

The University of Alabama at Birmingham

Healthy Learning Environment and Learner Mistreatment Statement

Responsible Party: University of Alabama at Birmingham Marnix E. Heersink School of Medicine's Associate Dean for Students

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this statement is to communicate the University of Alabama at Birmingham Marnix E. Heersink School of Medicine's commitment to a healthy learning environment that supports student learning and is free of mistreatment. It establishes that the medical school abides by the University of Alabama at Birmingham's Equal Opportunity and Discriminatory Harassment Policy and follows the University's procedures for addressing mistreatment. The Healthy Learning Environment and Learner Mistreatment Procedures outlines the mechanisms for students to report mistreatment and the process by which the medical school addresses allegations of mistreatment. It describes the medical school's responsibility to report on the status of the learning environment to students and other stakeholders to ensure transparency and accountability.

REASON FOR STATEMENT AND PROCEDURES

This statement establishes expectations for a learning environment that supports student learning and is free of mistreatment. It also provides mechanisms by which students, residents, faculty, and staff can report concerns for mistreatment. This statement references university-level policies and procedures that meet the requirements set forth by the Liaison Committee for Medical Education (LCME) accreditation requirements as follows:

Element 3.5: Learning Environment/Professionalism

“A medical school ensures that the learning environment of its medical education program is conducive to the ongoing development of explicit and appropriate professional behaviors in its medical students, faculty, and staff at all locations. The medical school and its clinical affiliates share the responsibility for periodic evaluation of the learning environment in order to identify positive and negative influences on the maintenance of professional standards, develop and conduct appropriate strategies to enhance positive and mitigate negative influences, and identify and promptly correct violations of professional standards.”

3.6 Student Mistreatment

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“A medical school develops effective written policies that define mistreatment, has effective mechanisms in place for a prompt response to any complaints, and supports educational activities aimed at preventing mistreatment. Mechanisms for reporting mistreatment are understood by medical students, including visiting medical students, and ensure that any violations can be registered and investigated without fear of retaliation.”

SCOPE

This statement applies to all preclinical and clinical medical students involved in UAB Heersink School of Medicine coursework (i.e. coursework on main and regional campuses and coursework in community practice). It also applies to all visiting students participating in electives (or other learning activities) on any of the medical school’s campuses.

MEDICAL SCHOOL’S POSITION ON MAINTAINING A HEALTHY LEARNING ENVIRONMENT AND ADDRESSING LEARNER MISTREATMENT

The Heersink School of Medicine is committed to providing a safe, respectful, and healthy learning environment. The medical school does not tolerate harassment, discrimination, or retaliation. Appropriate professional behavior is expected from all learners, teachers, and support staff in every venue across all encounters. This commitment extends to our regional campuses and other collaborative educational sites. In line with this commitment, the medical school abides by all applicable policies including but not limited to UAB’s Equal Opportunity and Discriminatory Harassment Policy, UAB’s Duty to Report and Non-Retaliation Policy, UAB’s Title IX Sex Discrimination, Sexual Harassment, and Sexual Violence Policy, UAB’s Student Conduct Code, and the UAB Enterprise Code of Conduct. These policies contain multiple reporting options for students who believe that they are being discriminated against or harassed.

GENERAL PROCEDURE

Reporting Mistreatment

Medical students are encouraged to report any behavior that they perceive to be mistreatment. This includes behavior directed toward them as individuals, or toward other learners, teachers, residents, patients, or staff. The school provides several mechanisms for such reporting, including personal meetings (with course directors, the Associate or Assistant Deans for Students, or Medical Student Services team members on any campus), confidential or anonymous online reporting within the School of Medicine (i.e., ReportIt), and confidential or anonymous online reporting outside of the medical school (i.e., UAB Ethics Hotline and Title IX Office

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Students are introduced to the school's position for a Healthy Learning Environment and Learner Mistreatment, the UAB Equal Opportunity and Discriminatory Harassment Policy, expectations for learner, faculty, and support staff professional behavior, and mechanisms available for reporting unprofessional behavior including mistreatment at the beginning of medical school. This statement, policies, expectations for professional behavior and the reporting mechanisms are covered in detail again prior to the start of clinical coursework during orientation to the clerkships. Students attest to reviewing the statement for Healthy Learning Environment and Learner Mistreatment during the mandatory annual student credentialing process. Students are reminded of reporting mechanisms during orientation to each preclinical and clinical course, on the School of Medicine's websites, and through digital signage in Volker Hall.

