learning Plan, as described in 3.b.

b. Focused Learning Plan (“Partial Progress”)

Following the Student Meeting and determination of next steps:

- i. The student will, with guidance, formulate a Focused Learning Plan to reflect the identified next steps, including the time period for completion and review.
- ii. The Foundations Director will review and either approve *or* not approve the student’s Focused Learning Plan. To facilitate this review, the Foundations Director may consult with the relevant course/component director(s) as well as other appropriate curriculum leaders.
 - a. If the student’s updated Focused Learning Plan is approved, the Foundations Director or delegate will inform the student and the Focused Learning Plan will be entered in the student’s Learner Chart by the Director of Student Assessment or delegate.
 - b. If the student’s Focused Learning Plan is not approved, the Foundations Director or delegate will inform the student. The student will meet with the Foundations Director to discuss next steps. Based on feedback from the Foundations Director, the student will update their Focused Learning Plan, which will be reviewed and either approved *or* not approved by the Foundations Director.
- iii. After the time period specified in the Focused Learning Plan, the Foundations Director will review the student’s progress. The review may include consultation with the relevant course/component director(s) as well as other appropriate curriculum leaders. The outcome of this review will be a progress update submitted by the Foundations Director to the Student Progress Committee.
- iv. The Student Progress Committee will review the student’s progress, including consideration of their Focused Learning Plan, and decide whether the student is satisfactorily progressing.
 - a. If the Student Progress Committee decides that the student is satisfactorily progressing, the student will be informed by the Foundations Director and/or Chair of the Student Progress Committee (or delegate) that their Focused Learning Plan has been successfully completed and that they are satisfactorily progressing.
 - b. If the Student Progress Committee decides that the student is not satisfactorily progressing, a formal remediation process will be initiated, as described in 3.c.

c. Remediation (“Unsatisfactory Progress”)

In the event that the Student Progress Committee decides that a student is not satisfactorily progressing:

- i. The student will be required to meet with the Foundations Director or delegate.
- ii. The student will be informed both orally and in writing by the Foundations Director or delegate that they are not satisfactorily progressing according to the terms of their Focused Learning Plan, that the Board of Examiners will be informed of this fact, and that their performance will be discussed at a meeting of the Board of Examiners. Students will also be informed of the consequences of not successfully completing the required remediation, as set out in the program’s *Standards for grading and promotion of undergraduate medical students in the Foundations Curriculum*. The student must be fully informed of their rights, including their right to provide a written submission to the Board of Examiners in the event that their performance is being reviewed by the Board.
- iii. 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.
- iv. The Foundations Director, in consultation with the relevant course/component director(s) as well as other appropriate curriculum leaders, and subject to the approval of the Board of Examiners, is responsible for the design and content of a formal program of remediation. The Foundations Director will recommend to the Board of Examiners the level of performance expected in supplemental assessments(s). Specific performance criteria that may differ from those normally used in a course or for a component may be required for successful completion of remedial work. The timing and duration of the remediation will be dependent on the specific course(s)/component(s) in question.
- v. Following the specified time period for completion, the Student Progress Committee will review the student’s progress and decide if the student has successfully completed the formal program of remediation.
 - a. If the Student Progress Committee decides that the student has successfully completed the formal program of remediation, the Student Progress Committee, represented by the Foundations Director and/or Director of Student Assessment, will recommend to the Board of Examiners that the student be granted Credit for the course, with a grade of 60%, in accordance with the program’s *Standards for grading and promotion of undergraduate medical students in the Foundations Curriculum*.
 - b. If the Student Progress Committee decides that the student has not successfully completed the formal program of remediation, the recommendation to the Board of Examiners from the Foundations Director and/or Director of Student Assessment, on behalf of the Student Progress Committee, will be governed by the *Standards for grading and promotion of undergraduate medical students in the Foundations Curriculum*.
- vi. The Board of Examiners will make the final determination regarding successful completion of the remediation.

4. Procedures to address unsatisfactory progress based on lapses in professional behaviour

a. Initial identification of unsatisfactory progress based on lapses in professional behaviour

In all teaching and learning settings where teachers are in a position to make meaningful observations about students’ professional behaviour, supervising faculty members complete professionalism evaluation forms. This assessment exercise provides an opportunity for teachers to point out to students occasions when they fell short of expectations in their professional behaviour and also to indicate when they performed exceptionally well. Because students have significant contact with medical education administrative staff, these staff members may also fill in a form if they feel a student has significant learning issues related to professional behaviour. Forms can also be completed on behalf of community preceptors.

Single minor lapses that do not constitute a pattern of behaviour may result in a discussion between the student and the relevant curriculum leader(s). Such discussions are intended to ensure that students have the opportunity to discuss their performance in a safe and confidential environment, and that they are aware of the various supports available to them.

Unsatisfactory progress based on lapses in professional behaviour occurs when:

- A student receives two or more professionalism evaluations with a minor lapse
- A student receives a professionalism evaluation with a major lapse

b. Procedures to address unsatisfactory progress based on lapses in professional behaviour

- i. The course director will meet with any student who has received two or more minor lapses or a major lapse in their course and confirm that such lapses have occurred. If this is confirmed, the course director will inform the Foundations Director. In cases where the minor lapses or major lapse are not related to a specific course or where they occur over several courses, the student will be invited to meet with the Foundations Director to confirm that the lapses have occurred. If confirmed, the procedures outlined below will be followed.
- ii. The student will be required to meet with the Foundations Director or delegate to discuss issues identified and the student viewpoint, with input from course/component director(s) and other curriculum leaders as appropriate. The Foundations Director will make a determination as to whether the minor lapses or major lapse have occurred.
- iii. 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.
- iv. The Foundations Director, in consultation with the relevant course/component director(s), Faculty Lead, Ethics & Professionalism and other appropriate curriculum leaders, will determine whether to inform the Vice Dean, MD Program. If the lapse(s) is/are deemed to be particularly significant, and/or if there are further lapses, then a meeting between the student and the Vice Dean, MD Program, may be required. This step may take place either before or after the student is discussed by the Student Progress Committee.
- v. If the Foundations Director has determined that the minor lapses or major lapse should stand, the student's performance and possible next steps will be discussed by the Student Progress Committee.
- vi. The Foundations Director, in consultation with the Director of Student Assessment and Faculty Lead, Ethics & Professionalism, will make a determination regarding formal remediation, for recommendation 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 in the event that their performance is being reviewed by the Board.
- vii. If the recommendation for formal professionalism remediation is approved by the Board of Examiners, 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. Students will also be informed of the consequences of not successfully completing the required remediation, as set out in the program's *Standards for grading and promotion of undergraduate medical students in the Foundations Curriculum*.
- viii. Following the specified time period for completion, the Faculty Lead will review the student's progress and determine if the student has successfully completed the program of remediation.
- ix. Upon successful completion of the program of remediation program, the Faculty Lead will recommend to the Board of Examiners that the student has successfully completed the professionalism remediation. (The Student Progress Committee, represented by the Foundations



Director and/or Director of Student Assessment, is responsible for recommending if the student should be granted Credit for the course, with a grade of 60%, in accordance with the program's *Standards for grading and promotion of undergraduate medical students in the Foundations Curriculum.*)

- x. If the program of remediation has not been successfully completed, the recommendation to the Board of Examiners from the Faculty Lead will be governed by the *Standards for grading and promotion of undergraduate medical students in the Foundations Curriculum.*