



## Expectations for Student Professionalism

**RESPONSIBILITY:** Dean, Western College of Veterinary Medicine

**AUTHORIZATION:** Faculty Council, Western College of Veterinary Medicine

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**REVISIONS:**

### Purpose:

The purpose of the *Expectations for Student Professionalism* is to outline the standards of professional behaviour expected of students enrolled in the Western College of Veterinary Medicine (“College”) at the University of Saskatchewan (“University”). This document also outlines the processes for addressing concerns related to student unprofessionalism.

### Authority and Responsibility:

Under College Faculty Council bylaws, Faculty Council is granted the authority to establish and publish rules and methods for the progression and graduation of students and for their suspension or requirement to withdraw permanently for failure to meet the requirements for progression. Faculty Council is granted authority to make decisions concerning progression of students and concerning their suspension or requirement to withdraw, in accordance with the rules approved by the Faculty Council.

This college-level policy is subject to the [\*Standard of Student Conduct in Non-Academic Matters and Regulations and Procedures for Resolution of Complaints and Appeals\*](#), under the authority of University Council. To the extent that this policy is inconsistent with University policy, University regulations will prevail.

### Scope:

All undergraduate students registered in the College are subject to the provisions detailed in the *Expectations for Student Professionalism*.

### Definitions:

A “Critical Incident” is an egregious breach of standards resulting in direct harm or significant consequences, such as physical assault or unauthorized disclosure of confidential information.

A “Major Incident” is a more serious incident with potential consequences that could affect patient care, the reputation of the College, or the safety of individuals. This includes failure to respond to situations or serious breaches of conduct.

A “Minor Incident” is characterized by minimal consequences that may arise from misunderstandings or a lack of familiarity with expected standards. Examples might include late assignments or failing to communicate professionally with faculty, clinicians, peers, and staff.



A “Professionalism Hearing” is a formal review conducted by the Professionalism Panel to assess allegations of unprofessional conduct by a veterinary student. This process evaluates the validity of the claims, allows for evidence presentation, and determines necessary actions or consequences based on established guidelines.

A “Professionalism Panel” (“Panel”) is comprised of faculty members within the College, including at least two veterinarians, tasked with evaluating allegations of unprofessional behavior by students. The Panel is responsible for determining appropriate responses or remediation plans.

A “Reporter” is a person who submits a report of unprofessional behaviour. This could include faculty members, students, clinicians, staff members, or any witness to such conduct.

A “Respondent” is a student alleged to have engaged in unprofessional behaviour. In this document, this refers to students enrolled in the Doctor of Veterinary Medicine (DVM) program.

“Year Teachers Committee” is a designated group of faculty members in the College responsible for overseeing the academic progress and conduct of veterinary students within a specific year of the DVM program. The committee addresses academic and professional issues to support students in meeting established standards and expectations of the curriculum.

### Guiding Principles:

As outlined in the [Student Discipline](#) policy, the University upholds six guiding principles common to both academic and non-academic misconduct regulations: 1) Freedom of Expression; 2) Mutual Respect and Diversity; 3) A Commitment to Non-Violence; 4) A Commitment to Justice and Fairness; 5) Security and Safety; and 6) Integrity.

Building upon these foundational principles, the College recognizes the unique context of veterinary education and practice. As such, the following principles have been established to guide students in their professional behaviour:

**Empathy:** Veterinary professionals demonstrate compassion for clients, their families, and support persons in distress. This includes active listening, recognizing individual differences, and providing sensitive support, especially during challenging situations such as illness or end-of-life care.

**Accountability:** Students are expected to take responsibility for their actions and decisions, recognizing their influence on the veterinary community. This principle emphasizes the importance of learning from experiences to promote personal and professional growth.

**Professionalism:** Students must consistently exhibit professional behaviour in all settings, including being punctual, reliable, and maintaining appropriate conduct and attire in accordance with veterinary standards.

**Ethical Responsibility:** Students must uphold their ethical obligations as veterinary professionals by prioritizing animal welfare and public health. They are expected to understand the implications of their actions and consistently act in a manner that reinforces the integrity of the veterinary profession.



## Responsibilities:

The **Associate Dean, Academic** (ADA) is responsible for overseeing the Expectations for Student Professionalism as well as all procedures resulting from breaches of this conduct. This includes maintaining confidential records of incidents and ensuring that appropriate processes are followed in response to unprofessional behaviour.

All members of the veterinary community, including faculty, staff, and students, share the responsibility of upholding professional standards. Reports of unprofessional behaviour should be submitted to the appropriate authorities to initiate the necessary procedures.

