

# 700 ACADEMIC DIFFICULTY: M.S.W. HANDBOOK

## 700 Academic Difficulty

Students who encounter academic difficulties are encouraged to discuss learning challenges first with the instructor of the relevant course and next with their Academic Adviser if the difficulties extend across a number of courses. The Accessibility Resource Center is available to assist students who require specific accommodations due to disability.

## 700.1 Informal Problem-Solving Processes

Students, faculty, and/or administrators are encouraged to address student learning needs and issues through an informal process of advisement and problem solving to address these issues as they emerge. The key outcome of this informal process is to identify supports for students to help them resolve challenges and to support them in their learning.

Students should seek to address any challenges with the instructor of the relevant course or their practicum supervisor. The Accessibility Resource Center is available to assist students who require specific accommodations due to disability. It is expected that the majority of issues impacting student learning will be addressed and resolved through academic and practicum advising.

The list below outlines the individuals and/or offices that may be involved in problem-solving with the student in the recommended pathways. Resources are listed in the order in which they should be utilized.

### Academic

#### a) Classroom

1. Instructor
2. Adviser/Course Coordinator
3. Associate Dean of Academic Affairs

#### b) Practicum Learning

1. Supervisor
2. Practicum Faculty Adviser
3. Director of MSW Practicum Learning/ Director of Practicum Learning
4. Associate Dean of Academic Affairs

#### c) Community Based Anti-Racism Experience (CBARE)

1. CBARE Adviser
2. CBARE Coordinator
3. Associate Dean of Academic Affairs

#### d) Course issues (credits, registration, course waivers, etc.)

1. Registrar's Office

#### e) Disability issues / learning accommodations

1. Director, Accessibility Resource Center

#### f) Leave of absence, medical leave, withdrawals

1. Associate Dean of Academic Affairs

## Residential Issues

1. Head Resident
2. Director of Community Engagement & Student Support

## Racism

### a) Systemic

1. Marta Sotomayor Fellow consultation
2. Director of Community Engagement & Student Support
3. Associate Dean of Academic Affairs

### b) Classroom

1. Professor
2. Course Coordinator
3. Director of Community Engagement & Student Support
4. Associate Dean of Academic Affairs

Marta Sotomayor Fellow (anonymous consultation at any point in process)

### c) Specific Concerns

1. Faculty
2. Director of Community Engagement & Student Support

Marta Sotomayor Fellow (anonymous consultation at any point in process)

For a list of additional resources for learning, social, and emotional issues see Campus and Community Resources ([https://drive.google.com/file/d/1G0PqjLxtSRJ3QfyOY9Yij-Mc\\_7yFe37o/view/?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1G0PqjLxtSRJ3QfyOY9Yij-Mc_7yFe37o/view/?usp=sharing)).

## 700.2 Academic Progress Review

The Academic Progress Review constitutes SSW's procedures to address a student's ongoing, serious academic and learning issues. These procedures aim to ensure that:

- serious concerns about a student's academic progress are brought to a student's attention;
- expectations, supports, and relevant timelines for amelioration of the concerns are established;
- updates on student progress are reviewed;
- and a range of possible outcomes for the student are reviewed.

An Academic Conference is the first of the two steps of the Academic Progress Review process. The second step is the Review.

The Conference should precede a Review except in cases of serious personal or professional misconduct. The Conference typically results in the development of an Action Plan outlining expectations and timelines for students, advisers, supervisors, and/or administrators. The Review is a deliberation phase that may result in one or more of a number of possible outcomes, including but not limited to, dismissal from the program.

The decision to convene a consultation or a review is made by the Associate Dean of Academic Affairs in response to a request by a sequence Chair. The Chair is responsible for gathering written reports from key people regarding the areas of concern and extending requests to participate in the review.

### 700.2.1 Conference, Stage 1 of the Academic Review Process

The purpose of the Conference is to discuss educational goals and mediation of issues to achieve learning goals when the advisement and informal problem-solving process has proven insufficient in resolving learning challenges. It is expected that a holistic analysis of the student's learning situation will be continued through the Conference process. There will be an examination of the student's learning issues and the learning environment, including structural factors that may be impacting it. The adviser, with the agreement of the curricular sequence chair, may make a request for a Conference to the Associate Dean of Academic Affairs. The Associate Dean makes the decision whether the situation should move into the Academic Progress Review process or remain as an advising issue.

Serious issues of personal or professional misconduct move directly to Review, the 2nd step, of the Academic Progress Review process.

