

Salisbury University  
College of Health and Human Services  
School of Health Sciences

## **Respiratory Therapy Program**

Student Behavior in a Professional Academic Program Policy

## Introduction

Salisbury University (the “University”) and the Respiratory Therapy Program in the School of Health Sciences (SHS) strive to attract, matriculate, and educate students who possess both the intellectual capacity for respiratory therapy and who also exhibit a high capacity for ethical and professional behavior. Fundamental attributes of ethical and professional behavior include, but are not limited to honesty, integrity, and civility, as well as a demonstrated desire to learn, respect for the academic process, concern for the welfare of patients and their families, commitment to patient confidentiality, respect for the rights of others, emotional maturity, and self-discipline.

Since the development of ethical and professional behavior is an integral part of education in respiratory therapy, demonstrating such conduct during your education is an academic matter. Professionalism is a cornerstone of a successful academic program, just as it is a cornerstone of the responsible conduct of research, maintaining integrity and compassion in the delivery of health care, and building a collegial and conscientious health professions team.

Circumstances may arise during a student’s course of study that call into question the capacity or commitment of the student to maintain this academic standard. The University and the Respiratory Therapy Program have the responsibility and authority to determine a student’s fitness to continue in their program of study. The process of transitioning from a student to a health care professional requires study, self-reflection, and self-management on the part of learners. Development of ethical and professional behavior is critical in the education of respiratory therapy students and considered a core competency in the academic program. Thus, ethical, and professional behaviors are key factors in achieving and maintaining academic good standing. When a student accepts an offer of admission into the respiratory therapy program, he or she commits to comply with all University and Respirator Therapy Program rules and expectations, including those regarding ethical and professional conduct.

## Policy and Procedures

The Respiratory Therapy Program has established this “Student Behavior in a Professional Academic Program Policy” (“Policy”). In addition to the academic and clinical-related requirements of the program, this Policy and its related procedures govern academic, ethical, and professional behavior of respiratory therapy students.

The Policy and procedures identify student responsibilities and rights in conjunction with standards of fairness, privacy, and due process. They are derived, in part, from the standards of conduct adopted and published by American Association Respiratory Care (AARC). Students are also expected to comply with federal, state, and local laws and regulations, and University policies and procedures (e.g., Code of Community Standards, Policy and Procedures Prohibiting Sexual Misconduct and Other Sex and Gender-Based Discrimination, etc.).

As noted above, professional ethical and behavior standards are integral elements to the comprehensive education of respiratory therapy students and violations of this Policy are academic matters. Failure to meet ethical and professional behavior standards may result in: i) action up to, and possibly including, program dismissal, and ii) referral to the Dean of Students, which may result in suspension or dismissal from the University. A student who violates this policy may jeopardize their advancement through the Respiratory Therapy Program and the likelihood of completing the program and graduating.

## Objective

The objective of this Policy is to articulate the academic importance of the ethical and professional behavior of students within the Respiratory Therapy Program in the School of Health Sciences. This policy provides students, faculty, and staff with clearly articulated expectations regarding student ethical and professional behavior, assures professional programs have the authority and responsibility to act on concerns regarding the ethical and professional behavior of students, outlines a description of the procedures for managing and addressing student ethical and professional behavior, and assures standards are implemented consistent with principles of fairness, privacy, and due process.

