

# McGill University School of Social Work

## Code of Professional Conduct and Appropriate Use of Social Media Policy

Approved by School Council November 25<sup>th</sup> 2020

### 1. Purpose and Scope

McGill University's School of Social Work (the "School") prepares professionals to make contributions that make a difference in Montreal, across Canada, and around the world. Our emphasis is on critical thinking, research, practice and policy, with a focus on social justice on issues facing vulnerable and disadvantaged people. Our goal is the development of just and equitable societies.

The McGill School is committed to the aspirations of the social work profession which includes the advancement of issues related to social justice through respectful community engagement and dialogue.

This Code of Professional Conduct and Appropriate Use of Social Media Policy is consistent with the Canadian Association of Social Work Educators (CASWE) Standards of Accreditation with respect to Codes of Ethics (SB/M 2.4.4)<sup>1</sup>, Professional Suitability (SB/M 2.4.5)<sup>2</sup>, and Use of Social Media (SB/M 2.4.6.)<sup>3</sup>. It outlines expectations for student conduct that aligns with the School's mission and guiding principles as set forth in Section 1 of [the School Council Bylaws](#). This policy is consistent with the policies of McGill University in relation to the [Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures](#).

This Code of Professional Conduct and Appropriate Use of Social Media Policy delineates expectations for students regarding conduct in actual or virtual interactions with one another within the School, and in the outside community in contexts where they represent the School (e.g. field placements, research activities, presentations and dissemination activities etc.). The expectations outlined in this Code of Professional Conduct and Appropriate Use of Social Media Policy also provide guidance to all members of the School community (i.e. professors, sessional lecturers, field coordinators and field supervisors, students, research staff and administrative

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<sup>1</sup> CASWE Standards for Accreditation SB/M 2.4.4. "The academic unit has a policy requiring that the performance of professional responsibilities of social work students be in accordance with the relevant social work codes of ethics.

<sup>2</sup> 2. CASWE Standards for Accreditation SB/M 2.4 "The academic unit has a policy regarding the professional suitability of the student for the profession of social work. Students are made aware that serious or repeated violations of the Code of Ethics put them at risk of exclusion from the program on the basis of professional unsuitability."

<sup>3</sup> CASWE Standards for Accreditation SB/M 2.4.6 "The academic unit has a policy regarding ethical use of all forms of social media to ensure the privacy, confidentiality, and interests of the academic unit and its field practicum community and demonstrates how the policy and procedures are consistent with the relevant human rights legislation, with the mission of CASWE-ACFTS, and with the mission of the academic unit concerned."

staff). All students will be made aware of this Code of Professional Conduct and Appropriate Use of Social Media Policy and other related university-wide and School-specific policies upon admission.

## 2. Expectations for Professional Conduct

The School prepares social work students for professional practice, ensuring that graduates are eligible for registration with the appropriate license to their degree to practice as Registered Social Workers, Couple and Family Therapists and Psychotherapists in Quebec. As a consequence of this mandate, this Code of Professional Conduct must adhere to the Canadian Association of Social Worker's (CASW) [Code of Ethics](#), and the Ordre des travailleurs sociaux et des thérapeutes conjugaux et familiaux du Québec ([OTSTCFQ](#)) [Code of Ethics](#). Alongside the above noted codes of conduct, students enrolled in undergraduate and graduate programs are expected to act in accordance with the [McGill University Handbook of Student Rights and Responsibilities](#), the [McGill Code of Student Conduct](#), the [Policy on Harassment and Discrimination Prohibited by Law](#) and the [Policy Against Sexual Violence](#).

Permeating the expectations for Professional Conduct as noted above and as delineated in this Code of Professional Conduct Policy, students enrolled in undergraduate and graduate programs in the School are expected to uphold:

- a) A commitment to learning from others
- b) An interest in receiving and addressing feedback provided from classroom sessional lecturers and supervisors
- c) A commitment to the principles of social justice and inclusion
- d) Engagement in reflective practice including a willingness to explore how personal beliefs and values can interfere with respectful and inclusive interactions with other students, clients, and communities
- e) Professional use of social media (see the School's policy on use of social media)

### 2.1 Identifying & Addressing a Student Breach of Professional Conduct

All students of the School of Social Work are expected to behave in a professional manner in all areas of comportment and are responsible and accountable for their actions. While progression through any academic program is dependent upon satisfactory performance in coursework and field placements, these two criteria are not the sole determinants of successful progression in programs. The School also has a responsibility to identify a student from any program if it is determined that the student has demonstrated serious or repeated violations of the above noted Codes of Ethics, and Codes of Conduct.