The following procedures will guide the Conference process:

1. The ADAA, one of the Directors of Practicum Learning or designate will facilitate the meeting.
2. The meeting will result in one of three outcomes:
  - a. Action steps articulated for the organization or school. No substantive action steps identified for the students. In this case, the Conference is considered closed for the student.
  - b. Action steps identified for the student, supervisor and/or adviser. In this case, the School will work with the adviser and/or supervisor or agency to resolve issues, and the student will be informed that if their progress issues remain unresolved, it may result in moving to the Review phase of the Academic Progress Review process. The Action Plan should have a clear end date, no later than May 31st, by which a final determination of progress is made.
  - c. Action steps articulated for the student only, with no substantive action steps identified for the organization or School. In this case, the student will be informed that if their progress issues remain unresolved, it may result in moving to the Review phase of the Academic Progress Review process. The Action Plan should have a clear end date, no later than May 31st, by which a final determination of progress is made.
3. The Action Plan will include a check-in point to make sure that issues are being resolved, what criteria will be used to make this determination, and who is responsible for initiating the check-in.
4. The Action Plan will be drafted for the review of all parties. All parties should provide feedback within a reasonable time frame, typically one week. One of the Directors of Practicum Learning or the ADAA will hold final responsibility for the content of the Action Plan. If any party continues to be in disagreement with an aspect of the Action Plan, they should submit their concern in writing. This will be appended to the Action Plan and taken into consideration through the check-in phase to the conclusion of the conference phase.
5. At the end of the period specified in the Action Plan, one of the Directors of Practicum Learning will submit a written report to the Associate Dean summarizing the progress made on the Action Plan on or before May 1st. In developing the Action Plan Update Summary, the the Directors of Practicum Learning should consider the following sources of information:
  - a. Input from instructor and student regarding the issues outlined in the Action Plan with attention to individual level and structural issues;
  - b. Where relevant, monthly practicum narratives and practicum evaluation forms to date in the current internship;
  - c. Relevant correspondence; and
  - d. Independent information that the student may submit.

Upon review of the Action Plan summary report, the Associate Dean of Academic Affairs will determine in consultation with the Directors of Practicum Learning whether:

1. The Action Plan is considered successfully accomplished and all issues resolved. In the case where there are student requirements, the Action Plan is considered concluded.
2. The Action Plan should be renewed and continued; A timeframe must be specified for any continuation.
3. An additional Consultation is indicated to further examine evolving issues. This may result in a modification to the Action Plan.
4. The issues cannot be resolved thorough the Consultation process and a Review, stage 2 of the Academic Progress Review, should be convened.

### 700.2.2 Review, Stage 2 of the Academic Review Process

The Review is the second and final phase of the Academic Progress Review Process. Students may be referred to a Review in cases of ongoing academic difficulty that have not been resolved successfully through the Consultation Phase (as outlined above) or in serious situations of personal or profession misconduct outlined below.

#### 700.2.2.A Personal and Professional Misconduct Violations

Personal and/or professional conduct of a student that calls for a Review process without an intervening Conference includes, but is not limited to, such matters as the following:

1. Egregious violations of the National Association of Social Work (NASW) Code of Ethics.
2. Harassing, coercing, verbally abusing, or intimidating any persons the student encounters in an arena of the Program, including classroom, internship, and the larger school community.
3. Unauthorized or improper use of college, school and/or internship agency services, equipment, and facilities, including and not limited to computers, email or web addresses, social media platforms, and telephones.
4. All forms of dishonesty including cheating, knowingly furnishing false information to the college, school, or internship agency, any alteration or misuse of college, school, or internship agency documents, records, or instruments of identification.
5. Improper disclosure through electronic or other means, of protected information and/or information designated as confidential that the student encounters in their role as a student and/ or as a member of the school/college community.
6. Theft of or intentional damage to property of the school, college, internship agency or of members and visitors of the above.
7. Physical abuse or harm or threat of physical harm or abuse to any persons that the student encounters in any arena of the program, including classroom, internship, and the larger school community.
8. Plagiarism, defined as presenting all or parts of another's work product as one's own.
9. A violation of the Smith College Policy on Substance Use and Abuse.

10. A violation of the Smith College Sexual Harassment Policy and Procedures or Smith College Sexual Assault Policy. Once it is determined that an Academic Progress Review is needed, procedures detailed below will be followed.

### **700.2.2.B Convening the Academic Progress Review Committee**

The Academic Progress Review Committee (the "Committee") serves as the body before which all issues pertaining to a student's academic progress and personal and professional conduct comes for hearing and disposition. Any given Review will be attended by a subsection of the Standing Committee, and by others who will be invited by the Chair of the Standing Committee to present information regarding the Review.

