

Carleton University

SENATE POLICY ON SOCIAL WORK PROFESSIONAL SUITABILITY

Preamble

Professional social workers work with vulnerable individuals, families, and groups. To be a social worker demands adherence to the highest standards of ethical practice both personally and professionally. Students in the Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) and Master of Social Work (MSW) programs are expected to conform to the Canadian Association of Social Workers (CASW) [Code of Ethics](#) and the Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers (OCSWSSW) [Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice](#).

The Canadian Association for Social Work Education (CASWE) Standards for Accreditation (2014) require that the School have a policy regarding professional suitability of students for the profession of social work, and that students be informed that violation of the professional code of ethics may result in exclusion from the program on the basis of professional unsuitability. This Professional Suitability Policy is intended to ensure that students in the School of Social Work at Carleton University ("Carleton") are suitable for the practice of social work.

The School of Social Work is committed to ensuring the highest standard for the practice of professional social work and to protecting the safety and well-being of all students, staff, faculty members, and clients. This Policy sets out the procedures for management of an allegation of professional unsuitability and shall be outlined in students' offers of admission to the School of Social Work.

1) DEFINITIONS:

- a) Professional suitability: means adherence to the core social work values, as set out in the Canadian Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics, including:
 - i) Respect for the inherent dignity and worth of persons;
 - ii) Pursuit of social justice;
 - iii) Service to humanity;
 - iv) Integrity in professional practice;
 - v) Confidentiality;
 - vi) Competent application of knowledge and skills for professional practice.
- b) Professional unsuitability: means acting in a manner which violates the core social work values and/or violates the CASW Code of Ethics or the OCSWSSW Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice.
- c) The Social Work Professional Unsuitability Review Committee (PURC): refers to the committee responsible for adjudicating written complaints of unprofessional conduct against a student.
- d) Director: refers to the Director of the School of Social Work or designate.
- e) A Complaint: refers to a submission to the Director alleging that a student has engaged in conduct or behaviour which makes them unsuitable for the profession of social work.
- f) Complainant: refers to a person who has made a complaint against a student.
- g) Advisor: a person who supports a student required to appear for a hearing to provide advice, guidance and/or moral support to the student, arranged by the student. For the purposes of this Policy, the advisor is normally a faculty member in the School of Social Work or the Ombudsperson. The Advisor is not considered to be a party at the hearing.

2) JURISDICTION and APPLICATION

- a) The Senate of Carleton University has approved this Social Work Professional Suitability Policy to address complaints against a Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) or Master of Social Work (MSW) student at Carleton University.
- b) The application of this Policy shall be consistent with Provincial legislation and the policies of Carleton University.
- c) This Policy is not intended, neither shall it be used, to limit legal and professionally appropriate student activities that are directed to transforming, challenging, or critically engaging organisational structures, forms of practice, and theory.
- d) This Policy shall be applied in a reasonable manner recognizing that students are engaged in educational and learning processes. When errors and lapses in professional behaviour are identified it is expected that students demonstrate an ability to be self-reflective, to learn, and to correct errors and mistakes.
- e) This Policy applies to BSW or MSW students registered at Carleton University.
- f) Students are required at all times to conform to all Carleton policies such as the Student Rights and Responsibilities Policy and the Academic Integrity Policy. Review by the PURC shall neither limit student responsibilities under these or any other Carleton University policies, nor the application of such policies.

3) COMPLAINTS

A hearing of the PURC may be required when the Director receives information alleging professional unsuitability including but not limited to circumstances by which:

- a) The Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers (OCSWSSW) Discipline Committee, any other Provincial or Territorial body of social work regulators, or any other legislated body of human services professionals has found that a student has engaged in professional misconduct, incompetent practice, and has been found to be unfit for professional practice.
- b) A court of law has convicted a student of a criminal offence of a nature to indicate professional unsuitability.
- c) Service users/clients, other students, colleagues, faculty or the public have alleged that a student has engaged in actions or behaviours which demonstrate professional unsuitability;
- d) The Field Supervisor or Faculty Liaison alleges that a student is unfit for practice due to impaired functioning, or that a student's practice is incompetent. Incompetent practice can be defined as:
 - (1) A lack of knowledge, skill or judgment, or a general disregard for the welfare of the public;
 - (2) A pattern of failure to learn from practice errors when identified by instructors and to repeat problematic unprofessional behaviours;
 - (3) A pattern of behaviour that demonstrates that the student is unfit to carry out the responsibilities of a person engaged in the practice of social work;
- e) The Field Supervisor or Faculty Liaison alleges that a student suffers from a physical or mental condition which impairs social work performance during the practicum, beyond reasonable accommodation for the educational and training needs of individuals with disabilities.
- f) An Instructor of a Social Work course alleges that a student has acted toward fellow students or the Instructor in a manner that violates the CASW Code of Ethics or OCSWSSW Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice.
- g) A student has failed in their responsibility to notify the Director of criminal charges, convictions, or allegations of professional misconduct and/or review by the OCSWSSW or similar body as

required under this policy, or any other finding that could reasonably be expected to indicate professional unsuitability.

