

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
School of Social Work
Technical Standards for Professional and Ethical Behavior

Introduction and Purpose:

The School of Social Work (SSW) at The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill is committed to supporting students as they prepare to become professional social workers. The Technical Standards for Professional and Ethical Behavior describe the minimum expectations each Master of Social Work (MSW) student must satisfy in order to enroll in, progress through, and graduate from the MSW program.

Because the SSW is preparing students for careers as professional social workers, and given the nature of professional social work practice to protect the clients and communities we serve, the SSW has established requirements for student conduct that not only focus on academic performance but that also emphasize necessary skills, attributes, and competencies. These requirements apply within the traditional classroom setting, in field placements, and in the broader community context.

Becoming a professional is a gradual process. Thus, the Technical Standards for Professional and Ethical Behavior articulate minimum expectations for students. If at any point during a student's matriculation they have questions about whether or not they can meet these Standards, they should notify the Associate Dean for Student Affairs. If faculty or administrators have questions about whether a student is able to meet these Standards, the Committee on Students policy will be followed and this document can be used as a guide to make a referral to the Committee on Students. The full Committee on Students referral process is outlined in the next section.

A student can participate in the MSW program so long as they are able to meet these standards with or without reasonable accommodations. Students who seek accommodations for disabilities should contact the University's Office of Accessibility Resources and Service ("ARS") as soon as possible. ARS will determine a student's eligibility for and recommend appropriate accommodations and services. ARS may be reached by phone at 919-962-8300 or by email at accessibility@unc.edu.

Commitment to Non-Discrimination

The University is committed to equality of educational opportunity. The University does not discriminate in offering access to its educational programs and activities on the basis of age, color, disability, gender, gender expression, gender identity, genetic information, national origin, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, or veteran status.

The Technical Standards outlined below address the following:

1. Communication
2. Physical and Cognitive Ability
3. Emotional Stability, Management, and Regulation
4. Self-Awareness and Reflective Listening
5. Respect for Diversity and Commitment to Social Justice
6. Ethical Conduct
7. Interpersonal Skills
8. Academic and Professional Standards

Technical Standards

1. Communication

Students must be willing and able to meet the following requirements:

- Express ideas and feelings clearly;
- Demonstrate effective verbal and nonverbal communication skills, including the ability to listen objectively and to interpret nonverbal communication;
- Communicate responsibly and respectfully in all interactions with colleagues, faculty, field instructors, task supervisors, staff, clients, other professionals, and all others they might come into contact within their student role;
- Communicate clearly through written products at a level appropriate for graduate work, including using correct grammar and spelling and applying the SSW-designated writing style;
- Advocate for themselves in an appropriate and responsible manner that uses proper channels for conflict resolution as outlined in the [Student Concerns and Grievances](#) section of the [MSW Curriculum Manual](#); and
- Mastery of both written and spoken English is required at matriculation into the program, although applications from students with sight, hearing, and/or speech disabilities will receive full consideration. In such cases, the use of assistive technology, a trained intermediary, or other communications aide may be appropriate if it functions only as an information conduit and does not serve integrative or interpretive functions.

2. Physical and Cognitive Ability

Students must have sufficient sensory, motor, and cognitive skills to meet the following requirements:

- Attend and participate in classes and field placements per the expectations outlined in the syllabi and in accordance with the field setting and the Council on Social Work Education Core Competencies of Social Work Practice;
- Navigate transportation to attend field and classroom requirements;

- Use the technology required to engage in scholarship and effective practice including, but not limited to, the use of computers, telephones, and agency databases;
- Demonstrate the ability to acquire knowledge and process experiences to inform practice; and
- Demonstrate the capacity to think critically and to apply effective problem-solving skills.

3. Emotional Stability, Management, and Regulation

In accordance with the National Association of Social Workers' (NASW) Code of Ethics (§ 4.05), social work students should not allow their personal problems or issues to interfere with their judgment and performance or to jeopardize the best interests of people for whom they have professional responsibility. The social work student must demonstrate the emotional and mental stability necessary to execute sound judgment and performance in the program as well as generally to support the practice of social work. Students must be willing and able to meet the following standards:

- Demonstrate appropriate self-disclosure (the revealing of personal information) and professional boundaries in classroom and field settings, including all assignments;
- Maintain respectful relationships with colleagues, faculty, field instructors/task supervisors, staff, clients, and other professionals;
- Seek appropriate help when personal issues interfere with professional and scholastic performance;
- Manage stress effectively through self-care and by relying upon supportive relationships with colleagues, peers, and others; and
- The ability to integrate into practice constructive criticism received in both didactic and field settings.