## Intent

- A. This Policy is a means to formally address unmet professional behaviors. All respiratory therapy students are expected to demonstrate high standards of ethical and professional behavior in all educational and clinical settings including, but not limited to:
1. Classroom-based milieu (e.g., classrooms, lecture halls, laboratories, online and technology-based classes).
  2. Professional and clinical sites that are part of the learning program (e.g., hospitals, clinics, community health centers, schools, ambulatory settings, Henson Medical Simulation Center, and study abroad).
  3. Other settings not part of the formal learning program but which contribute to the learning process (e.g., student-run special interest group meetings and activities, clubs and governance structures, interactions with Respiratory Therapy and non-Respiratory Therapy Professional Program administrators, faculty and staff of the University, or any other member of the campus community); and
- B. In addition, while this policy is intended to guide the ethical and professional behavior of students studying in the Respiratory Therapy Professional Program and not intended to directly guide or address behavior that is a part of a student's private life, such behavior may come to the attention of Salisbury University in several ways and become the focus of a Policy investigation or charge in the following ways:
1. Conduct may be reported to a member of the faculty or administration from a variety of sources raising concern about the student's capacity to continue his or her studies. If such reported conduct raises a concern about the safety of the student or the safety of others that the student may have contact with or includes behavior that could indicate an issue with judgment or moral, ethical, or personal values that would preclude satisfactory functioning in the chosen discipline, an investigation may be conducted, and action taken on the basis of the investigation.
  2. If a student is charged with an offense in the civil justice system and the University becomes aware of and verifies this circumstance through self-report of the student or a reliable, verified source, the University, in its sole discretion, will promptly pursue an investigation and institute commensurate academic and/or student judicial disciplinary action simultaneous with or in advance of any final adjudication of the civil court proceeding. The University will complete this due process regardless of whether the student withdraws from the program and/or the University and/or fails to participate in the process.
  3. If a student is charged with a criminal offense, he or she is obligated to report this to their program chair immediately. If a matriculating student has been charged with a criminal offense between the time the student has submitted an application, for admission and the time the student arrives at school, or at any time while the student at Salisbury University, the student must inform the program chair of the charges before the first day of classes. If the University later discovers that a student withheld disclosure of a criminal charge, the program chair has the authority to take the immediate interim action of suspending or dismissing a student from a clinical session, didactic class, and/or from the program. The University, in its sole discretion, will promptly pursue an investigation and institute commensurate academic and/or student judicial disciplinary action simultaneous with or in advance of any final adjudication of the criminal court proceeding. The University will complete this due process regardless of whether the student withdraws from the program and/or the University and/or fails to participate in the process. This is consistent with the obligation of the University and its health professions programs to ensure the safety of patients and others.

- C. Respiratory Therapy Professional Students are always expected to hold themselves to the highest standards of ethical and professional conduct. As part of their education, these students must begin to practice behavior that they will uphold for the rest of their professional lives. While not all-inclusive, examples of unacceptable ethical and professional behavior include, but are not limited to, the following:
1. Lack of integrity and honesty (e.g., lying about, misrepresenting, or not reporting information about care given, clinical errors, or any action related to clinical functions, acting outside the scope of his or her role in a clinical, academic, professional, or administrative setting)
  2. Failure to demonstrate professional demeanor or concern for patient safety (e.g., use of offensive language and gestures, being under the influence of alcohol or drugs in the educational or clinic setting)
  3. Unmet professional responsibility (e.g., not contributing to an atmosphere conducive to learning due to poor attendance, punctuality issues, and/or distracting or insensitive behavior in class, lab, or clinic; poor personal hygiene; needing continual reminders to complete responsibilities in a timely manner; not responding to requests [written, verbal, e-mail, telephone] in a timely manner; breaching patient confidentiality)
  4. Exhibiting disruptive behavior (e.g., pushing; punching; throwing things; making inappropriate gestures; threats; verbal intimidation; language that belittles or demeans; negative comments with racial, ethnic, religious, age, gender, or sexual overtones; making impertinent or inappropriate written entries in the medical record; or making statements attacking students, faculty, or staff). Certain behavior complaints, particularly in cases of complaints of sexual harassment and sexual assault, could be violations under Salisbury University and USM policies and may require investigation by the Salisbury University Fair Practices Office.
  5. Lack of effort toward self-improvement and adaptability (e.g., resistant, or defensive in accepting constructive criticism; remaining unaware of one's inadequacies; resisting considering or making suggested changes to improve learning, behavior, or performance; not accepting responsibility for errors or failure; abusive or inappropriately critical or arrogant)
  6. Lack of respect for cultural diversity (e.g., inappropriate behavior with respect to age, culture, race, religion, ethnic origin, gender, sexual orientation). Certain behavior complaints, particularly in cases of complaints of sexual harassment and sexual assault, could be violations under Salisbury University and USM policies and may require investigation by the Salisbury University Fair Practices Office.
  7. Exhibiting poor relationships with members of the health care team (e.g., not functioning appropriately within the health care team or not demonstrating the ability to collaborate with fellow students, staff)
  8. Exhibiting poor relationships with patients and families (e.g., insensitive to the patient's or family's needs, inappropriate personal relationships with patients or members of their families; lack of empathy)
  9. Failure to maintain and safeguard the confidentiality of patient and research participant information, including paper and electronic records, verbal communications, and social networking and electronic media sites.
  10. Failure to comply with University, school, and/or program academic and clinically related requirements (e.g., education, immunization, HIPAA, FERPA)

