Student Performance Support and Problem Solving Process

The faculty of the Department of Social Work at Metropolitan State University of Denver has as their primary mission the successful professional education and development of our students for the field and profession of social work. Our primary concern is to ensure students’ successful progression through either the BSW or MSW program and readiness for the field. Student success is our highest priority. However, as professional and accredited educational programs, each program in the department is required to make sure that students adhere to the standards, ethics, and values of the profession. Therefore, students are continually assessed in terms of academic and professional performance.

As faculty, we recognize that there are times in each person’s life when meeting academic and professional standards may be difficult. The Student Performance Support and Problem Solving Process is designed to support our students in being successful while maintaining programmatic standards. The process outlined here further builds upon the Department’s Standards of Professional and Ethical Behavior. Students and faculty are always entitled to utilize University policy and procedure to address their concerns. However, the following outlined process is the preferred process of the Social Work Department. It should also be noted that, depending on the nature of the concern, a referral to higher levels of support is possible at any point in the process should the concern warrant (see serious vs. non-serious concerns).

For concerns specifically related to performance in a field agency, students will follow the parallel Field Student Performance Support and Problem Solving Process. Issues in field seminar will follow the below policy, as they would in any academic course.

This process is intended to address issues that may create obstacles to student success during any part of their academic program. It is important to note that the University prohibits discrimination and/or harassment against any employee or student based on the individual’s race, color, gender, national origin, religion, disability, age, veteran or marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, or based on those aspects in an individual’s relatives, friends or associates. Allegations of discrimination should be reported to the Office of Equal Opportunity at (303) 556-4746, SSB 440. Allegations of sexual misconduct can be submitted to Student Conduct and Conflict Resolution Services at (303) 556-3559, Tivoli 311, or an individual can file a report online by visiting: http://www.msudenver.edu/deanofstudents/studentconduct/reportanincident/
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First Level of Student Support—Meeting between student and instructor

The first level of student support offered to all students is the direct communication with a faculty member (this includes course faculty, faculty field liaison, field instructor, or advisor). Through discussion and interaction that are a normal and typical part of the class, field, and advising process, faculty may offer support to students experiencing challenges in meeting expectations of the program and University. For most students this level of support is sufficient to navigate the difficult challenges that often get in the way of student success. Students are encouraged to use this level of student support early in any area they notice themselves failing to meet the standards expressed in the Standards of Professional and Ethical Behavior or in course expectations or Student or Field Handbooks. Your early use of faculty support helps to ensure that you will get the support you need and be successful. The results of this level of support may include, but are not limited to, recommendations to the student regarding changing performance or behavior, accommodations or modifications to assignments, and/or provision of additional support services.

Second Level of Student Support—Meeting between student, instructor, and advisor

If a student is not finding enough support through the first level of support, or a faculty member believes that the support provided at the first level is not helpful enough, either party can ask for the second level of support. The second level of support involves the student, faculty member, and advisor in a three-way discussion and problem solving process to explore additional support and steps that might be required. If the faculty member is also the advisor, an alternative faculty member may be identified. The role of the advisor is to help facilitate clear communication between the faculty member and the student and to brainstorm solutions for success. The advisor may be a useful resource in assisting the student to prepare for this discussion. The results of this level of support may include, but are not limited to, asking a student to complete specific tasks associated with the performance or behavior, making suggestions about modification to a student’s course or plan of study, and/or asking for or requesting additional support services. The outcomes of this support process should be documented in the student file. This may include the development of a written plan or contract.

Third Level of Student Support—Meeting between student, advisor, and BSSW or MSW Program Director

If a student is not finding enough support through the first and second level of support or if a faculty member believes that the support provided at the first or second level does not resolve the concerns, either party can ask for the third level of support. The third level of support involves meeting with the student, the concerned faculty member, the BSSW or MSW Program Director, and the student’s advisor. The goal of the meeting is to discuss and problem solve solutions to the challenges preventing student success. The results of this level of support may include, but are not limited to, recommendations regarding specific tasks to be undertaken by the student, modifications or alterations to the student’s plan or course of study, and/or recommendations to University discipline procedures. At this level, the student may be placed on a Performance Notice to ensure that extra attention and support is given to the situation in hopes of not further escalating the concern. Because the program has the right and responsibility to request reevaluation of a student’s suitability for the social work program, it is at this level of the support process that this would be considered. The outcomes of this support process shall be documented in the student file and forwarded to the Department chair.