The medical school understands that confidentiality and anonymity of reporters are critical to ensuring that reporters feel empowered to report mistreatment. The medical school takes every step within the law to ensure confidentiality. The medical school abides by the UAB retaliation policy, which states that "retaliation against any individual who reports, in Good Faith, wrongful conduct or who participates in the investigation of wrongful conduct is prohibited."

Response to Reports of Mistreatment

Review. Medical Student Services and the Department of Medical Education review reports of inappropriate behavior by or mistreatment of medical students along with results of regular data collection instruments. Summarized data is formally reported to the Continuous Quality Improvement Committee, the Senior Associate Dean for Medical Education, at the School of Medicine Executive Committee, and shared with Health System leadership. Summary of local and national student mistreatment data are provided to medical students annually in conjunction with strategies to mitigate mistreatment.

Instances of Student Mistreatment by faculty, staff, or residents. Individual reports of student mistreatment are thoroughly investigated by Medical Student Services senior staff, and results are reported to the Senior Associate Dean for Medical Education. The Senior Associate Dean for Medical Education, who also serves as Chair of the Department of Medical Education, interfaces with department chairs, center directors, hospital and health system Chiefs of Staff, compliance offices, and the university to adjudicate such cases and make recommendations to leaders who implement appropriate actions according to Heersink School of Medicine and university policies. Medical Student Services administrators actively support students in such circumstances and may adjust students' schedules and provide appropriate referrals for counseling when needed.

Student Misconduct including Mistreatment of Other Students. Professional behavior is expected of all medical students as defined in the Medical Student Code of

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Conduct and UAB's Non-Academic Student Conduct Policy. Reports of student misconduct including mistreatment of other students are investigated by Medical Student Services, and plans are developed to address specific concerns. Interventions emphasize learner growth and personal accountability. Faculty members, staff, students, and other observers are strongly encouraged to report such concerns to Medical Student Services, where a support system exists to provide for coaching, advising, constructive feedback, accountability, and monitoring. This allows for rapid intervention with coaching and mentoring for minor behavioral concerns. This system also provides for longitudinal monitoring so that students who demonstrate repeated difficulties are identified and a remediation action plan can be developed. Student behavior that is inconsistent with the school's Professional Code of Conduct and Best Practices, Honor Code, and/or Essential Capacities/Technical Standards, is handled as described in the Non-academic Conduct Policy, Honor Code, or in other school administrative policies and procedures, including those regarding student impairment. We define an impaired medical student as one whose behavior violates the accepted standards of the medical profession and the school of medicine's technical standards. Students who demonstrate evidence of impairment may be removed from the educational environment and placed on Student-initiated or School-initiated Leave of Absence.

Monitoring and Accountability. The medical school monitors the health of the learning environment through a variety of assessment strategies including direct reports from students and other concerned individuals, reports from student advisory groups and the student senate, data from course/clerkship reviews, ReportIT (reports and responses to reports), AAMC questionnaires, and de-identified information provided by the Ethics Hotline and the Title IX Office. A summary of findings is provided annually to the Continuous Quality Improvement Committee, the Senior Associate Dean for Medical Education, the School of Medicine Executive Committee, and with Health System leadership. Each provides feedback for improving the Learning Environment. Improvement plans are implemented by Medical Student Services in collaboration with the university, UAB Hospital, UAB Health System, and other educational partners. The summary of mistreatment findings is made available to deans, department chairs, residency program directors, preclinical and clinical course directors and other appropriate faculty. The summary of findings and improvement plan is shared with students annually.

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HISTORY

Statement Created: July 01, 2021

Revised: N/A

University of Alabama at Birmingham Marnix E. Heersink School of Medicine policies and statements shall be reviewed periodically to determine whether revisions are appropriate to address the needs of the medical school community.