

TOWSON UNIVERSITY
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH SCIENCES
PROFESSIONAL BEHAVIOR POLICY

INTRODUCTION and RATIONALE

The Department of Health Sciences has a responsibility to ensure that our students are well prepared and highly qualified to join the health professions. Allied Health, Gerontology, Health Care Management, and Public Health require strong academic preparation for and mastery of professional competencies. These professions also require non-academic professional behaviors, such as interpersonal skills and ethical, respectful conduct, which are critical to success in all sectors of employment (or productive engagement). The goal of this Professional Behavior Policy is to help students demonstrate professional behaviors in class and in internship placements. This document sets forth essential, professional behaviors for the Department of Health Sciences. Students are expected to adhere to these guidelines.

A professional behavior policy serves several important functions, including, but not limited to: (a) providing information to those considering health, helping, and human service careers to help students in their career decision-making, and (b) serving as one of the key areas for advising and feedback to students as part of their professional development.

All students in the Department of Health Sciences are expected to demonstrate they are prepared to work as professionals. Relevant professional behaviors are outlined below.

Department Expectations of Behavior

The Department of Health Sciences Professional Behavior Policy is grouped into four categories: Communication/Interpersonal Skills, Personal and Professional Behavior, Respect for Self and Others, and Social Media Policy.

Students enrolled in the Department of Health Sciences must exhibit effective:

1. Communication/Interpersonal Skills

- **Students express themselves effectively in written and oral communication regarding concepts, assignments, evaluations, and expectations with members of the learning community such as University faculty, students, administrators, and other staff. Students will:**
 - communicate effectively with other students, faculty, staff, and professionals. Students express ideas and feelings clearly and demonstrate a willingness and an ability to listen to others.
 - write clearly and use correct grammar and spelling. Students demonstrate sufficient skills to adequately complete all written assignments, as specified by faculty.
 - demonstrate sufficient oral skills to adequately complete all oral assignments and to meet the objectives of their internship, as specified by faculty.

- **Students have communication skills that are responsive to a variety of perspectives represented in diverse classrooms and/or other professional environments. Students will:**
 - demonstrate communication skills that are responsive to a variety of perspectives represented in diverse classrooms and/or other professional environments.
 - appreciate the value of diversity and look beyond self in interactions with others. They must respect differences in personal, political, religious, sexual, and/or cultural values and should not impose their personal views on others.

- **Students possess the necessary interpersonal competencies to function effectively with other students, faculty, colleagues, and community members and to function collaboratively as part of a professional team. Students will:**
 - demonstrate positive social skills in professional and social interactions with faculty, colleagues, peers, and diverse community members.
 - express their viewpoints and negotiate difficulties with instructors, peers, or community members honestly and civilly. Students should understand that disagreements are a natural function of human interaction, and should be conducted civilly according to the fair rules of persuasion, problem solving, and argumentation (listen, offer counterpoints respectfully, seek common ground if possible; and finally defer to opposing views that are backed by superior quantity and quality of evidence, or else agree to disagree).
 - take care not to overshare personal details or challenges in a professional setting (a concept also known as TMI or “too much information”).

2. **Personal and Professional Behavior**

- **Students will arrive on time and stay for the duration of the planned experience for professional commitments, including classes and internship. They will:**
 - meet deadlines for course assignments and program requirements. A pattern of repeated absences, lateness, and failure to meet deadlines in courses or internship is not acceptable.
 - understand that internship sites are advised by the Health Sciences Department to treat interns as unpaid employees who are bound to all worksite policies and standards, and that failure to comply with worksite policies and standards may result in work counseling or disciplinary measures up to and including termination from the internship site.

- **Students will be able to work appropriately, including as part of a team, with time constraints and deadlines, to concentrate in distracting situations, and to make subjective judgments. They will:**
 - work with frequent interruptions, respond appropriately to unexpected situations, and cope with variations in workload and stress levels.
 - multi-task and adapt to and display flexibility in changing situations.
 - make and execute quick, appropriate, and accurate decisions in a complex, stressful environment.
 - maintain composure and continue to function well in various situations.
 - follow their internship site's policies, guidelines, rules and conventions, and respectfully and judiciously ask for clarification when needed.