In a Level 3 meeting, the advisor consults with the referring instructor or supervisor, gathering necessary information about the concern(s). The student, advisor, and program director look at: 1) the factors that might
have contributed to the current situation, 2) the conduct or behavior that requires change or adjustment, 3) the available supports within the University to address any noted issues, 4) the student’s willingness to utilize supports and make necessary changes for improvement, 5) terms for remediation and 6) if a Performance Notice is deemed appropriate, the terms of this notice (i.e., restrictions placed on the student which may range from disallowing coursework for a term, limiting the number of course hours, the placement of the student in certain courses, etc.). If a student is placed on a Performance Notice, a Performance Plan will be created to include specific goals to be met, dates for goals to be met, plan for progress meetings with the advisor, and a timetable for goal completion.

The final Performance Plan will be signed by the advisor, the students, and the program director. At this time, the student is placed on the Performance Plan and receives a copy of the signed form. The original Social Work Performance Plan is placed in the student’s file.

The successful completion of the Performance Plan will result in the removal of the Performance Notice.

If, at any stage of the process, the student refuses to engage in the development of a Performance Plan, the student will be automatically referred to a Full Student Performance Review.

**Fourth Level of Student Support—Student Performance Review**

There are two types of student performance reviews. Automatic Administrative Performance Reviews and a Full Student Performance Review.

**Automatic Administrative Performance Reviews** are triggered by a violation of departmental grade or course sequencing policy. These can include:

- The student who falls below the required minimum GPA
- The student who receives a grade below that required in the program (academic or field)
- The student falls out of the required sequence of coursework or fails to adhere to the advising snapshot provided at time of acceptance. (Exceptions to this agreement may be formally approved by the Office of Social Work Student Services without the need for a performance review).
- The student has an outstanding incomplete from one semester when the subsequent semester begins, and does not have an approved plan for completion.
- The student does not fulfill the obligations mandated by special, probationary, and/or conditional status.

Automatic Administrative Performance Reviews will always result in a referral back to the student’s advisor and may result in a Full Student Performance Review. Automatic Administrative Performance Reviews will result in the student automatically being placed on a Performance Notice and require a student Performance Plan (to be completed by the advisor and the student and signed by the student, advisor, and BSSW or MSW Director). If the consequences of the student’s grades would result in the student being dismissed from the program, the student will be referred to the student’s advisor and the student’s program director. The advisor, program director, and student can request a Full Student Performance Review.

**Full Student Performance Reviews** are usually the result of a recommendation of the advisor and program director. However, in certain cases the gravity of the concern may elevate the issue to an automatic Full Student Performance Review. Examples of the types of behavior that may trigger an automatic Full Student Performance Review include:
• The student’s behavior or interactions raise concerns about his/her ability to function in the Social Work Department or as a professional social worker, and such concerns are not resolved among the student, his/her advisor, and any other concerned parties (including, but not limited to, acts or threats of physical and/or verbal violence).
• Documented evidence of serious criminal activity (e.g. felony) occurring during the course of study or which occurred prior to admission to the program and was not disclosed as required during the admission process.
• A major violation of the Standards of Professional and Ethical Behavior or of the MSU Denver Student Handbook (including, but not limited to, violations of confidentiality, impairment as a professional, or major acts of academic dishonesty).

Non-automatic Full Student Performance Reviews generally result when issues are unresolved at lower levels of support. Issues that can result in a non-automatic Full Student Performance Review include, but are not limited to:

• Physical illness or emotional problems that exceed the availability of reasonable accommodations and, in the professional judgement of one or more of the social work faculty, could impair effective quality provision of services to future clients, acceptance of supervision, appearance and general demeanor.
• Professional goals are not matched to those of the social work profession and generalist social work practice.
• The student displays behavior that interferes with their professional judgment and performance or jeopardizes the best interests of people for whom they have professional accountability in the classroom or responsibility in the field placement.
• The student displays behavior that is a significant violation or a pattern of violations of the Standards of Professional and Ethical Behavior or the MSU Denver Student Handbook (including, but not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, and/or fraud).
• The student is dismissed from his/her field experience course for cause (e.g. a violation of professional practice or other expressly articulated violation of agency or University policy).

