

Student Professional Behavior in an Academic Program Policy

Jeannine Rainbolt College of Education
University of Oklahoma

Part I: Policy, Philosophy, and Standards of Professionalism

The Jeannine Rainbolt College of Education (JRCoE) strives to prepare its students for careers as teachers, counselors, and education professionals who not only possess the intellectual capacity to function in their chosen field, but also have a high capacity for professional behavior. The process of transitioning from a student to a teacher, counselor, or education professional requires learners to actively engage in study, self-reflection, and self-management. When a student accepts an offer of admission into a JRCoE department or program, he or she commits to comply with all its regulations, including those contained herein regarding professional conduct. Professional behaviors are considered a core competency in the academic program. As a distinct learning community within the University, JRCoE has established this Student Professional Behavior in an Academic Program Policy regarding standards of professional behavior for JRCoE students. These standards are derived, in part, from the standards of conduct by national and local professional organizations, national organizations that accredit JRCoE programs (e.g., ACTFL, APA, CAEP, CEC, ELCC, IRA, NAEYC, NCSS, NCTE, NSTA), and organizations that license or certify JRCoE and its learners (i.e., the Oklahoma State Department of Education).

Professionalism education and training takes place through classroom modelling of appropriate behaviors and through the informal dialogue between student and his or her instructors and professional mentors. A student should welcome information about the expectations of professionalism that are prevalent in his or her field. A faculty member or mentor education professional should endeavor to model professional behavior and, where possible, offer suggestions for correction that align with professional standards. Most students will find that by engaging in this informal give-and-take, standards of professionalism are adequately maintained.

From time to time, however, circumstances may arise during a student's course of study that call into question the student's capacity or commitment to maintaining this academic standard. As such, JRCoE retains the responsibility and authority to identify unprofessional behaviors and support correction when appropriate. Failure to meet professional behavior standards may result in a range of consequences, such as: formal or informal consultation with JRCoE faculty and administration for improvement and/or academic consequences.

In some cases, a behavior prohibited under this policy also constitutes a violation of the University of Oklahoma Student Rights and Responsibilities Code or its Academic Integrity Code. These codes govern minimum standards of conduct applicable to all students at the University of Oklahoma. In such cases, the Dean will consult with the Office of Student Conduct and/or the Academic Integrity Office to ensure the University has an opportunity to review the matter and ascertain whether University-level disciplinary action should be instituted in lieu of, or in addition to, potential JRCoE action.

A. Policy objectives

1. To document the importance of professionalism as a component of the academic program;
2. To provide students, faculty, and staff with clear expectations regarding student professional behavior;
3. To provide JRCoE departments and programs with clearly articulated authority to act when dealing with student professional behavior issues, and to provide JRCoE students with a system for review of decisions that may impact their progress in a program; and
4. To identify fair and impartial procedures for managing and addressing student professional behavior issues.

B. Scope of policy

All JRCoE students are expected to demonstrate high standards of professional behavior in all educational and field settings, including but not limited to:

1. Classroom-based milieu (e.g., classrooms, lecture halls, laboratories, online and technology-based classes);
2. Professional and field sites that are part of the learning program (e.g., schools, clinics, agencies); and
3. Other settings not part of the formal learning program but that contribute to the learning process (e.g., securing necessary background checks and other tasks required by the department).

C. Unprofessional behavior outside the learning program

1. If a student is charged with a criminal offense, he or she is obligated to report this to the Dean immediately. If a matriculating student has been charged with a criminal offense between the time of application and the beginning of school, or at any time while a student, the student must inform the Dean of the charges before the first day of classes. If a student is charged with a crime of violence; possession or distribution of controlled substance; contributing to the delinquency of a minor; any crime that, upon conviction, would require registration under the Oklahoma Sex Offender Registration Act (or, if charged in a foreign jurisdiction, that substantially parallels any crimes under the Oklahoma Sex Offender Registration Act); or any crime involving moral turpitude, the student may not be allowed to continue the course of study or may be restricted from enrollment in courses with a field experience component, until there is a final satisfactory disposition of the criminal charge either by verdict, plea, or dismissal. This restriction is consistent with the obligation of the University to ensure the safety of children, clients, and others.