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## Procedures for Handling Breaches of Ethical and Professional Behavior Standards

Violations of this Policy will be handled as follows:

Complaints regarding suspected breaches of ethical and professional behavior may be initiated by individuals within the University, school, or program (students, faculty, staff, and administration) or by external sources (patients, families, visitors, extramural rotation sites, other agencies with which a student has had contact). Additionally, if in the absence of a specific complaint, individuals within the University, school, or program become aware of conduct of an egregious or serious nature, they will investigate in lieu of a formal complaint and will take all appropriate actions in compliance with the procedure outlined in this document.

The initial complaint should be promptly forwarded to the student's program chair. If the program chair is not available or the circumstances of the complaint prevent notification of the program chair, the Dean of the College of Health and Human Services should be notified promptly. The formal complaint must be in writing, with a brief description of the evidence, and submitted within 10 University business days of the discovery of the incident, exclusive of University breaks and academic intercessions.

(Note: Complaints brought forward after the 10-day deadline may be reviewed but must be presented with an explanation of why the deadline was not met. Prior to proceeding with the complaint review and investigation, the program chair or other receiving administrator will evaluate the nature and acceptability of the delay.)

The University is legally required to investigate all egregious acts of sexual harassment or sexual violence. Therefore, the University reserves the right to investigate, with or without a formal written complaint, in the best interest of the University or the community. Independent of the results of the investigation under this policy, breaches of ethical professional behavior and standards dealing with Fair Practices issues will be referred to the Fair Practices Office for investigation under other applicable policies and procedures.

### Complaint Categories

There are three categories of complaints and associated procedures outlined below. The complaints are categorized by severity of behavior and whether immediate punitive action is warranted. The three categories are as follows:

- Troubling Behavior (Teaching Opportunity) – Behavior that is of concern but that may be remediated through a single discussion.
- Troubling Behavior (Professional Concerns Report) – Behavior that requires a formal process for remediation, for example, situations in which a student has exhibited significant and/or serious behavior problems that do not warrant suspension or dismissal but need to be corrected.
- Egregious, Unethical, or Unprofessional Behavior – Behavior requiring immediate action by the program chair to take the interim action of suspending or dismissing a student from a clinical session, didactic class, and/or from the program.

### Individual Category Review and Outcome Procedure

#### Troubling Behavior – Teaching Opportunity

For less egregious unethical and unprofessional behavior, rather than filing a formal complaint about professional behavior, the faculty member or program chair may conclude (but is not required to conclude) that the incident is more appropriately handled as a teaching opportunity rather than a disciplinary matter.

In such cases, the faculty member or program chair will contact the student directly to discuss the issue, provide feedback, and make suggestions for how the behavioral issue can be mitigated. If the faculty member or program chair believes an effective resolution resulted from meeting with the student, no further action is required (i.e., Informal Resolution).

However, the incident shall be documented in the student's file and may be reviewed in the future, where applicable, to indicate a pattern, practice, or failure to benefit from redirection (i.e., documentation of mentoring). The student will be provided a copy of the documentation that is placed in the student's file. This student file will be separate from the student's academic file and kept solely in a secure location within the department; access to its contents would only be on a need-to-know basis.

### **Troubling Behavior – Professionalism Concerns Report**

In the event that the faculty member or program chair determines the feedback given to the student regarding the issues of concern was not successful in resolving the issue or if the behavior is of a significant or serious nature (but not warranting immediate suspension or dismissal), a Professionalism Concerns Report (PCR) will be completed (i.e., formal resolution) by the faculty member involved or program chair (if the complaint originates from someone other than a program faculty member).

The focus of the PCR process is still educational with the goal of helping the health professions student move forward successfully in coursework, clinical practice experience, and interactions within the health care community.

The PCR must be filed with the program chair within 10 University business days from the time the behavior was observed or reported. A copy of the PCR will also be provided to the student, and the student will be encouraged to respond within three University business days to the PCR in writing to the program chair discussing the circumstances that led up to the complaint and the nature of the complaint itself. The student's response to the PCR must be submitted to the program chair prior to any meeting.

