Rutgers University School of Social Work MSW Program
Policy Statement on Standards of Professional and Ethical Conduct

Standards of Professional and Ethical Conduct

As the Rutgers University MSW program seeks to prepare students for professional and ethical social work practice, MSW students are expected to maintain a high level of professional and ethical conduct and adhere as closely as possible to professional and ethical standards articulated in the *NASW Code of Ethics* and the Rutgers University School of Social Work’s professional conduct standards as articulated below. The program expects students to conduct themselves in a manner concordant with a professional social work practitioner. In addition to the clearly defined academic standards specified in the [School of Social Work (SSW) Academics website](#), students are expected to meet the following Standards of Professional and Ethical conduct in the classroom, in the wider university community, and in their field education settings. Failure to maintain these standards at a level appropriate to their years in the program may result in a review by the School of Social Work’s Committee on Students. A temporary suspension from field practicum participation may occur during the period of review by the Committee.

- **Adherence to the NASW Code of Ethics**
- **Professional Communication**: The social work student must communicate effectively and professionally with other students, faculty, staff, clients, field supervisors and other professionals. These standards include, but are not limited to, civility and respectful communication; respectful attention and responsiveness to feedback in communication; self-awareness in communication, including controlling one’s emotional reactions and personal stress in communications with others; effective communication of academic and professional challenges and problem solving around these challenges with appropriate supports; and the minimization of inappropriate personal mobile communication device usage in professional and academic settings.
- **Professional Commitment and Behavior**: The social work student must demonstrate a commitment to the profession and behave in a professionally appropriate manner. Demonstration of professional commitment and behavior includes, but is not limited to, adherence to the *NASW Code of Ethics*, maintaining client confidentiality, adherence to appropriate professional boundaries in client-worker relationships, self-care and the ability to control emotional reactions and personal stress so it does not impact professional judgement and performance; appropriate professional attire in professional settings; and, refraining from impaired practice and not allowing one’s own personal circumstances or issues to interfere with their professional judgment and performance. Use of alcohol and unlawful use of substances during field education, coursework and other university events may demonstrate a failure to behave and conduct oneself in a professional manner.
- **Respect for Diversity and Commitment to Social Justice**: The social work student must appreciate the value of human diversity and demonstrate a commitment to understanding cultural difference and practicing cultural humility. The student must serve in an appropriate manner all persons in need of assistance, regardless of the person's age, class, race, ethnicity, religious affiliation (or lack thereof), gender identification, ability, sexual orientation, and value system. The student should also respect cultural differences among their peers, faculty, supervisors and other professionals. The student should recognize how larger social
inequalities impact the individuals and communities they serve and integrate social work methods that address the eradication of social injustice into their practice as professionally appropriate.

Students who are suspected of violating the SSW’s Standards of Professional and Ethical Conduct or engage in behaviors that are harmful to clients, themselves, or the larger professional community while enrolled in the MSW program may be referred to the School of Social Work MSW Program’s Committee on Students. Prior to a committee referral, the committee expects that involved parties be engaged in a problem-solving process with the support of the appropriate RU SSW offices (field education, student affairs, academic affairs etc.).
Rutgers University School of Social Work MSW Program
Committee on Students

In accordance with the Rutgers University School of Social Work MSW Program’s Policy Statement on Standards of Professional and Ethical Conduct, students who are suspected of violating the SSW’s Standards of Professional and Ethical Conduct or engage in behaviors that are harmful to clients, themselves, or the larger professional community while enrolled in the MSW program may be referred to the School of Social Work MSW Program’s Committee on Students. Prior to a committee referral, the committee expects that involved parties be engaged in a problem-solving process with the support of the appropriate RU SSW offices (field education, student affairs, academic affairs etc.). A temporary suspension from field practicum participation may occur during the period of review by the Committee. Referral to the Rutgers’ University School of Social Work’s Committee on Students does not bar other compliance offices within Rutgers University from investigating and charging students under the appropriate and applicable student policies (including but not limited to the University Code of Student Conduct and the Rutgers University Academic Integrity Policy). The outcomes of any such investigations may be considered by the committee to the extent that the committee deems it relevant to the standards.

The Committee will uphold professional social work values and ethics and is concerned with the well-being of the current and future clients as well as students. Committee members will act judiciously and expect students to engage the School of Social Work’s Standards of Professional and Ethical Conduct at the level appropriate for a student.

The Committee on students is comprised of 2 elected faculty members (TT and/or NTT), a field education faculty (appointed by the Dean) and the MSW Director (in their official capacity and as standing chair). The Associate Dean of Academic Affairs serves as an ex-officio member. Committee members who have a potential conflict of interest or dual relationship with a student referred to the COS will be recused from participation. The Dean, if they deem appropriate, may appoint an additional or alternative members for any session.

The committee will meet on an as needed basis and no later than 30 days following a referral.