**Full Student Performance Review**

If the situation requires a Full Student Performance Review, a committee will be formed as outlined to conduct a formal review of the student’s performance and to make formal recommendations as to a plan of action. Results of the Full Student Performance Review can result in modification to the student’s plan of study and/or dismissal from the program.

**Full Student Performance Review Procedure**

All committee members and the student’s faculty advisor must be present at the meeting. If the student’s faculty advisor is on the committee, then another Social Work faculty member shall fill the committee position and the student’s advisor shall function as advisor.
Members of the Full Student Performance Review

The director of the student’s program (e.g. BSSW or MSW) shall serve as the chair of the Performance Review Committee. The chair will organize and facilitate the meeting and ensure that the process outlined in this policy is adhered to. The chair will publish the results of the meeting to the student, the committee, and to the student’s file.

Two faculty members from the student’s program (e.g. BSSW or MSW) shall serve as voting members of the committee. These faculty members will not currently serve in another role with the student (e.g. instructor or advisor). If the issue involves a field related matter, one of the faculty will be a field faculty liaison.

Role of the Faculty Advisor or Designee

The Performance Review Committee shall identify the designated Social Work faculty/administrator or staff member who has the most knowledge about the student and his/her overall performance. In many cases, this will be the faculty advisor. At the review hearing, the designee shall present brief background information about the student. This person will also secure evaluations from instructors of the previous semester(s) regarding the student’s performance in his/her courses and field and will secure evaluations from the Office of Social Work Student Services about the overall academic status of the student. Based on the information gathered, the designee will present his/her own assessment of the student’s overall performance and any recommendation.

Those who appear before the committee may include:

- The student whose performance is to be reviewed may attend during the fact-finding part of the meeting. The student must leave prior to the committee’s deliberation. The student may also present information to the review committee. Prior to the meeting, the student must inform the committee chair of his/her intent to attend the meeting and/or speak to the committee.
- The student may ask persons who have specific knowledge about his/her performance in this specific situation to present information to the committee. Such persons must make brief statements and are permitted to be present in the committee meeting only to make their presentation to the committee. The committee chair must be informed in advance about those persons who will appear on behalf of the student, as well as the general nature of the information each will present.
- If the student is receiving services from the Access Center—the student’s Disability Coordinator or another representative will attend to ensure that the student’s rights and University’s obligations are attended to with regard to ADA requirements.
- The designated Social Work faculty/administrator or staff member will contribute information regarding the student’s performance and will respond to questions from committee members.
- If the review was requested by a faculty/administrator/staff member, that person shall present his/her information to the committee and respond to questions from committee members.
- Other faculty/administrator/staff members or Field Experience supervisors may contribute information regarding the student’s performance. These members are to be identified by the student’s faculty advisor or committee chair.
- The presence of the Dean from the School of Letters, Arts and Sciences may be requested by the Performance Review Committee chair.
Confidentiality

All procedures related to the performance review must be carried out in a manner which assures protection of the student’s rights in line with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act. The student has the right to review all written information which is presented at the hearing, before the hearing, and may address any of this information in the hearing. Members of the committee and other persons who appear at the review hearing are expected to maintain confidentiality with regard to all aspect of the hearing. Actions of the committee are to remain confidential and are to be shared only with those persons involved with the student in an educational capacity.

Meeting Agenda

1. Fact Finding
   a. Review of facts which led to performance review – Chair of Performance Review Committee
   b. Presentation of background information about student – Faculty advisor or designated Social Work faculty/administrator or staff member
   c. When a hearing resulted from a faculty request, presentation by that person
   d. Presentation of information by student
   e. Presentation of information by student designated persons with information relevant to the performance of the student, if any are present
   f. Presentation of information by other faculty members
   g. Summary of main points and facts – Chair of Performance Review Committee

2. Deliberation and Action
   For this part of the meeting, voting committee members, the student’s advisor or designated Social Work faculty/administrator/staff member, the Dean (if present), and other social work faculty or field faculty will be included in the deliberations, but only the chair of the committee and the voting committee members will vote. Deliberations may include the following:
   a. Consideration of all factors of the student’s present and past performance
   b. Discussion of the options to address the performance problem(s)
   c. Formation of a remediation plan to be completed by the student to resolve the performance problem, or decision to dismiss the student from the Program