- **Students will seek assistance and follow supervision in a timely manner, and modify and respond appropriately to constructive reviews of their work from supervisors. They will:**
 - accept constructive feedback in a professional manner. They demonstrate the ability to act upon appropriate suggestions and reasonable criticism.
 - be flexible, open to new ideas, and modify their work in response to feedback.

- **Students will demonstrate attitudes of integrity, responsibility, and tolerance. They will:**
 - demonstrate honesty and integrity by being truthful about background, experiences, and qualifications; doing their own work; giving credit for the ideas of others; and providing proper citations of source materials.
 - interact courteously, fairly, and professionally with people from diverse racial, cultural, and social backgrounds and of different genders, gender identities, and/or sexual preferences.
 - not make verbal or physical threats; engage in sexual harassment; become involved in sexual relationships with clients, patients, residents, supervisors, or faculty; or abuse others in physical, emotional, verbal, or sexual ways.
 - understand the perspectives of others and demonstrate the ability to separate personal and professional issues.
 - protect the confidentiality of information unless disclosure serves professional purposes or is required by law. In certain internship placements, protection of confidentiality requires knowledge of and compliance with the [Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act \(HIPAA\)](#).

3. Respect for Self and Others

- Students exhibit respect for all Towson University staff, faculty, peers/colleagues, and community members.
- Students respect the rule that cell phone for personal use is prohibited during class hours; possible exceptions for emergencies may be approved in advance.
- Students are free of the influence of illegal drugs and/or the abuse of legal drugs and/or alcoholic beverages on university premises and at internship sites. Students are expected to abide by the Towson University Code of Student Conduct and the Student Academic Integrity Policy.
- Students demonstrate the ability to deal with personal and professional stressors through the use of appropriate coping mechanisms. They handle stress effectively by using appropriate self-care and by developing supportive relationships with colleagues, peers, and others.
- Students use sound judgment. They seek and effectively use help for medical and emotional problems (including from resources such as the Towson University Health Center, Accessibility & Disability Services, and the Towson University Counseling Center) that may interfere with academic and/or professional performance.
- Students project an image of professionalism. They will:
 - demonstrate appropriate personal hygiene.
 - dress appropriately for their professional contexts.
 - possess maturity, self-discipline, and appropriate professional judgment.

4. Social Media Policy

- The same principles and guidelines that apply to students' activities in general also apply to their activities online. This includes all forms of online publishing and discussion, including blogs, user-generated video and audio, social networks and other social media applications. The Internet is neither anonymous nor forgetful, and there is no clear line between one's professional life and personal life on a social media site.
 - Students realize their representations on the internet will be considered within the scope of their professional demeanor.
 - Students shall not take or post photos of internship placement sites on social media accounts or personal websites without specific written consent.
 - As interns, students must review and comply with the placement agency's social media policies. At certain placements, posting information and/or pictures on social media could be a [HIPAA](#) violation.

Implementation and Review Procedures

Students will receive a copy of the Department's *Professional Behavior Policy* and sign a *Professional Behavior Policy Acknowledgement Form* at pre-advising sessions in the Department of Health Sciences and renew this commitment at the time of entry to internship placements.

At various points (e.g., in class and during internship) students will be notified of professional and/or academic behavior inadequacies that may prevent them from progressing through their program. Documentation and consensus regarding the student's functioning will be sought before any action is taken. Students who experience deficiencies in any areas will be encouraged to seek appropriate professional help from Towson University or other sources. Failure to address the problem may jeopardize continuation in the academic program.

Accommodations for Individuals with Disabilities

Requirements of the Professional Behavior Policy may be met with or without accommodations. Students should contact Towson University's Accessibility & Disability Services (ADS) (410-704-2638) and follow established university policy and procedures. Students with disabilities are encouraged to speak to ADS about accommodations that may be needed during an internship placement.