## Professional Behaviour Expectations:

### Conduct in Action

This falls under the guiding principles of **Empathy** and **Professionalism**. Veterinary students are expected to engage compassionately with clients, their families, and colleagues. This means recognizing emotional needs and actively providing support in difficult situations. Oversights in recognizing a client's emotional state may signal an opportunity for growth, while failing to assist during critical moments can undermine trust in veterinary care. Insensitivity to a client's distress can lead to significant emotional harm, requiring prompt attention.

Examples of infractions include but are not limited to:

- *Minor Incident:* Failing to recognize when a client is upset.
- *Major Incident:* Neglecting to provide assistance during critical situations.
- *Critical Incident:* Displaying insensitivity to a client's distress, resulting in significant emotional harm.

### Ownership and Integrity

This falls under the guiding principles of **Accountability** and **Professionalism**. Veterinary students must take responsibility for their actions and decisions, understanding their impact on patient care and the veterinary community. This includes learning from experiences and striving for personal and professional growth. Neglect in managing time may point to areas needing improvement, while repeated failures to communicate absences reflect a more serious lack of accountability. Serious concerns regarding patient welfare that are overlooked require immediate reflection on one's professional responsibilities.

Examples of infractions include but are not limited to:

- *Minor Incident:* Submitting assignments late without prior notification.
- *Major Incident:* Repeated failures to report significant absences.
- *Critical Incident:* Neglecting to communicate serious concerns that jeopardize patient care.



## Professional Presentation

This falls under the guiding principle of **Professionalism**. Veterinary students must consistently exhibit professional behavior in all contexts. This includes maintaining appropriate attire and demonstrating reliability and punctuality in both academic and clinical environments. Simple lapses, such as inappropriate clothing in clinical settings, may indicate a lack of understanding of professional standards. More significant issues arise when chronic lateness affects trust and dependability among peers and faculty. Serious breaches, like public misconduct that harms the profession's reputation, require immediate action.

Examples of infractions include but are not limited to:

- *Minor Incident:* Wearing unsuitable clothing during clinical activities.
- *Major Incident:* Frequently arriving late to classes or clinical duties.
- *Critical Incident:* Engaging in public behavior that damages the College's reputation.

## Integrity in Practice

This falls under the guiding principle of **Ethical Responsibility**. Integrity in practice is essential in veterinary medicine, guiding students to prioritize animal welfare and public health in their decision-making. This involves understanding ethical standards and recognizing the implications of their actions on clients, patients, and the broader community. Students must act with integrity and transparency in all situations.

Examples of infractions include but are not limited to:

- *Minor Incident:* Sending an informal email to a client regarding their pet's health, which may be perceived as unprofessional.
- *Major Incident:* Withholding important information affecting patient outcomes, such as failing to disclose a treatment risk to a client.
- *Critical Incident:* Violating confidentiality by sharing a patient's private information without consent, leading to significant consequences for both the individual and the profession.

## Reporting Procedures:

### Reporting a Minor Incident

Many cases of alleged unprofessional conduct stem from misunderstandings or unfamiliarity with expected standards. Minor incidents can often be addressed through informal meetings between the reporter and the student. A constructive conversation may suffice to help the student understand the issue and work towards improvement. The reporter will document the discussion and complete the *Minor Incidents Form* (Appendix A). A copy will be provided to the student for their records, and the completed form will be submitted to the ADA who will maintain a confidential file of these forms.



During the academic year, the ADA will review these forms for patterns of behavior. If a student is accused of a minor infraction fewer than two times, this information will not be forwarded to the subsequent Year Teachers Committee Chair. If a pattern becomes apparent, the ADA will reach out to the student.

If a student is accused of multiple minor breaches, the ADA will meet with the student to document the discussion and complete a Professionalism Concern Report. The student will have the opportunity to comment on the report, which will be retained according to the University of Saskatchewan's file retention policies. No immediate further action will occur at this stage.

Should the student be involved in another minor incident after a Professionalism Concern Report has been filed, the ADA will prepare an additional report for submission to the Panel for further evaluation.

The determination of whether a Professionalism Hearing is necessary will depend on several factors, including the nature and severity of the reported incidents, any patterns of unprofessional behavior, and the overall impact on patient care or colleague safety. Previous infractions documented in Professionalism Concern Reports will also be considered. The Panel will evaluate these elements and exercise discretion in accordance with established guidelines to decide if a formal hearing is necessary.