While it is desirable for a unanimous opinion, a majority vote will decide the plan (only the chair of the committee and the voting faculty members will vote). It is the responsibility of the Performance Review Committee chair to write a statement which describes the nature of the performance problem, a summary of the facts which were presented to the committee, and the committee’s action. This information will be kept in the student’s file. Within one week after the review hearing, this written summary statement reflecting the committee’s decision will be sent in writing to:

- The student,
- The student’s faculty advisor or designated faculty/administrator/staff member,
- The Directors of Graduate and Undergraduate Field Education,
- The Chair of the Social Work Department, and
- The student’s file.
**Appeal Process**

Should the student disagree with the results of the Full Student Performance Review, he/she must follow the University Appeal Process.
Academic Performance

Academic performance is evaluated in courses by instructors. Students must maintain the minimum GPA for their program as well as the minimum grades in their coursework according to their program’s guidelines. In addition, students must adhere to the course sequencing as designated in the program catalog and their plan of study.

Professional Performance

Professional performance is formally evaluated in the field courses by the faculty field liaison and the field instructor. Professional performance is also assessed in all social work courses and in interactions with staff, faculty, students, field supervisors, the field office, field colleagues and clients, and the community. Students are required to maintain professional conduct and demeanor in all of their interactions as guided by the Social Work Code of Ethics.

Expectations for professional conduct and demeanor further include adherence to the following:

   For example: Students are expected to treat clients with dignity and respect.

b. Metropolitan State University of Denver Policies as outlined in the student catalog (http://www.msudenver.edu/academics/catalog/)
   For example: From the Student Code of Conduct, students are prohibited from engaging in hazing activities.

c. Metropolitan State University of Denver BSSW or MSW Program policies as outlined in the BSSW Program Student Handbook and the MSW Program Student Handbook, which can be found on the Department of Social Work website
   For example: Students are expected to attend class.

d. Interacting with students, faculty, advisors, field supervisors, and clients in a professional manner
   For example: Students are expected to address problems with others in a constructive manner and to consider, accept, and implement feedback from faculty and instructors that is intended to help with their professional development.
**Serious vs. Non-Serious Concerns**

When an advisor, instructor, or supervisor notes a concern regarding a student’s professional conduct or behavior, the course of action will generally be a consultation with the student. However, this will depend on the seriousness of the issue. Serious issues, as determined by the advisor in consultation with the appropriate Program Director, may result in immediate suspension from the program and referred to the University’s Conduct Officer (please see the University’s Code of Conflict).

When a concern is raised regarding a student’s professional conduct or behavior, the course of action is dependent on the seriousness of the concern.

**Serious Concerns**

Serious concerns are those that threaten, cause, or have the potential to cause physical, psychological or emotional harm to others. Many serious concerns violate University, program, or agency policy or violate the Social Work Code of Ethics. Serious concerns include, but are not limited to: assault of a supervisor, faculty, client, or student; sexual contact with a client; and, intoxication at work. Serious concerns, as determined by a faculty member or advisor in consultation with the Program Director, may result in immediate suspension from the program and referral to the University’s Conduct Officer.

**Non-Serious Concerns**

Concerns that are not deemed serious by the advisor and Program Director (see above) will be handled so that the student has an opportunity to address and correct the noted concern. The term non-serious is used not to minimize the nature of the concern, but rather to differentiate it from those that result in immediate dismissal from the program.

Non-serious concerns are those that do not bring real or potential harm to self or others as stated above in the section on serious concerns. While non-serious concerns include acts that may be in violation of the Social Work Code of Ethics or written University, program, department, or agency policies, they are not necessarily proscribed by the aforementioned policies and standards. These concerns include, but are not limited to, difficulties interacting with a peer, staff, faculty, or agency colleagues; repeated class tardiness or unexcused absences; behavior or conduct that disrupts interaction or learning in the classroom; and, acts of academic dishonesty. Again, the term non-serious applies only to distinguish such concerns from those that result in immediate dismissal from the program, not as an indication that such conduct is deemed acceptable.

**Notification**

If, at any stage of the process (Level One, Level Two, Level Three, or Level Four), the advisor or other program representative is unable to arrange a meeting with a student, notice (e.g. note of concern; remediation plan; Performance Review letter, etc.) will be sent to the student in writing to the student’s MSU Denver email address and will serve as the official notice and status for the student.
Domains/Standards/Areas of Concern

The following are additional clarification and expansion of those areas in the Department of Social Work Standards of Professional and Ethical Behavior that each student signs upon admission to the department. This is not meant as a full and exhaustive expansion, but is designed to provide the student and faculty member with greater guidance as to the standards of the department in the primary domains of professional practice.