(Note: Complaints brought forward after the 10 University business days deadline may be reviewed, but they must be presented with an explanation of why the deadline was not met. Prior to proceeding with the complaint review and investigation, the program chair or other receiving administrator will evaluate the nature and acceptability of the delay.)

Within three business days of receipt of the PCR and with the purpose of understanding the circumstances of the accusation, the program chair will conduct an interview of the accused student, interview witnesses to the event that led up to the complaint, review any pertinent documents, and take any other action deemed necessary to understand the circumstances that brought on the complaint.

Based on the outcome of the review, the student's response and student interview, the program chair may decide that the PCR is unwarranted or may provide the student with strategies to mitigate the identified unprofessional behavior.

During the program chair's meeting with the student to discuss the findings of the review, the student will be provided with an opportunity for reflection on appropriate behavioral changes. The student will be asked to sign the PCR acknowledging the PCR has been reviewed. The program chair may require remedial action, such as a corrective action plan or mandated counseling, which shall be noted on the PCR.

If a corrective action plan or other remediation is required by the PCR, the plan shall include a timeline for remediation. At the conclusion of this timeline, the program chair will meet with the student to review the outcome of the remediation process. The program chair will place a concluding written comment in the PCR discussing the level of success of the remediation. The PCR is then filed with the student's departmental record. This student file will be separate from the student's academic file and kept solely in a secure location within the department; access to its contents would only be on a need-to-know basis. The student will be apprised of this record retention in writing by the involved faculty member or program chair.

## **Troubling Behavior – Multiple**

### **Professionalism Concerns Reports**

In the event that a student fails on multiple occasions to meet the expected standards of ethical and professional conduct as documented by multiple PCRs in the student's file, the program chair may exercise the option to institute an interim program dismissal of the student within two University business days.

If the decision for interim dismissal from the program is made, the program chair will notify the student in writing of the decision. If the student remains dissatisfied with the Program level, discussions, and interventions (e.g., a corrective action plan or other remediation is required by the PCR), the student may appeal to the CHHS Professional Behavior Committee by completing the Professional Behavior Violation Appeal Request Form.

### **Egregious, Unethical, or Unprofessional Behavior**

Any accusation of egregious, unethical, or unprofessional behavior should be reported in writing to the program chair within three University business days. If in the absence of a specific written complaint, individuals within the University, school, or program become aware of conduct of an egregious or serious nature, an investigation in lieu of a formal complaint and will take all appropriate actions in compliance with the procedure outlined in this document. Accusations of egregious, unethical, or unprofessional behavior will be considered serious and necessitate that the program director take immediate action to prevent any continuation of the behavior and potential harm to self, patients, or members of the community. If the program chair is not available or the circumstances of the complaint prevent notification of the program chair, the Dean of the College of Health and Human Services should be notified promptly.

Following notification and with the purpose of understanding the circumstances of the accusation, the program chair will urgently (i.e., within 24 business hours of the complaint) conduct an interview of the accused student and any witnesses to the event that led up to the complaint and review any pertinent documents and any other action deemed necessary to make an interim decision.

The reported behavior can result in the student's immediate interim suspension or dismissal from the program. Examples of egregious misconduct include, but are not limited to, patient endangerment, unacceptable patient management, inappropriate alteration of patient records, behavior posing a danger to persons or property, an ongoing threat of or disruption of the academic process, or certain acts of sexual misconduct. The program chair has the authority to take the immediate interim action of suspending or dismissing a student from a clinical session, didactic class, and/or from the program.

If the decision for dismissal is made, the program chair will notify the student in writing of the decision. If the student remains dissatisfied with the Program level decision, the student may appeal to the CHHS Professional Behavior Committee.

Details on the relevant procedures are available at:

[College of Health and Human Services \(CHHS\) Policy and Procedure for Professional Behavior Violations \(salisbury.edu\)](https://www.salisbury.edu/academic-offices/health-and-human-services/files/Professional_Behavior_Violation_Appeal_Request_Form.pdf)

The Appeal form available at:

[https://www.salisbury.edu/academic-offices/health-and-human-services/files/Professional\\_Behavior\\_Violation\\_Appeal\\_Request\\_Form.pdf](https://www.salisbury.edu/academic-offices/health-and-human-services/files/Professional_Behavior_Violation_Appeal_Request_Form.pdf)