### **Reporting a Major Incident**

Major incidents involve actions that significantly affect patient care, the welfare of colleagues, or the reputation of the veterinary profession. These situations warrant a formal response.

In the event of a major incident, the reporter will submit a *Major or Critical Incidents Form* (Appendix B). The ADA will meet with the student to document the discussion and complete a Professionalism Concern Report. The student will have the opportunity to comment on the report, which will be retained in accordance with the University of Saskatchewan's file retention policies. No immediate further action will occur at this stage.

If another major incident occurs after a Professionalism Concern Report has been filed, the ADA will prepare an additional report for submission to the Panel for evaluation.

The determination of whether a Professionalism Hearing is necessary will depend on various factors, including the severity and nature of the reported incidents, identifiable patterns of unprofessional behavior, and the impact on patient care or colleague safety. Previous infractions documented in Professionalism Concern Reports will also be taken into account. The Panel will evaluate these elements and exercise discretion in accordance with established guidelines to determine if a formal hearing is warranted.

### **Reporting a Critical Incident**

Critical incidents involve actions that have direct harmful consequences or egregious breaches of well-recognized standards. Given the severity of these situations, they require immediate attention and reporting to ensure the safety and well-being of all involved.



When a critical incident is reported, the reporter submits a *Major or Critical Incidents Form* (Appendix B). The ADA prepares a Professionalism Concern Report and submits it directly to the Panel. The Panel will promptly evaluate the circumstances surrounding the incident, allowing for evidence presentation and determining necessary actions or consequences.

The decision-making process will consider various factors, including the nature and severity of the incident, any patterns of unprofessional behavior, and the potential impact on patient care or colleague safety. Previous infractions documented in Professionalism Concern Reports will also be considered.

In cases where the critical incident poses an immediate threat to patient or community safety, the ADA has the authority to temporarily suspend the student's participation in clinical activities pending the outcome of the evaluation by the Panel.

### Process for a Formal Hearing:

The Panel conducts a formal hearing when significant allegations of unprofessional behavior warrant thorough evaluation. The hearing aims to ensure fairness and transparency while addressing the concerns raised.

Upon initiation, the Panel receives the Professionalism Concern Report and any supporting documentation. Both the reporter and the student involved are invited to present their perspectives during the hearing. This process allows for the examination of evidence, clarification of facts, and opportunities for all parties to contribute relevant information.

The Panel's decision is based on the evidence presented, the nature of the allegations, and any previous incidents documented in Professionalism Concern Reports. Following deliberation, the Panel will communicate its findings and recommendations in writing to the ADA and the student involved. The Panel has the sole authority to determine the appropriate sanctions. The Panel shall have the authority to dismiss the matter completely, or to impose one or more sanctions which may include, but are not limited to, the following:

1. Implement a remediation plan tailored to the specific issues identified, overseen by the Panel.
2. Refer the student for assessment regarding potential medical or psychosocial factors contributing to the unprofessional conduct.
3. Require the student to repeat the academic year in which the unprofessional conduct occurred.
4. Suspend the student from the DVM program for a specified period of time.
5. Expel the student from the University.
6. Postpone, deny, or revoke the conferral of the DVM degree.

All proceedings prioritize an educational approach, fostering the professional growth of the student while maintaining accountability and upholding the standards of the veterinary profession.



## Appeals:

Students have the right to appeal the Panel's decision to the Dean, WCVM, on the limited grounds as articulated at Section V of the University's [\*Procedures for Student Appeals in Academic Matters\*](#).

Procedures for appeals dealing with matters other than substantive academic judgment are outlined in detail, including appeals of standing in a program. The grounds of appeal for all college-level appeals shall be limited to the grounds of appeal outlined in Part V.B.1 of those procedures.

1. **Procedural Irregularities:** A student may appeal if there has been a significant failure to follow procedural regulations as outlined in this document.
2. **Differential Treatment:** An appeal may be made on the basis of alleged differential treatment compared to other students, either in the College's assessment of the incident(s) or in the Panel's judgment(s).
3. **Discrimination or Harassment:** A student may appeal if they believe that discrimination or harassment, as outlined in the University's policy, has affected the Panel's decision(s).
4. **Failure to Accommodate:** An appeal can be filed if there is an alleged failure to implement the University's approved policies regarding accommodations for students with disabilities. In this case, the alleged failure to implement accommodations would need to be directly related to the professionalism infractions noted by the College.
5. **New Evidence:** A student may appeal if new evidence arises that could not have been reasonably presented at the initial Panel hearing and could likely influence the original decision.