- h) There is alleged conduct which violates the CSAW Code of Ethics and the Ontario College of Social Workers and/or the OCSWSSW Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice.

4) SOCIAL WORK PROFESSIONAL UNSUITABILITY REVIEW COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

- a) Carleton University shall establish a Social Work Professional Unsuitability Review Committee (PURC).
- b) Members of the PURC will serve either in their *ex officio* capacity or otherwise normally for a three year term.
- c) The composition of the PURC shall be as follows:
 - i) The Dean of the Faculty of Public Affairs or designate who shall serve as Chair (*ex officio* and voting in the case of a tie only);
 - ii) The Director of the School of Social Work (*ex officio* and voting);
 - iii) The Supervisors of the BSW and MSW programs (*ex officio* and voting);
 - iv) Where the student is in the BSW program, the BSW Practicum Coordinator, and where the student is in the MSW, the MSW Practicum Coordinator (*ex officio* and voting);
 - v) A Carleton faculty member from outside the School of Social Work and an alternate appointed by the Dean of the Faculty of Public Affairs;
 - vi) A practising social worker and an alternate who are members in good standing of the Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers (OCSWSSW) who shall be recommended to the Dean of the Faculty of Public Affairs by the OCSWSSW;
 - vii) A representative of University Equity Services as a non-voting member.
- d) A quorum for the PURC shall be five members, two of whom must be the Chair and a member from outside the School of Social Work.

5) PRELIMINARY PROCEDURES

- a) When the Director receives a complaint from a person that indicates a student may be unsuitable for the profession of social work or engaged in professional unsuitable behaviour, the Director shall make a preliminary determination of (i) whether the matter requires taking emergency safety measures and (ii) whether it requires referral to the PURC as set out in 5(c) below. The Director shall report their findings to the Dean of the Faculty of Public Affairs.
- b) **Emergency Safety Measures:** When the Director deems that the matter disclosed in a complaint poses immediate threat to the safety of the campus community, the Director shall immediately notify the Director, Student Affairs, and the Department of Campus Safety.
- c) **Determination by Director:** Upon receipt of a complaint as soon as reasonably practicable the Director will review all available documentation and determine either:
 - i) There is insufficient evidence and/or information, on a *prima facie* basis, to refer the matter to the Chair of PURC;
 - ii) There is sufficient evidence and/or information, on a *prima facie* basis, to proceed and refer the matter to the Chair of PURC.
- d) **Preparation for PURC hearing**
 - i) When a matter is referred to the PURC the Chair of the PURC will:
 - (1) Schedule a date for the PURC hearing. The hearing should be held as soon as reasonably practicable following the Director's determination that there is sufficient evidence to proceed.
 - (2) Within 5 working days of the Director's determination that there is sufficient evidence to proceed, the Chair will send an email to the student's Carleton email address (with a "Request a Delivery Receipt" and a "Request a Read Receipt"), which provides:

- (a) the statement that: "If the allegations contained in the written complaint are substantiated and are determined to constitute professional unsuitability you may be required to withdraw from the (BSW program/ MSW program).";
- (b) a summary of the complaint;
- (c) a copy of this policy;
- (d) the names of the members of the PURC and alternates;
- (e) a statement advising the student of the availability of the services of the University Ombuds office;
- (f) a statement advising the student of their right to examine all documentation relevant to the complaint, and how the student can access this documentation
- (g) any other information which the Chair deems relevant for the student to address the complaint;
- (h) the date, time and place to appear before the PURC.

