

Policy Name: 3.05.1 Positive Learning Environment Policy**Scope:**

The School of Medicine is committed to providing and maintaining a safe and effective learning environment in which students, residents, fellows, faculty, and staff work together to both instruct and learn in a manner that promotes the highest level of patient care. As an institution that trains future generations of physicians, we expect the members of our community to sustain an academic environment that encourages mutually respectful relationships, is conducive to learning, and is free of mistreatment, unlawful discrimination and harassment, and threats of retaliation.

We endorse the Mistreatment Guidelines of the Group on Student Affairs of the Association of American Medical Colleges in stating that, “The medical learning environment is expected to facilitate students' acquisition of the professional and collegial attitudes necessary for effective, caring, and compassionate health care. The development and nurturing of these attitudes is enhanced and, indeed, based on the presence of mutual respect between teacher and student. Characteristic of this respect is the expectation that all participants in the educational program assume their responsibilities in a manner that enriches the quality of the learning process.”

It is, therefore, unacceptable, for a teacher to engage in discrimination or harassment, and/or mistreatment of students, or fail to adhere to applicable school, campus, and university-wide policies, procedures, and guidelines that establish standards for professionalism and conduct, as well as those principles of professionalism and ethics generally accepted within the medical profession.

All members of the medical education community have (1) a shared responsibility to protect the integrity of the learning environment, (2) the right to work and learn free of unlawful discrimination, harassment, and mistreatment, and (3) a duty to report any incident that has compromised the positive learning environment.

Applicability:

This policy is applicable to all students enrolled in, all faculty, staff and administrators employed by, and all other teachers holding appointments with the School of Medicine (e.g., residents).

Characteristics of a Positive Learning Environment:

In accordance with standards set by the Liaison Committee on Medical Education (LCME), the learning environment of the medical education program should be “conducive to the ongoing development of explicit and appropriate professional behaviors in its medical students, faculty and staff at all training locations,” whether in the classroom, clinical or laboratory settings, and “is one in which all individuals are treated with respect.” Each member of the medical school community should be accepted as an individual and treated civilly and with respect.

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Code of Professional Conduct for Teacher-Student Relationships:

1. The role of the teacher is to create an environment that facilitates learning by (i) ensuring responsibility and accountability; (ii) demonstrating respect for students as individuals and adhering to their proper roles as guides and counselors; (iii) fostering honest academic and professional conduct; (iv) guaranteeing their evaluations of students accurately reflect each student's capability; (v) respecting the boundaries of the relationship between teacher and student; and (vi) avoiding any exploitation, harassment, discrimination and/or mistreatment of the student. As such, teachers are expected to:
 - a. Model the professional virtues of reliability, compassion, empathy, integrity, courage, self-restraint, and selflessness.
 - b. Maintain high professional standards, including values and attitudes, in all interactions.
 - c. Ensure the quality of all phases and components of the student's education program.
 - d. Cultivate medical students' intellectual, professional, and personal development towards achievement of academic excellence.
 - e. Respect students as individuals and identify and work to address situations when students are not treated with respect by other teachers or staff.
 - f. Support students' mental health and well-being.
 - g. Comply with the policies, procedures and guidelines related to allegations of unlawful discrimination, harassment, mistreatment, and retaliation, and understand the process of reporting for allegations.
 - h. Encourage students who experience or witness mistreatment to report it and support the student in the reporting process.
 - i. Refuse to engage in or tolerate reprisals or retaliation of any kind because of a good faith report of mistreatment.
 - j. Take responsibility for students assigned to one's course or clinical service, and ensure a safe, fair, supportive, unbiased learning environment that respects each student's physical and social boundaries as well as encourages their development as a medical professional.
 - k. Assign tasks to students based on their knowledge, skills, and experience.
 - l. Provide high-quality, scaffolded supervision and appropriate guidance.
 - m. Provide timely, constructive, respectful, and personalized feedback to students.
 - n. Adhere to the policy on student work hours and all other applicable School of Medicine policies.
 - o. Solicit feedback from students regarding their perception of their educational experiences.

2. Students are expected to take responsibility in creating and maintaining a positive learning environment by:
 - a. Complying with policies, procedures, and guidelines outlining expectations for student professionalism.
 - b. Attending, being prepared and on time for, and participating in all academic and clinical activities and learning experiences consistent with the expectations of the faculty member, department, school, and/or experiential site.

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- c. Respecting teachers, staff, patients, and fellow learners as human beings.
- d. Requesting, accepting, and learning from feedback that is delivered in a respectful, constructive manner.
- e. Recognizing the importance of participation as an active learner and that not all learning stems from formal and structured activities.
- f. Developing an understanding and, when not certain, seeking clarification on what does and does not constitute student mistreatment; and
- g. Immediately reporting incidents of student mistreatment either experienced or observed.

Student Mistreatment:

Mistreatment arises when behavior disparages the dignity of others and unreasonably interferes with the learning process/environment; instances of student mistreatment may be experienced by an individual or observed by an uninvolved individual. Publicly humiliating, physically harming, exploiting, and/or subjecting an individual to unwanted sexual advances are all examples of mistreatment.

Spirited discussion and the conflict of ideas are integral to an academic environment of openness, so long as they are conducted in a civil and respectful way. Asking and answering questions to stimulate critical thinking and draw out ideas and underlying assumptions is vital to teaching but can and should be done in a respectful manner. In addition, constructive feedback is crucial to students' educational progress and professional development. Some feedback may be discouraging, critical, or harsh, and at times, make the student feel uncomfortable; course/clerkship directors are encouraged to have discussion privately with students should they believe that the feedback may elicit an adverse response from the student. Further, students should be encouraged to engage in reflection of action and reflection in action, which allows them to reflect in the moment as a situation unfolds, as well as after the situation has occurred to determine how they could have acted differently. Occasionally students feel embarrassed when they make mistakes, answer questions incorrectly, or are not adequately prepared. Note that not every behavior or action to which the student responds with stress or emotional discomfort is considered mistreatment. A student should reflect on each such situation and consider not just his/her/their personal reaction or response, but also the actions of the teacher/staff in light of any legitimate concerns for patient safety, circumstances surrounding the situation, and the possible teaching points of the experience. In general, actions taken in good faith and done in a respectful and constructive manner to assess or develop knowledge/skill, and/or to correct unacceptable performance/behavior are not considered mistreatment.

Reporting Mistreatment & Other Learning Environment Concerns:

Anyone who experiences or witnesses an incident of student mistreatment is encouraged to make a report as described in the Reporting and Response Flowchart for Medical Student Mistreatment and Discrimination. Anyone with general learning environment concerns may consult with the Associate Dean for Student Affairs and/or the Associate Dean for Undergraduate Medical

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Education. The Associate Deans will collaborate with faculty/teachers, clerkship directors, and others in conducting inquiries, attempting resolution, and generally discussing learning environment concerns. Appropriate notifications will be made, and actions taken in accordance with applicable university, school, departmental and/or site policies and procedures.

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