2. The Dean may temporarily suspend a student from continued interaction with children, their families, clients, or others in a field placement or professional setting when concerns arise about the well-being of the children, their families, or clients, or the JRCoE student, until such incident can be investigated. The Dean shall document the reason(s) for any suspension in the student's file, to ensure consistency and to aid in later review of the action, if necessary.

D. Standards of professional conduct

Fundamental attributes of professionalism and professional behavior include, but are not limited to, honesty and integrity; dedicated desire to learn and respect for academic process; concern for the welfare of children, their families, clients, and others; commitment to confidentiality; respect for the rights of others; emotional maturity; and self-discipline. Professional behavior requires:

1. Integrity and honesty: Students are expected to be truthful in their communications with JRCoE and the students and professionals with whom they interact in field placements. NOTE: Allegations of academic misconduct, including but not limited to cheating, plagiarism, fabrication, fraud, destruction, bribery or intimidation, assisting others in any act prohibited by the Academic Integrity Code will be referred to Academic Integrity for investigation and follow up.
2. Commitment to students: Students interacting with children must ensure their actions demonstrate appropriate commitment to the education of those children, including using reasonable effort to protect students from conditions harmful to learning or to health or safety; and communicating with students in a manner that will not lead to embarrassment or disparagement.
3. Meeting professional responsibilities: Students are expected to manage personal and professional responsibilities and are responsible for making alternate arrangements with JRCoE and field placement professionals when necessary.
4. Respect for educational setting: Student behavior should be appropriate in the context of the educational setting and should not unnecessarily interfere with the teaching or learning of others. Especially in field experiences and placements, students should not interrupt teaching or counseling sessions unnecessarily.
5. Self-improvement and adaptability: Students are expected to demonstrate the ability to receive positive and critical feedback and incorporate suggestions into their work.
6. Compliance with policies of the field placement setting: Students are expected to be familiar with field placement site rules and regulations governing the workplace, such as rules regarding calling in for an unexpected absence, parking, and the like.
7. Compliance with codes of ethics of relevant national professional organizations: (e.g., ACEI, ACTFL, APA, CEC, ELCC, IRA, NAEYC, NCSS, NCTE, NSTA).

Students are expected to be aware of the codes of ethics relevant to their areas of study and/or anticipated certification.

8. Interaction with professional colleagues: Students are expected to be able to communicate effectively and appropriately when necessary, and to collaborate with other students and education professionals to complete a task. Interpersonal disputes should not interfere with a professional's ability to function effectively in the education environment. (Serious grievances, such as concerns about a colleague's ethical behavior, interaction with children, or discrimination in the educational environment should be escalated to a supervisor or the correct reporting authority, such as the Department of Human Services and/or law enforcement (child abuse or neglect) or University's Office of Institutional Equity (unlawful discrimination)).
9. Interaction with children, clients or others: Students are expected to be able to communicate effectively and appropriately with children, clients, and their families. In professional interactions, students should avoid use of abusive language, personal attacks, or profanity. Likewise, in these interactions, students should avoid using a raised voice or engaging in argument. Students should identify clear professional boundaries in interacting with children, clients, and others. Students should not communicate with children outside the professional setting without parental and supervisor approval.
10. Protecting the confidentiality of child/client information, including paper and electronic records, verbal communication, and social networking and electronic media sites. Students are expected to use reasonable care in protecting information entrusted to them. Students should avoid improper/careless storage of education records, such as leaving them in a car for longer than reasonably necessary, or failing to password-protect records stored on technology. Students should avoid posting about children or clients on social media as well as postings about confidential interactions with parents and colleagues. Students should be familiar with the requirements of the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act ("FERPA") and should only share confidential information with authorized persons.
11. Compliance with JRCoE, department, and program academic and field-related requirements (e.g., criminal background checks): Students are expected to comply with requirements within designated time frames. If circumstances render the student unable to do so, it is the student's responsibility to contact the appropriate JRCoE representative and make alternate arrangements.

Part II: Procedures for Handling Unprofessional Behavior

If a student's performance is inconsistent with the expectations of the Student Professional Behavior in an Academic Program Policy, the matter will be handled as follows:

- A. Academic grade consequence:

If a failure to adhere to professional standards listed above results in an academic grade consequence, such as an “F” or a “U” in a placement involving a field experience or placement, or a grade reduction in a traditional lecture-format course (if provided in the syllabus), a student may appeal the grade to the JRCoE Academic Appeals Board.