Therefore, if a student displays ethical or professional conduct that is deemed serious in nature or poses any kind of immediate risk to other students, professors, sessional lecturers, field coordinators or field supervisors, non-academic staff, vulnerable groups and/or clients, a process (outlined below) is set in motion for identifying and addressing such potential breaches of Professional conduct.

## 2.2 Procedures for Identifying and Addressing Breaches of Professional and/or Ethical Conduct:

When any member of the school community (i.e. professors, sessional lecturers, field coordinators or field supervisors, students, research staff and administrative staff) expresses concern about the professional conduct of any student, it is expected that these concerns will be first discussed directly with the student within the specific learning context in which it arose. This discussion includes the identification of a series of steps that the student should take to address the concerns and a clear timeframe (e.g. one month) to put these steps into effect. A clearly written summary of the steps to be taken, and the timeframe, is placed in the student's official file. The appropriate Program Director is notified of the discussion and agreed upon plan.

If after the stipulated timeframe there has not been sufficient reduction in the concerns about professional conduct, the matter will be brought to the appropriate Program Director, their representative, or the Director of the School in the form of a written document. The student will be copied on this report and requested to attend a follow up meeting. The aim of the meeting is to provide the student with an opportunity to respond to the expressed concerns and to again participate in developing strategies and processes for resolving the concerns. The outcome of this meeting results in a clearly written plan to address the professional conduct concerns, placed in the student's official file. The plan identifies criteria for evaluation, timeline and a process for reexamining the concerns. Should the student refrain from participating in this meeting, the concerns will be brought to the attention of the Dean of Students or appropriate Associate Dean in the Faculty of Arts or Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies.

At the end of the timeline set for the implementation of the plan, a follow up evaluation meeting will be held with the same participants. If the student has not achieved the goals identified in the plan, or if some progress has been made but concerns persist, a decision will be made whether to extend or revise the plan. If the student has not made discernible progress, the Director of the School or the appropriate Program Director will alert the Dean of Students or appropriate Associate Dean in the Faculty of Arts or Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies that the student is in Breach of Professional Conduct and that steps requested of the student to address the issues have not been met. In response to serious and/or repeated breaches of professional or ethical conduct in the classroom, field placement, or broader School community, the Director of the School or the appropriate Program Director may discuss and request from the appropriate Dean or Associate Dean the removal of the student from field placement and university activities while such concerns are further investigated.

## 2.3 Appeals

At any point in this process including the moment a concern is first expressed by a member of the School community, the student may appeal to the appropriate Associate Dean in the Faculty of Arts or Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies expressing their disagreement with the concerns, the proposed plan or the re-evaluation. A student may also issue a formal grievance through the University's grievance procedures.

## 2.4 Identifying and Addressing Professional Conduct Issues for Which Other University Procedures Exist

If a breach in professional conduct falls within the purview of existing University policies and procedures the University process shall be enacted. Such breaches in conduct may include the following:

**Critical incidents:** sexual assault, physical assault, verbal abuse threatening safety. See [McGill's Policy Against Sexual Violence](#).

**Major incidents:** repeated engagement in discriminatory and oppressive behaviour towards any member of the academic and professional community, including clients, regarding their race, class, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, social condition, disability or other aspects of identity. [See McGill's Policy on Harassment and Discrimination Prohibited by Law](#).

## 3. Appropriate Use of Social Media

Students, professors, sessional lecturers, field coordinators or field supervisors, and non-academic staff rely upon online communication for professional and personal means. Using these forms of social media (including email, Facebook, twitter, Instagram and others) can result in violations of professional and ethical conduct, resulting in the following guidelines for safe, effective and professionally appropriate online presence and communication.

### 3.1 Professional Use of Social Media

This Code of Professional Conduct and Appropriate Use of Social Media Policy applies to “all forms of interactions including in personal communication as well as written communication including emails, phone calls and social media platforms”. A Professional Conduct Review (described above) may therefore be initiated in response to concerns raised with respect to any student's email communications or misuse of social media platforms.

This policy is consistent with Section A.1.q of the McGill [Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures](#) which extends the code of conduct to the following circumstances:

*(c) off-campus, including online or in social media, where the conduct has consequences that may be reasonably seen to adversely affect:*

*(i) the safety of students, academic, administrative and support staff while on campus or while participating in a University-sponsored program, event or activity; or*

*(ii) the right of a Member of the University Community to use and enjoy the University's learning or working environment.*

Breaches of the Code of Student Conduct involving misuse of social media should therefore be dealt with through the policies and procedures set forth in the University's [Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures](#).