The University complies with the requirements of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. Therefore, Towson University will endeavor to make reasonable accommodations with respect to its professional behavior standards for a student with a disability who is otherwise qualified. "Disability" shall mean, with respect to an individual: (1) a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more of the major life functions of such individual; (2) a record of such an impairment; or (3) being regarded as having such an impairment. The University reserves the right to reject any requests for accommodations that are unreasonable, including those that would involve the use of an intermediary that would require a student to rely on someone else's power of selection and observation, fundamentally alter the nature of the University's educational program, lower academic standards, cause an undue hardship on the University, or endanger the safety of students or others.

Unless a student has expressly waived his or her privilege to confidentiality of records provided to substantiate either a disability or a recommendation for an accommodation, program administrators to which such information has been communicated shall maintain such information in a manner that preserves its confidentiality. Under no circumstances shall such information become part of a student's academic records.

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STUDENT ACKNOWLEDGEMENT FORM

Students in the Department of Health Sciences must exhibit effective:

Communication/Interpersonal Skills

- be able to express themselves effectively in written and oral communication in regards to concepts, assignments, evaluations, and expectations with members of the learning community such as university faculty, students, administrators, and staff
- have communication skills that are responsive to different perspectives represented in diverse classrooms and/or other professional environments
- have the necessary interpersonal competencies to function effectively with instructors, peers, faculty, staff, professionals, and community members, and to function collaboratively as part of a professional team

Personal and Professional Behavior

- arrive on time for professional commitments, including classes and internship
- be able to work under time constraints, concentrate in distracting situations, and make subjective judgments
- seek assistance and follow supervision in a timely manner, and accept and respond appropriately to constructive review of their work from faculty and supervisors
- demonstrate integrity, responsibility, and tolerance
- maintain confidentiality, including compliance with HIPAA in certain internship settings
- show respect for self and others
- project an image of professionalism

Respect for Self and Others

- respect for all TU and internship personnel
- obey appropriate cell phone use
- remain drug and alcohol free while attending university classes and events and at internship placements
- use sound judgment and deal with personal and professional stressors appropriately

Social Media Policy

- realize their representations on the internet will be considered within the scope of their professional demeanor
- review and comply with social media policies at internship placement agency, including compliance with HIPAA in certain internship settings

I have read and acknowledge receipt of the **Department of Health Sciences Professional Behavior Policy** in its entirety. I understand that if the expectations outlined in the Policy are not met satisfactorily, I may be recommended for dismissal from my major program and/or denied the opportunity to complete the internship component of the curriculum.

Student Signature

Date

PRINTED Name

Date

This signed document should be given to the **Department Chair or Program Director**.

NOTE: The University has a legal obligation to provide appropriate accommodations for students with documented disabilities. Students seeking accommodations should register with the University's Office of Accessibility & Disability Services (ADS) and notify course instructors prior to the start of classes or internships.

POLICY REGARDING CONTINUANCE OR REMOVAL FROM INTERNSHIP PLACEMENTS

As well as academic preparation and skills, the health professions also require non-academic professional behaviors, such as interpersonal skills, which are as critical to success as those in the academic domain. Students who fail to demonstrate appropriate professional behavior or mastery of content may be removed from an internship placement.

If a student fails to demonstrate competence in one or more expectations in the internship, the following policy shall be implemented.