B. Minor violations

Minor violations of this policy are violations that, under the circumstances, do not render a student’s performance unsatisfactory but are not consistent with professional expectations. Infrequent tardiness, isolated instances of failing to meet professional standards in interactions with colleagues, and similar infractions are examples of minor violations. Such minor violations will usually be handled by the faculty member or program director who observes or receives the report of unprofessional behavior. Minor violations may be handled through informal feedback and discussion with the student and, if appropriate under the circumstances and authorized by the syllabus, with a course grade consequence. Academic grade consequences for minor violations of this policy are subject to review in the same manner as other grades under JRCoE policy.

C. Repeated or significant violations: behavior contracts

If a program director or department chair observes or receives repeated reports of minor violations, or if a student’s behavior is of a significant or serious nature (but not warranting immediate suspension or dismissal), the student should be called to a meeting to discuss the matter with the program director and the responsible department chair or associate dean. The student should receive a full and fair opportunity to respond to the perceived areas of deficiency.

If the student denies that the behavior occurred, the meeting may be adjourned pending further inquiry into the matter, if appropriate. If the student admits the behavior but denies the behavior violates standards of professionalism, the matter should be discussed by the student and the program director as an educational exercise. If after such discussion, in the opinion of the department chair or associate dean, the behavior must be corrected in order for the student to meet minimum standards of professionalism, a Professional Behavior Contract (“Contract”) will be created. The focus of the Contract process is educational, with the goal of helping the student move forward successfully in coursework, field experiences, and interactions with the JRCoE community. The Contract will summarize the problematic behavior and required resolution needed to avoid delays in academic progress (if possible), offer a timeline for expected progress, and offer resources and supports to the student (such as educational research materials, assignment of a mentorship or observation opportunities). The Contract will be signed by the student and the faculty member or program director and placed in the student’s file in JRCoE. The student may signal disagreement by stating “disagree” next to his or her signature.

In the event the student fails to meet the expected standards of professional behavior as documented in the Contract, or if additional issues related to professional behavior arise, the Dean may impose conditions or restrictions on the student’s ability to continue in the program. Examples of conditions or restrictions include, but are not limited to: successful completion of professional development activities, readings, or shadowing opportunities;

restriction from placement in field experience or practicum; extension of contract (if parties agree improvement is reasonably likely); or increased supervision and academic counseling requirements. Prior to any such action the department chair and Dean will meet with the student, identify the concerns, identify the anticipated conditions or restrictions, and provide the student an opportunity to respond. Within three (3) days of such meeting, the student will be provided notice of the decision. If the student disagrees, the student may appeal the decision to the Academic Appeals Board within ten days of the student's receipt of the notice of decision.

D. Serious violations: suspension/dismissal from JRCoE

In the event a student is alleged to have engaged in conduct that, if proven true, would reasonably constitute grounds for denial or revocation of an Oklahoma teaching certificate, such as:

- 1) Conduct that would constitute a felony;
- 2) Conduct that would constitute a crime of moral turpitude;
- 3) Conduct that would violate the narcotic laws of the United States or the State of Oklahoma;
- 4) Conduct that would constitute a crime, if such crime requires registration under the Oklahoma Sex Offender Registration Act (or equivalent crimes under the laws of another state or country); or
- 5) Conduct that would constitute a crime, if such crime requires registration under the Mary Rippy Violent Offender Registration Act (or equivalent crimes under the laws of another state or country).

The Dean may temporarily suspend the student from continued interaction with children, their families, clients, or others in a field placement or professional settings until such incident can be investigated and resolved. The Office of Student Conduct shall be notified of the allegation(s) and may either 1) investigate and discipline under the appropriate section(s) of the University-wide Student Code of Rights and Responsibilities, or 2) refer to JRCoE for investigation and appropriate action.

If the matter is referred to JRCoE, the Dean shall require an investigation into the allegations, although in some cases the investigation may be delayed pending the outcome of a criminal proceeding. If the investigation results in a finding (based on a preponderance of the evidence) that a student has engaged in conduct that would likely result in ineligibility for, or revocation of, an Oklahoma teaching certificate, the student may be dismissed from JRCoE. The student may appeal the decision to the Academic Appeals Board within ten (10) days of receipt of the notice of dismissal; provided, the dismissal of a student upon entering a plea of guilty or upon conviction of a crime that would result in denial or revocation of an Oklahoma teaching certificate is not subject to review.