

**University of Alabama at Birmingham Heersink School of Medicine  
Student Academic Standing Committee  
Bylaws**

**Purpose**

To uphold uniform standards, the University of Alabama at Birmingham Marnix E. Heersink School of Medicine (UABHSOM) will utilize a single committee, the Student Academic Standing Committee (SASC). This committee will review pertinent information including student academic and professional performance throughout the academic years at UABHSOM and make decisions about academic status, progression, remediation, and dismissal. Professional ethics and conduct are as essential to the practice of medicine as academic excellence and may be considered by the Committee.

**Committee Composition and Structure**

The composition of the Student Academic Standing Committee will consist of a chair and 26 members, all appointed by the Senior Associate Dean for Medical Education. To assure that the committee has broad faculty representation, the membership will include faculty that are in course and/or clerkship directorship positions as well as diverse representation from all campuses of UABHSOM. Faculty members with decanal positions are not eligible.

**Subcommittees**

- Faculty Appeal Panel (FAP): The Senior Associate Dean for Medical Education (SADME) will appoint four faculty members, who have served at least one year on the main committee, to serve on this subcommittee. FAP members will serve a two-year term. Three faculty members will attend appeal panels and one will serve as an alternate. FAP members will not attend the regular SASC meetings. The FAP will consider student requests to appeal SASC decisions involving academic status (i.e., academic probation) or SASC decisions impacting academic progression through medical school (e.g., recycling academic terms or dismissal from the school).
- Faculty Review Panel (FRP): The SADME may appoint a subcommittee on an ad hoc basis to address issues that arise between regular SASC meetings. The FRP will be composed of at least three SASC faculty members and the composition may vary. The Faculty Review Panel acts on behalf of the SASC and its decisions are final, subject to UABHSOM policies for appeal.

**Committee Membership**

1. Committee chair

- Must be a UABHSOM faculty member
- Three-year term, renewable
- Must have served one full term on the SASC prior to appointment

2. Members

a. Joint Health Science Departments (7 members total)

- Must be UABHSOM faculty members
- Three-year term, renewable

b. Clinical Science Departments (14 members total)

- Must be UABHSOM faculty members
- Three-year term, renewable
- One to three members from each regional campus
- Up to 11 members from the Birmingham campus

c. Students (3 members total)

- Must have completed the first two years of medical school, passed the USMLE Step 1 examination and be Active in Good Standing
- May be assigned to any campus
- Two-year term

d. Faculty Appeal Panel Alternate

- Must be UABHSOM faculty member
- Three-year term, renewable
- From any campus
- May come from Joint Health Sciences or a Clinical Science Department

3. Ex-officio members and guests

Ex-officio members include the SADME, the Associate and Assistant Deans for Undergraduate Medical Education, Associate and Assistant Deans for Students, Associate Dean for Admissions/Enrollment Management, and the SOM Registrar. Other school administrative officials with relevant knowledge or information as well as course directors and clerkship directors whose courses are being reviewed may be invited guests to SASC meetings. Course and clerkship directors' recommendations will be

presented by that individual or the Associate Dean for Undergraduate Medical Education.

### **Voting Privileges**

The chair and each member will have equal voting privileges . For a regular SASC meeting, a quorum requires 12 voting members. The chair will vote in the case of a tie. Any member who is a course or clerkship director will abstain from voting on recommendations made for the course or clerkship for which that committee member is a director. Members will abstain from discussion and voting when they have a conflict of interest. Conflicts of interest may include but are not limited to the course director for the course under consideration, provision of health services (i.e., psychiatric care, psychological counseling, physical healthcare), relationship to the student outside of clinical course work (i.e., research mentor, letter of recommendation writer, friend of family, previous employer, etc.), or any other reason deemed by the faculty member as a potential conflict. Any member may raise a conflict-of-interest concern and the committee chair will make a final determination regarding whether the SASC member should recuse themselves from involvement in discussion and voting. The process for reporting a potential conflict of interest is described below.

### **Committee Authority and Responsibility**

The SASC is charged with the review of student academic and professional progression, with individual consideration of students with difficulty such as course failures, failures of medical licensing examinations, and/or lapses of professionalism. Final actions may include decisions for changes to academic standing including active with deficiency and academic probation, academic and/or professionalism remediation, repeating the academic year in its entirety (“recycle”), promotion, and dismissal from the School of Medicine. SASC actions are final, subject to School of Medicine appeal procedures. While the SASC determines when remediation is required, it does not determine the conditions of remediation. Students who fail a course or a portion of a course (i.e., Knowledge or Application portions) must remediate to the satisfaction of the course director(s). The SASC does not consider requests to retake failed remediations.

While the committee may consider known extenuating circumstances as presented by the Associate Dean for Students, it is not the responsibility of the committee to actively investigate whether such circumstances exist. The SASC does not meet with or interview students before or during deliberation. The Associate Dean for Students will meet with students under consideration by the committee, discuss any extenuating circumstances, and support the student’s effort to prepare written communication to the SASC if desired.

Non-academic matters affecting progression through medical school, such as extenuating circumstances (e.g., health problems, financial difficulties) or possible

disciplinary action for academic or non-academic misconduct, will be referred to the appropriate parties for further investigation and action. Results of such disciplinary action may be shared with the committee when deemed appropriate by the SADME.