4. Self-Awareness and Reflective Thinking

Students must be willing and able to meet the following requirements:

- Demonstrate a willingness to continually reflect on their own values, attitudes, beliefs, biases, emotions, past and current experiences, and to consider how these factors affect their thinking, behavior, interactions, and relationships;
- Demonstrate the capacity to continuously reassess their own strengths, limitations, and suitability for professional practice;
- Take responsibility for their own actions and consider the impact of these actions on others; and
- Seek supervision and accept constructive feedback in a positive manner.

5. Respect for Diversity and Social Justice

Social work practice requires understanding, affirming, and respecting another individual's way of life and values. Social workers appreciate that, as a consequence of difference, a person's life experience may include oppression, poverty, marginalization, and alienation as

well as privilege and power (Council on Social Work Education, 2009, EPAS §2.1.4).

Students must be willing and able to meet the following requirements:

- Demonstrate a willingness to examine their personal beliefs, values, and assumptions that perpetuate or counter oppression;
- Strive to relate and to work nonjudgmentally with others who differ from themselves, regardless of the person's age, class, color, culture, race or ethnicity, family structure, beliefs, religion, sex, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, marital status, national origin, ability, and/or value system;
- Demonstrate knowledge of and sensitivity to diversity, oppression, and privilege;
- Approach differences with an attitude of humility and respect, acknowledging the importance of cultural differences in shaping life experiences;
- Demonstrate the ability to develop and strengthen cross-cultural proficiency sufficient to work effectively with a wide variety of diverse groups and communities; and
- Exhibit an appreciation for difference and a commitment to engage around the complex issues of diversity and social justice.

6. Ethical Conduct

Students are required to adhere to ethical conduct and decision-making in accordance with the values, ethics, and standards established for the social work profession, as formalized in the NASW Code of Ethics, and to abide by all applicable University policies, including the University's Honor Code. Students must be willing and able to meet the following requirements:

- Adhere to a commitment to clients' rights to freedom of choice and self-determination;
- Demonstrate behavior and decisions reflecting the highest standards of honesty and personal and professional integrity;
- Maintain appropriate professional boundaries with colleagues, faculty, field instructors/task supervisors, staff, clients, and other professionals;
- Understand their role in practice as a learner and social work student. This includes the ability to correctly judge the limits of one's own competence and to seek help from an appropriate source when necessary;
- Disclose to SSW administration any legal involvement that takes place during enrollment in the MSW program, including arrest, criminal charge, criminal conviction, plea of guilty, plea of no contact, plea of nolo contendere, Alfred plea, deferred prosecution, prayer for judgment, or any other acceptance of responsibility for the commission of a crime other than a traffic-related misdemeanor or infraction;
- Disclose any discipline imposed by a state licensing board or the equivalent; and
- Follow federal and state laws and agency policies regarding confidentiality and mandatory reporting, including seeking permission from agency administrators for

the use of agency materials, records, or audio-visual materials for academic course work.

7. Interpersonal Skills

Students must be willing and able to meet the following requirements:

- Demonstrate the ability to build rapport with and work effectively with colleagues, faculty, field instructors/task supervisors, staff, clients, and other professionals; and
- Demonstrate the capacity to understand the experience and perspectives of individuals or groups and use this empathy as a basis for a productive relationship; and
- Exhibit conflict resolution skills, including the ability to negotiate differing attitudes and opinions.

8. Academic and Professional Standards

Students must be willing and able to meet the following requirements:

- Demonstrate the ability to meet the Graduate School's requirements to remain in good academic standing and to continue in the program (i.e., cannot receive a grade of F or nine credit hours with a grade of L to remain in good academic standing). This includes following the policies and procedures of the University and the Graduate School (<https://gradschool.unc.edu/handbook/>).
- Show the capacity to successfully complete required field practicum hours and demonstrate positive progress in the required competencies and behavioral indicators in the field and classroom settings;
- Follow the policies, procedures, and operating standards of SSW, the Graduate School, UNC-Chapel Hill, and the field placement agency;
- Ensure that appearance, dress, and general demeanor are appropriate to the context;
- Be punctual and dependable, prioritize responsibilities and manage time well, attend class and field in accordance with relevant policy, observe deadlines, complete assignments on time, and conscientiously arrange and keep appointments; and
- Adhere to agency policies and practices through the learning process and supervision.