6) PURC HEARING PROCEDURES

- a) The purpose of the PURC hearing is investigative and, where possible, rehabilitative and educational in nature. The hearing is meant to:
 - i) provide students with an opportunity to respond to the allegation made against them;
 - ii) seek clarification of the evidence;
 - iii) help students understand professional suitability expectations;
 - iv) enable the PURC to determine the student's suitability for the profession of social work.
- b) The student has the right to:
 - i) have an advisor present;
 - ii) present relevant evidence as appropriate;
 - iii) be informed of all relevant information and evidence regarding the complaint;
 - iv) receive a written copy of any findings or reports.
- c) The proceedings of PURC shall continue notwithstanding that the student withdraws from the BSW or MSW program.
- d) If a student fails to attend the scheduled PURC hearing, the PURC may re-schedule the hearing for an alternative time, or make a decision based upon the evidence available in absence of the student.
- e) The student must inform the PURC five (5) working days prior to the hearing of the identity of any support person accompanying him/her.
- f) The hearing shall not be open to the public.

7) PURC FINDINGS AND DECISIONS

- a) Following the hearing, PURC shall meet in closed session with its members only to consider the evidence and information and shall produce a report. The report shall set out:
 - i) A summary of the complaint, the evidence presented informing the complaint, and the student's response if any.
 - ii) A finding that:
 - (1) The student is not suitable for the profession of social work;
 - (2) The student requires remediation and correction in order to achieve professional suitability;
 - (3) The student has suffered an episodic impairment of their professional suitability;
 - (4) The evidence does not indicate professional unsuitability.
 - iii) When the PURC finds that the student is not suitable for the profession of social work it will, through its Chair, recommend to the Provost that the student be required to withdraw permanently from the program. It is the Provost who will make the final determination

- regarding the student's withdrawal. The Provost may either withdraw the student or refer the matter back to PURC if, in the Provost's opinion:
- (1) new information and facts have emerged that have not been considered by the PURC;
 - (2) this policy and related procedures have not been properly followed.
- iv) When the PURC finds that student requires remediation and correction, or has suffered an episodic impairment, the PURC will set out a course of action:
- (1) The course of action will include a plan for achievement of professional suitability, which may include any appropriate measures as determined by PURC including but not limited to a temporary suspension from the program (this latter to be recommended to the Provost and implemented as in 7 a) iii) above), a reduced course load, fulfilment of specified conditions, or other remediation;
 - (2) The course of action will include procedures for on-going monitoring of the student's progress towards professional suitability, for providing the student with feedback on his or her progress towards professional suitability, as well as timelines for the student's achievement of his or her professional suitability goals;
 - (3) If the student has had an episodic impairment, the PURC may require that the student produce an appropriate professional certification that the condition has been resolved.
- v) When the PURC finds that the evidence does not indicate professional unsuitability, this finding will be communicated to the student by the Chair, and the records will be handled as described in the section "Records and Retention of Material" below.
- b) The PURC Report shall be sent by the Chair to the Provost, the Dean of the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Affairs where the student is in the MSW, the appropriate Registrar's Office, the Ombuds services, and to the student or, when signed consent has been given by the student to the Advisor, as soon as reasonably practicable following completion of the hearing.
- c) If the student fails to comply with conditions set out by PURC in the course of action, or fails to achieve the professional suitability goals set out in the course of action within the specified timelines, the PURC will reconvene to assess the student's professional suitability. At this time, the PURC may either provide the student with a modified course of action, or recommend the student's withdrawal to the Provost.
- d) The imposition of any form of sanction by the PURC does not in any way preclude the application and enforcement of any other Carleton policy should the student be deemed to have violated such policies.

8) APPEALS

- a) The student may appeal the decision of the PURC or the Provost to the Clerk of Senate. An appeal shall be based on:
- i) new information and facts not considered by the PURC;
 - ii) a claim that this policy and related procedures were not properly followed;
- b) The Clerk of Senate may in his or her sole discretion:
- i) Deny the appeal as having no basis;
 - ii) Consider and allow the appeal;
- If the appeal is allowed and considered, and the Clerk of Senate finds in favour of the student, the Clerk of Senate will refer the matter back to the PURC for reconsideration.

9) RECORDS AND RETENTION OF MATERIAL

- a) The Office of the Dean of the Faculty of Public Affairs shall manage and maintain all files and records as required by the Freedom of Information and Privacy Protection Act ('FIPPA') and reserves the right to share information with third parties as required by law.
- b) This material shall be retained by the Office of the Dean of the Faculty of Public Affairs in accordance with FIPPA and Carleton's record retention policies.

10) AMENDMENTS

- a) This Policy may be amended by Senate pursuant to recommendations by the School of Social Work and the Senate Committee on Curriculum, Admissions and Studies Policy (SCCASP).

Approval of the policy:

- i) Approved by the School of Social Work on September 30th, 2015.
- ii) Approved by the Senate Committee on Curriculum, Admissions and Studies Policy on October 20th, 2015.
- iii) Approved by Senate on October 30th 2015.