Procedure for Assisting Students and/or Removing Students from Internship Placements

1. If an agency supervisor requests the removal of an intern from a placement due to lateness, absenteeism, a breach of confidentiality (which may or may not be a [HIPAA](#) violation), unprofessional behavior, failure to comply with the agency's policies, or another reason, the placement at that site shall be ended immediately. If a student's actions are considered illegal activities, there is an automatic referral to step five of this policy. Within 48 hours of the removal, the student must write to the Internship Coordinator to request an alternate internship placement during the same semester. The decision will be made by the Internship Coordinator and the Chair of the Department of Health Sciences. If the student is not assigned to a new internship site in the same semester, the student will proceed to step five of this policy.
2. If issues arise at the internship site but the agency supervisor has not requested removal of the student, the university supervisor ensures that the agency supervisor has provided appropriate guidance and has involved the intern in a gradual progression of appropriate professional experiences with appropriate direction and feedback. The university supervisor is responsible for meeting with the intern and providing feedback, as well as ideas for troubleshooting problems at the internship. The agency supervisor should give written feedback to any intern who is having difficulty after formative verbal discussions with the intern have occurred.
3. When an agency supervisor, university supervisor, or others have identified a problem in the internship setting, it is the university supervisor's responsibility to inform the student, in writing, that they are not meeting expectations and to specify the behaviors, dispositions, knowledge, and/or skills that need remediation. Once informed of the area(s) requiring remediation, the student is responsible for developing/proposing an Assistance Plan (in response to the area(s) requiring remediation) with the university supervisor. After review, discussion, and revision (as needed) of the proposed plan, the university supervisor, along with the agency supervisor and the student, will finalize and sign an Assistance Plan that includes the areas of weakness and the steps the intern must follow to remediate those weaknesses. The plan will include a timeline that specifies how and when the intern will be expected to address the identified weaknesses, benchmarks, criteria, and the steps that will follow if the weaknesses are not remediated within the time frame. Each time the university supervisor and the agency supervisor meets with the intern, written notes will be provided regarding the progress being made on the Assistance Plan. The university supervisor will give a copy of the Assistance Plan to the Chair of the Department of Health Sciences and Program Director as a way to alert them that the student is experiencing difficulty. If the student refuses to sign or fails to implement the Assistance Plan, the student will be removed from the internship.
4. At the end of the time frame set forth in the Assistance Plan, the student is either allowed to proceed in the internship placement as long as they are able to maintain all of the responsibilities expected of the experience, or they are removed from the internship placement due to lack of progress on the Assistance Plan. This decision will be made by the university supervisor in collaboration with the agency supervisor, Internship Coordinator, Program Director, and the Chair of the Department of Health Sciences.
5. If an intern is removed from an internship, they will receive a grade of U for the internship course. If the removal occurs before the deadline for officially withdrawing from courses, the intern may be allowed to withdraw from the internship and receive a grade of W for the course.

6. A student may appeal removal from an internship placement to the Chair of the Department of Health Sciences within 48 hours of being removed from the placement. The Chair will decide on the appeal based on university policy as stated in the appropriate catalog. If the Chair rules in favor of the student, the student will be assigned to a different internship placement in the current or a future semester, but will not return to the original placement.

7. After removal from a placement, to be assigned to another internship placement in a subsequent semester, the intern must make a written request to the Chair of the Department of Health Sciences at least 60 days before the beginning of the semester in which the placement is sought. The Chair of the Department of Health Sciences will confer with the Department of Health Sciences Appeals Committee. If the Committee recommends denial of the request and the Chair concurs with the Committee, the student has the right to appeal the decision to the Dean of the College of Health Professions.

Email Etiquette: Do's and Don'ts

Do's

DO include a heading in the subject line. With the number of emails and viruses that populate inboxes, realize the significance of the subject line. A subject header is essential if you want someone to read your message.

DO make the subject line meaningful. A "Hi" or "Hello" won't do. The recipient decides in which order to read your message- or whether to read it all- based on who sent it and what it's about.

DO personalize your message to the recipient. Although email is informal, it still requires a personal greeting, such as, "Dear Ms. Jones," or "Hi, Jack." Failure to include a greeting can make your message seem cold.

DO account for tone. When you communicate in person, more than 90% of your message is non-verbal. Email has no tell-tale body language! The reader cannot see your face or hear the tone of your voice, so choose your words carefully and thoughtfully.

