

SECTION 1: ENSURING A CLIMATE FOR LEARNING

1.1 TEACHER-LEARNER AGREEMENT

Among the four missions of the School of Medicine is the education of future physicians. Our students have gone through a rigorous selection process and represent a group of highly skilled and academically well-prepared students. The School of Medicine holds in high regard professional behaviors and attitudes, including altruism, integrity, respect for others and a commitment to excellence. All members of the medical school community, including students, faculty, residents, fellows, staff, and administrators are held to high standards in these areas.

Effective learning is best fostered in an environment of mutual respect between teachers and learners. In the context of medical education, the term “teacher” is used broadly to include peers, resident physicians, full-time and volunteer faculty members, clinical preceptors, nurses and ancillary support staff, as well as others from whom students learn. Students and teachers share the challenge of learning and teaching not only the art and science of medicine, but also the acquisition of behaviors and values that characterize the ideal physician.

This Agreement serves both as a pledge and a reminder to teachers and students that their conduct in fulfilling their mutual obligations is the medium through which the profession perpetuates its ethical values.

1.1.1 Guiding Principles

Duty: Medical educators have a duty not only to convey the knowledge and skills required for delivering the profession's standard of care but also to model the values and attitudes required for preserving the medical profession's social contract with its patients.

Integrity: Learning environments that are conducive to conveying professional values must be based on integrity. Students and residents learn professionalism by observing and emulating role models who epitomize authentic professional values, attitudes and, especially, behaviors.

Respect: Respect for every individual is fundamental to the ethic of medicine. Mutual respect between students, as novice members of the profession, and their teachers, as experienced and esteemed professionals, is essential for nurturing that ethic. Given the inherently hierarchical nature of the teacher-learner relationship, teachers have a special obligation to ensure that students and residents are always treated respectfully.

1.1.2 Responsibilities of Teachers and Students

Teachers should:

Duty

- Maintain high professional standards in all interactions with patients, students, colleagues and staff;
- Provide relevant and timely information;
- Provide explicit learning and behavioral expectations early in a course;
- Provide timely, focused, accurate and constructive feedback on a regular basis;
- Practice insightful (Socratic) questioning, which stimulates learning and self-discovery and avoid overly aggressive questioning which may be perceived as hurtful, humiliating, degrading or punitive;
- Be familiar with the Student Honor Council process and the Student Professionalism Committee process and the role that faculty and students play in each (see sections 1.3.1 and 1.3.2);
- Provide thoughtful and timely evaluations at the end of a course;
- Disclose to students, during lectures, seminars and mentored research activities, the existence of any financial ties or conflicts-of-interest that are related to the material being taught;
- Be familiar with the responsibilities of the Teacher-Learner Agreement and utilize appropriate mechanisms to encourage students who experience mistreatment or who witness unprofessional behavior to report the facts immediately (see section 1.2.2 for options) and to treat all such reports as confidential.

Integrity

- Display honesty, integrity and compassion;
- Solicit feedback from students regarding their perception of their educational experiences and personal interactions;

Respect

- Treat students fairly, respectfully and without bias related to age, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, spiritual or political beliefs, disability or country of origin;
- Be prepared and on time;
- In all educational, research and clinical care settings, welcome and respect patients and others who are poor, disadvantaged, uninsured or non-English speaking;
- Recognize and respect patients' rights to privacy

Students should:

Duty

- Be active, enthusiastic, curious learners who work to enhance a positive learning environment;
- Demonstrate professional behavior in all settings;
- Recognize that not all learning stems from formal and structured activities;
- Recognize their responsibility to develop personal learning goals and to participate as active learners;
- Demonstrate a commitment to life-long learning, a practice that is essential to the profession of medicine;
- Recognize the privileges and responsibilities that derive from the opportunity to work with patients in clinical settings;
- Recognize the duty to place patient welfare above their own;
- Recognize and respect patients' rights to privacy;
- Provide teachers and the School of Medicine with constructive feedback that can be used to improve the educational experience;
- Be familiar with the responsibilities of the Teacher-Learner Agreement and utilize appropriate mechanisms to report exemplary professionalism and professionalism lapses (see section 1.2.2 for options).

Integrity

- Recognize personal limitations and seek help whenever it is needed;
- Display honesty, integrity and compassion; these attributes include the responsibility for upholding the School of Medicine Honor Council Principles (see section 1.3.2);
- Solicit feedback on their performance and recognize that criticism is not synonymous with “abuse”;

Respect

- Treat teachers and fellow students fairly, respectfully and without bias related to age, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, spiritual or political beliefs, disability or country of origin;
- Be prepared and on time;
- In all educational, research and clinical care settings, welcome and respect patients and others who are poor, disadvantaged, uninsured or non-English speaking;
- Recognize and respect patients' rights to privacy

1.1.3 Relationships between Students and Teachers

Students and teachers should recognize the special nature of the teacher-learner relationship, which is, in part, defined by professional role modeling, mentorship and supervision. There is a power differential, as expressed by the fact that teachers often evaluate student performance and the results of their evaluations may affect the student's future. Conversely, students evaluate the quality of their teachers and this can, to a lesser degree, affect the teacher's career.

Because of the special nature of this relationship, students and teachers should strive to develop a relationship that is characterized by mutual trust, acceptance and confidence. They both have an obligation to respect and maintain appropriate boundaries. Students and teachers must avoid any and all behaviors that conceivably could lead to the perception of a boundaries violation; avoiding boundary violations is crucial to a proper teacher-student relationship. There are similar boundaries between students and patients that exist because of the nature of this special and trusting relationship. Boundary violations or actions that may give the appearance of a boundary violation should routinely be avoided. A partial list includes:

- Romantic involvements;
- Business relationships, other than those that might emerge from joint educational projects;
- Faculty or students accepting services or personal favors from each other (e.g. babysitting, house sitting, pet care, work in the office);
- Accepting substantial gifts;
- Special treatment of a student, including gifts, meals, entertainment, or social contacts, that differs substantially from the usual teacher-learner relationship with other students;

Health providers who provide health services, including psychiatric/psychological counseling, to a medical student will have no involvement in the academic assessment or promotion of the medical student receiving those services. When students choose their health care providers from physicians who are on the faculty, they have the potential to be in a conflict-of-interest situation, where their provider is also evaluating their academic or clinical performance. Faculty members are not allowed to complete an evaluation for any students for whom they provide or have provided medical care. Conflicts arise between a faculty's role as the student's physician and their role as an evaluator of the student's performance. Faculty must notify students as soon as they recognize the conflict. Students likewise must notify a faculty member if they are assigned to a physician for evaluation who is providing or has provided medical care for them in the past. The student must also notify the course director who will find an alternative clinical site or provide an alternative faculty member for evaluation. Students may consult the Office of Student Life for a list of physicians who do not teach students.