### 3.2 Guidelines for Appropriate Use of Social Media

In addition to the guidelines provided by the [McGill University Social Media Guidelines](#), the following considerations specific to the professional context of social work should be considered by all members of the School community, including students, professors, sessional lecturers, field coordinators, field supervisors, and non-academic staff at the School. It is not unusual for members of the School community to have an online presence that is unrelated to their professional activities, in addition to any online activities related to their professional work. However, both the personal and professional online presence contribute to the development of an online profile and image that reflects on the person themselves, the School of Social Work, and the profession.

Regardless of the context, it is essential that all members of the community of the School be aware of their online profiles and activities and how these impact their professional identity, credibility and the image of the profession. It is essential that members of the community of the School be ethically responsible in their online activities and recognize the importance of appropriate boundaries, avoiding any discriminatory or derogatory statements and activities. These concerns can extend to posts, persons and pages that you may follow where activity and expressed opinions in those contexts may also be seen to reflect your values and views. Be aware that potential employers and clients do search online to learn about you. Be deliberate about establishing a professional social media profile.

The assumption should be made that anything posted online *is publicly accessible* and that any online activities could remain available to anyone even after deleting material. It is impossible to predict how information might be shared, misunderstood, decontextualized or accessed by third parties. Each member of the School community is responsible for what they post online. Posts that are potentially discriminatory, derogatory, sexually explicit, harassing or libelous can create a negative environment within relationships in the School and other professional settings and open the individual up to legal action, disciplinary action under the Student Code of Conduct or dismissal from any program within the School.

In addition, members of the community of the School are expected to apply the following guidelines:

- a) Assume that anything posted online can be seen by anyone, at any time, permanently.
- b) Do not post any confidential information about classmates or clients (i.e., specifics about a client or setting that would compromise identity, information about a professional situation or a classroom or private discussion that was shared in confidence) on any platform even if you have set appropriate privacy settings.
- c) If you wouldn't say it directly to a client, colleague, classmate, professor, lecturer, field coordinator, field supervisor or a member of the media, consider not posting it.
- d) Do not post comments or information online that could be misleading, inaccurate or reflect poorly on your own professional reputation.
- e) Do not engage in discriminatory, derogatory or harassing behaviour or posts that might reflect views antithetical to social work values and ethical practice.
- f) Do not misrepresent yourself in any social media activities, including the creation of any website. For instance, professional titles of Social Work, Psychotherapist and Dr. are

restricted titles and should only be utilized where conditions for the use of these professional titles has been met.

- g) In some agencies, communicating with clients through social media is a normal part of the work. Follow agency policies in these situations and set up social media accounts specific to your work settings.

## 4. Related McGill Policies & Services

Students, professors, sessional lecturers, field coordinators, field supervisors and non-academic staff are expected to be familiar with and comply with the policies of the University relating to conduct. These include, but are not limited to:

- [Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures](#)
- [Charter of Students' Rights](#)
- [Policy on Harassment and Discrimination Prohibited by Law](#) (See also [website](#).)
- [Policy Against Sexual Violence](#) (See also [website](#).)
- [Regulation on Conflict of Interest](#)
- [Regulation on the Conduct of Research](#)

### 4.1 Students in distress or in need of support

A number of services are available for students who may be having difficulty in their program and may be in need of help. These include:

- Physical and mental health services at the [Student Wellness Hub](#)
- Advising and accommodation from the [Office for Students with Disabilities](#)
- Support for students impacted by sexual violence [Office for Sexual Violence Response, Support and Education](#)
- Reporting harassment or discrimination to the [Senior Equity & Inclusion Advisor](#)
- Informal dispute resolution through the [Office of the Ombudsperson for Students](#)
- Financial aid from the [Scholarships and Student Aid Office](#)
- Help with family caregiving from the [Family Care hub](#)
- Support and referral through the [Office of the Dean of Students](#)
- Resources listed at: <https://mcgill.ca/resources-services-students>.

### 4.2 Academic advising

All students in the School are assigned academic advisors or supervisors.

#### **BSW Advising:**

Contact cohort advisors for BSW students are listed at <https://www.mcgill.ca/socialwork/prospective/bsw>

Undergraduate students with a CGPA below 2.0 come to the attention of the Arts OASIS office and will have access to advising and support through the [Arts OASIS](#) office.

**QY Advising:**

Contact the QY Coordinator for students in the MSW Qualifying Year

**MSW Advising:**

Contact assigned ISP or Thesis supervisor

**PhD Students:**

Contact your PhD supervisor

Graduate students can also contact the office of the [Dean of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies](#)

**Approvals:**

**School Faculty, March 11th 2020**

**School Council, November 25 2020**