DO look at your email address and determine how it represents you. Names such as "soccerguy8" don't sound professional. Students sometimes embarrass themselves by communicating with an employer using an inappropriate address.

DO include your name or a signature with additional details and contact information. The recipient may want to communicate by means other than email.

Don'ts

DONT forget to check for spelling and grammar. If you think this form of communication does not have to be letter perfect, think again! It represents you. Poorly written messages may indicate a poor caliber of work in other ways. Use proper capitalization, punctuation and usage, and always check your spelling.

DONT write the great American novel. Email is intended to be a brief communication. Keep the message short and concise. Use only a few, brief paragraphs.

DONT forward email without permission. Why take responsibility for passing along something that was addressed only to you? Often, confidential information becomes public knowledge because of someone's lack of judgment. Unless you were asked to forward something, don't do so without permission!

DONT "reply to all" unless you are sending a response appropriate for group viewing.

DONT fill in the "TO" line until you've written and proofed/edited your message. Is the information accurate? Grammatically correct? In an appropriate tone? If you enter the "TO" information first, a slip of the finger can send a message before its time!

DONT think that no one but the intended recipient will see your email. After a message leaves your mailbox, you have no idea where it may go. Don't use email to send anything that you wouldn't want to be seen in public.



Career
Center

Addendum 2: Suggestions for Professional Dress during Interviews and Internship Placements

Do

- *Practice appropriate personal and oral hygiene.* Nails, hair and facial hair should be clean and well-groomed. In most organizations with client/patient contact, employees should keep fingernails short (no longer than 1/4 inch in length) and clean. No artificial fingernails, extenders, or acrylic overlay can be worn by those providing "hands-on" care. Where required for patient safety and health requirements, long hair should be worn up, tied back or placed in a hair net.
- *Dress the part for the job you want.* Generally speaking, health professionals work in conservative organizations. Before you go out for an interview, take a look at the way people are dressed on websites that are representative of the organizations where you want to be employed. Most likely, you will not see baseball caps, jeans, tee-shirts, flip-flops, uncovered belly buttons, or low-rider jeans with exposed skin. You will see people dressed in clean, pressed dresses, skirts, slacks, and dress blouses and shirts.
- *Be consistent with standards of safety and good taste.* Attire should be clean, neat, pressed, in good repair, modest and fit properly. No logos or representations of drugs, tobacco, or alcohol should be worn. Low necklines and hemlines shorter than three inches above the knees are not recommended. Discretion should be used regarding fabric sheerness and the type of undergarments worn. Underwear should not be visible through clothing.

Don'ts

- The following are examples of clothing that are not permitted by many organizations while employees are on duty:
 - Beach wear, overalls, ragged pants, shorts, lycra pants, capri pants, harem style pants, leggings, excessively tight or form fitting garments
 - Tube, tank, crop, midriff or halter tops, muscle shirts, tee shirts (except as undergarments)
 - Sleeveless tops and dresses should cover the distance between the shoulder and the neck, in other words, no spaghetti straps or other thin straps should be worn without a jacket or sweater
 - Garments of jean or dungaree style material, i.e., designs incorporating denim and designs using heavy over stitching of seams or rivets
 - Sweat pants or garments of fleece material, sweat shirts and tee shirts.
 - Hats or head coverings, unless required to meet health regulation guidelines, worn as a religious observation, or designated as part of a uniform
- *Chew gum, wear excessive make-up, perfume, after-shave or jewelry.* The simpler the better. Do shower the day of the interview and do use a good deodorant. Many people have allergies to fragrances, and some organizations have declared themselves "Fragrance Free Zones". Wear jewelry that is understated and professional. Wearing many rings can make hand washing less effective for infection control. Long earrings can be grabbed and ripped out by disoriented patients, clients, or residents. Be mindful of your work environment and the people you serve.
- *Exposed body art (tattoos).* In many healthcare organizations, it is best for employees or interns to keep tattoos above your wrists and below your shirt collar.