Periodically, the SASC (including the FAP) will receive updates from the medical education leadership team on matters that are important to its work and matters that the SASC and FAP have a legitimate need to know to perform their work. This includes, but is not limited to, annual updates on the entering class, USMLE performance metrics, Medical Education Committee decisions regarding the curriculum and information about the learning environment.

### **Committee Organizational Relationship to the School of Medicine**

The SASC will report its activities, actions, and final decisions to the SADME. The SADME will forward all actions and decisions of the SASC to the Associate Dean for Students, the Associate Dean for Undergraduate Medical Education, the Associate Dean for Admissions/Enrollment Management, the Registrar, and relevant course directors.

### **Committee Meetings**

#### **1. Timing and Frequency**

The committee will meet monthly. Ad hoc meetings may be conducted at the chair's discretion.

#### **2. Quorum**

At least 12 voting members of the SASC, including the chair and representation from at least three of the school's four campuses constitute a quorum. Members who abstain are counted as part of the quorum. For a Faculty Review Panel, at least three SASC voting members must be present. For a Faculty Appeal Panel, three members must be present. The alternate may serve on an appeal panel in cases where a panel member cannot attend.

#### **3. Voting Decisions and Actions**

Final decisions of the SASC, SASC Faculty Review Panel, and Faculty Appeal Panel are determined by a simple majority vote of those present and eligible to vote on a particular action item. In some limited circumstances, votes may be solicited electronically after the conclusion of the meeting.

#### **4. Confidentiality**

All SASC deliberations, proceedings and related discussions will be considered strictly confidential. Confidentiality guidelines are posted on the SASC's secure website and reviewed with members at the beginning of each meeting. All members sign a Confidentiality Agreement annually.

#### 5. Conflict of Interest

SASC members sign a conflict-of-interest recusal agreement annually. At the beginning of each SASC meeting, the SASC chair reminds committee members to recuse themselves from any case where there is a true or perceived conflict of interest. In such cases, prior to initiation of discussion of a student's case, the committee member will state that there is a true or perceived conflict and will refrain from discussion or voting on the student's case.

#### 6. Bias and Objectivity

Objectivity is the quality of being able to make decisions or judgments in a fair way that is not influenced by personal feelings or beliefs. Personal bias refers to learned beliefs, opinions, or attitudes that people are unaware of and can reinforce stereotypes. Personal biases are unintentional, automatic, and inbuilt, leading to incorrect judgments. SASC members are asked to approach each student's case from a position of objectivity and with an understanding of how personal bias can influence decisions.

### **Appeal Process**

Students may appeal SASC decisions that change their academic status (e.g., academic probation) or impede or terminate academic progression (e.g., recycling academic terms, dismissal from school) in the UABHSOM. Students who fail a remediation cannot appeal to retake a remediation.

Immediately following SASC meetings, the Associate Dean for Students will communicate with the student to share the decision and explain the student's right to appeal and the process for appeal when indicated. Following this meeting, a written letter is also sent to the student and includes notification of the student's right to appeal and specific instructions should the student want to appeal. These include:

- The requirement that written notification of the student's intent to appeal be submitted to the SADME (email is acceptable).
- Deadline for notification specified by date and time.
- Consequences of missing the deadline (SASC decision becomes final with no further possibility for appeal).

The SASC Faculty Appeal Panel (FAP) considers appeal requests. This subcommittee of the SASC is composed of three experienced faculty SASC members and one alternate who do not attend the regular SASC meetings. The SADME charges the FAP and provides instruction and guidance regarding the deliberation process. The panel selects a chair from the group who presides at the meeting. Students may submit written documents and, at the discretion of the FAP, meet in person with the FAP to review extenuating circumstances that may have impacted their academic performance or support their appeal. The panel may vote to uphold the original decision of the SASC, modify it, or grant the student's appeal. The outcome is communicated to the student as soon as the FAP reaches its decision by the Associate Dean for Students, typically within 72 hours of the Appeal Panel meeting. The student receives official notification in letter form from the SADME on behalf of the Appeal Panel typically within five business days of the Appeal Panel meeting.

If the original decision is upheld, the student will be informed that a final appeal may be made to the Dean of the School of Medicine in limited situations. The Dean will not reconsider the facts and statements on which the original decision was based. The Dean will consider appeals only where there is evidence that the committee acted in an arbitrary or capricious manner, evidence of discrimination, a material procedural error in the SASC's review that prejudiced the student's ability to receive a fair hearing/decision, or where new information that was unavailable at the time of the SASC or FAP review has been discovered. Students who believe that one of these situations applies, may request to appeal to the Dean.

Specific written instructions for the student to appeal to the Dean will include:

- The requirement that written notification of intent to appeal be submitted to the SADME (email is acceptable).
- The requirement that written notification include rationale for the appeal.
- Deadline for notification specified by date and time.
- Consequences of missing the deadline (SASC decision becomes final with no further possibility for appeal).

The SADME will share requests for appeal with the Dean. The Dean will determine whether the request meets appeal criteria. When a request meets the criteria for appeal, the Dean will investigate the appeal. When the request does not meet criteria for appeal, the student will be notified that their request for appeal has been denied.

Notification that the appeal request is denied or granted typically occur within five business days of the student's appeal request. In cases where the request meets criteria, the student may be asked to provide further documentation and/or meet with the Dean to discuss the appeal. The appeal outcome will be communicated to the student via email and letter from the SADME on behalf of the Dean within 10 business

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days of the notification that the student's appeal will be reviewed by the Dean. The Dean's decision is final.

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