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<tr>
<th>Domain</th>
<th>Standard</th>
<th>Indicators of Concern</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Performance</td>
<td>• Plans and organizes work effectively</td>
<td>Appears to demonstrate a pattern of:</td>
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<td>• Turns in assignments complete and on time</td>
<td>• Poor organizational skills</td>
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<td>• Makes arrangements for his/her special needs</td>
<td>• Requests for extensions on assignments and exams</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Attends class regularly</td>
<td>• Turning in assignments late or incomplete</td>
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<td>• Multiple absences from class per class syllabus</td>
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<td>• Multiple absences from field placement</td>
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<td>Conduct/Behavior</td>
<td>• Demonstrates ability to work cooperatively with others</td>
<td>• Appears to create conflict in class, which impedes learning and/or building effective relationships</td>
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<td>• Actively participates in class discussion groups/role plays</td>
<td>• Uncooperative/unwilling to participate in class activities</td>
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<td>• Shows respect for others’ opinions</td>
<td>• Consistently late for class, or leaves class early</td>
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<td>• Is open to feedback from peers/faculty</td>
<td>• Consistently late for field placement</td>
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<td>• Demonstrates a willingness to understand diversity in people regarding race, color, gender, age, creed, ethnic or national origin, disability, political orientation, sexual orientation, and populations at risk</td>
<td>• Sleeps during class periods</td>
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<td>• Conducts him/herself according to the values and ethics of the profession</td>
<td>• Disrupts class process by talking to others</td>
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<td>• Uses derogatory language or demeaning remarks</td>
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<td>• Appears unwilling/unable to accept feedback</td>
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<td>• Monopolizes class discussions</td>
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<td>• Consistently complains about class workload to the point of impeding class process</td>
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<td>• Unwilling/unable to develop an understand of people different from oneself</td>
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- Discriminatory behavior or harassment towards others on the basis of race, gender, age, sexual orientation, disability, etc.
- Unethical professional behavior
- Academic misconduct
- Illegal behavior that impedes performance in field or class
- Unattended to personal issues that impede performance in class or field
- Acts or threats of violence to self or others

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| **Emotional Self-Awareness (Self-Understanding)** | • Uses self-disclosure appropriately  
• Appears to be able to handle discussion of uncomfortable topics  
• Deals appropriately in class with issues which arouse emotions  
• Demonstrates an awareness of one’s personal limits  
• Understands the effect of one’s behavior on others | • When engaged in self-disclosure, the student appears to be working through unresolved issues. The student appears to overact to, or resent feedback (e.g., takes it personally)  
• Appears unable/unwilling to control emotional reactions  
• Verbal threats directed at clients, faculty, staff, or students  
• Demonstrates poor judgement, decision-making, or problem solving skills  
• Consistent failure to demonstrate ability to form effective client/social worker relationship (e.g., shows judgmental attitude) |

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| **Communication Skills (Written)** | • Shows consistency in written communication  
• Written assignments demonstrate: good spelling, appropriate use of punctuation, clear structure and paragraphing, good organization, follows logical sequence.  
• Demonstrates ability to use citations | • Written works are frequently vague, shows difficulty in expressing ideas clearly and concisely and lacks critical analysis  
• Written work does not follow the assignment as designated by the instructor |
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<td>• Demonstrates ability to write effectively in records</td>
<td>• Student’s written work has errors in the areas of spelling, punctuation, structure, etc., and does not seek supports to improve</td>
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<td>• Shows command of the English language</td>
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<td>• Abides by University standards</td>
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<td>• Demonstrates use of critical thinking skills</td>
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<td>• Student’s written work has errors in the areas of spelling, punctuation, structure, etc., and does not seek supports to improve</td>
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<td>• Is able to clearly articulate ideas, thoughts, concepts, etc.</td>
<td>• Appears to have difficulty expressing him/herself when speaking</td>
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<td>• Has the ability to communicate clearly</td>
<td>• Difficulty communicating so that others can hear or understand</td>
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<td>• Has working proficiency of the English language even when English is not the student’s primary language</td>
<td>• Lacks a working proficiency of the English language when communicating</td>
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**Communication Skills (Verbal)**