Procedures for the Committee on Students

1) The referring faculty or instructor will consult with the MSW Director as to whether or not a possible violation of the SSW’s Standards of Ethical or Professional Conduct or otherwise harmful behaviors towards a client or the larger professional community has occurred. If upon consultation, it is determined that a possible violation or harmful behavior did occur, the MSW Director will instruct the referring party to place their concerns into writing with appropriate documentation (i.e., the request for review form and supporting materials).
2) The MSW Director will then notify the committee of the request for review and set a meeting time and date. The student’s advisor will also be informed.

3) The MSW Director will inform the student of the request for review in writing within 5 business days of receiving the written referral. They will inform the student of their rights and committee procedures as well as the date/time of the committee meeting. The student will be provided with a copy of the request for review form and be asked to submit a written response to the committee within 5 business days of receiving the request. The MSW Director will request a meeting with the student to review the request/concern. The student’s assigned SSW advisor will also be present at this meeting.

4) Students are encouraged to consult with and engage the support of their assigned School of Social Work advisor throughout the review process and the advisor may be present at the committee meeting if the student so desires. If present at the committee meeting, the advisor cannot advocate for the student or participate in the committee’s processes.

5) The MSW Director prepares a report for the committee including a summary of the meeting with the student and all accompanying documentation. This should be provided to the committee 5 business days before the scheduled meeting date. The committee can request additional documentation or information to be provided at the time of the hearing. The committee can also request the referring faculty to appear at the meeting.

6) At the committee meeting, the committee will meet in closed session to engage in deliberations and determine if the evidence substantiates the concerns. As noted above, the committee may request that the referring faculty appear at the meeting. The student will be invited to speak with committee during this process. The student has the right to refuse participation.

7) In addition to their assigned SSW advisor, the student has the right to invite a support person who is a member of the Rutgers University to attend the committee meeting with them. If present at the committee meeting, this guest functions as a source of support for the student, but cannot advocate for the student or participate in the committee’s processes.

8) If the violation of the SSW’s Standards of Professional and Ethical Conduct is substantiated by the committee, the committee will determine appropriate sanctions and/or make recommendations to the student. If the committee believes issues beyond the scope of the Standards of Professional and Ethical conduct are implicated, the committee will notify School leadership. Sanctions and/or recommendations to students may include but are not limited to:
   - Continuation of student in the program with no conditions. The concern has been addressed by the committee and no follow up action is necessary.
   - Warning or reprimand
   - Continuation of the student in the program with conditions that may include
     - Task assignments/papers (such as restitution, extra work, specialized work, or written reflections and/or research on various topics including ethics, specific policies or procedures.)
     - Failure to comply with conditions may result in further recommendations or sanctions
• Suspension/withdrawal from field practicum and/or withdrawal from co-requisite classes
• Probation with terms
• Leave of Absence (recommendation/advisement only)
• Suspension from MSW program
• Dismissal

9) The Committee’s meetings will be documented by the MSW Director in the form of meeting minutes and distributed to the members for review. All decisions, recommendations, or requirements determined by the Committee will be provided to the student and her/his advisor in writing by the MSW Director within 10 business days of the committee meeting. This letter will include information regarding appeal procedures. Failure to submit an appeal by the appropriate deadline will render the decision final and conclude the review process.

10) The student may appeal in writing to the Dean of the School within 10 business days of receiving the written determinations of the Committee on Students. The appeal process is an entirely written process. The Dean may uphold, modify, or remand the actions of the Committee. Grounds for appeal are limited to:

   o Unsupported Conclusion: The decision made by the Student Review Committee is not supported by the facts of the case.

   o Procedural Error: The Student Review Committee process did not conform with prescribed procedures. The error committed must be determined to have substantially impacted the fairness of the disciplinary process.

   o New Information: There is new information available that wasn’t available at the time of the original Student Review Committee meeting and it is sufficient to alter the original decision.

   o Disproportionate Sanction: The sanction imposed against the student was not appropriate for the offense committed.

11) The response to the appeal will be granted within 10 business days. The decision of the Dean of the School of Social Work is final and binding.

12) Throughout the process, all administrative procedures will be monitored by the MSW Director and one of the elected committee members to ensure the Committee’s procedures, intentions, and determinations are fully in compliance with School of Social Work policy and protects students’ rights articulated below.

13) All decisions/actions made by the Committee are considered private and only shared with appropriate school personnel on a need to know basis.

14) If at any point in the review process, any member of the Committee believes there is an immediate threat to the safety and security of the student or the community (including clients served), the appropriate University/community authorities will be contacted.
**Students’ Rights:** The Rutgers University School of Social Work MSW program values student rights and adherence to procedural processes. The student has a right to 1) review the written request for committee review and receive a copy of committee procedures in writing; 2) consult with the MSW Director concerning the suspected violation, their rights and committee procedures; 3) consult with their advisor throughout the review process; 4) submit a written response to the committee; 5) appear at the committee meeting; 6) invite a support person who is a member of the Rutgers University Community to attend, but not participate in, the committee meeting with them; 6) right to a reasonable accommodation as necessary to participate in this review process; 7) receive a written summary of the committee’s findings and decisions within 10 business days of the committee’s meeting; 8) appeal the Committee’s decision; and 9) receive a written response to an appeal with 10 business days of the appeal’s submission.