#### **Voting Committee Members at the Review:**

- The Associate Dean of Academic Affairs
- Two faculty from among the appointed pool Resident Faculty on the Standing Committee.

#### **Non-Voting Committee Member at Review:**

A Sotomayor Fellow will attend the meeting and participate in all discussions as a non-voting member. The Sotomayor Fellow is charged with observing and attending to issues of fairness and structural matters relevant to the Review process. The Sotomayor Fellow who attends the Review proceeding is not present as an advocate for the student undergoing the Review. The student is free to consult privately with one of the other Sotomayor Fellows for support. In the event that a Sotomayor Fellow is not available, the Director of Community Engagement and Student Support may take their place.

#### **Members of the Standing Committee include:**

- The Associate Dean of Academic Affairs or designee—Chair
- All members of the Resident Faculty serve as a faculty pool from which the Associate Dean of Academic Affairs may draw faculty representation

### **700.2.2.C Invited Participants at Review**

The relevant adviser will be present in person, through conference call or visual medium. In a Review generated from the Practicum sequence, the relevant internship supervisor and/or training director may also be asked to participate by phone to address questions.

### **700.2.2.D Supporting Participant at Review**

The student under Review may request in writing that a person of choice, who is a member of the School community in good standing, be present at the Review as a non-voting participant.

The written request from the student under Review serves as that student's informed consent to the presence and participation of this supporting individual at the Review.

This individual will be present during the presentation/discovery portions of the Review but will not be present during the deliberation/adjudication of the committee.

If the student under Review chooses, the supporting individual may be present with the student under Review for the Committee's presentation of the Review outcome.

The role of the supporting participant will be to help the student prepare for and present the student's point of view, ensure that the committee has considered the points the student has presented, and that the committee has followed its own stated guidelines. They may also make a statement on behalf of the student.

The supporting participant will sign a notice of confidentiality prior to the Review, indicating the participant's agreement that no portion of the proceedings can be disclosed to any person or persons.

## **700.2.3 Review Procedures**

A Review is initiated in writing by the relevant adviser or administrator (e.g., Associate Director of Practicum Learning) in consultation with the Associate Dean of Academic Affairs. Written request for a Review is sent to the Associate Dean of Academic Affairs.

There are two pathways to a Review: personal and/or professional misconduct of a student that calls for a Review process without an intervening consultation. (See the non-exhaustive list of examples under Personal and Professional Misconduct Violations).

Upon receipt of a preliminary request for a Review, the ADAA will review relevant information to determine whether a move to Review is warranted.

Materials must reflect a structural as well as individual level examination of learning progress. Materials to be reviewed may include but are not limited to the following:

- Student's written statement: The student may submit a written statement in response to the identified concerns within a timeframe specified by the Chair, typically 7-10 days
- Documentation that was presented for the relevant Consultation request
- The Action Plan Update Summary letter.

If Practicum related:

- Any additional monthly practicum narratives
- Any additional relevant email correspondence
- Standard information about the learning environment, which may include:
  - Agency description
  - Number of years of relationship with the agency
  - Log information about the agency focused on organization
  - Student and PFA ratings of the organization
  - Where possible, number of consultations/reviews conducted involving that agency/organization
  - Demographic summary of students placed there in the past

Once initiated, the Associate Dean or designee is responsible for managing the review process from notification to the implementation of any action items for the student or other parties.

### **700.2.3.A Notice of Review**

The Office of the Associate Dean of Academic Affairs (Chair of the Review committee) or designee will notify the student of the Review in writing and outline the areas of concern.

The Office of the Associate Dean will notify the committee and the student of the date and location of the Review meeting which will be scheduled as swiftly as possible.

The Associate Dean or designee will hold a pre-meeting with the student to overview the Academic Progress Review process and a post-meeting with the student to review next steps. The student may seek support from the Sotomayor Fellow or a faculty member through the process.

### 700.2.3.B Pre-Review Information Dissemination

The information identified above will be distributed to participating Review committee members. The student may authorize the sharing of this information with other key members of the SSW community (e.g., Accessibility Resource Center, support participant)

### 700.2.3.C Preparation Meeting of the Participating Review Committee Members

Prior to the commencement of the Review, the voting members, and non-voting Sotomayor Fellow and student member (if participating) of the Review Committee shall meet to define the function, focus, and terms of the Review.

### 700.2.3.D Review Meeting Process

#### Exploration Phase

The Review will commence with the student presenting their view of the situation (in a specified amount of time), followed by comments, questions, and discussion from other participants.

#### Deliberation Phase

Deliberations will be conducted only by the voting members, Sotomayor Fellow, and non-voting student member (if participating) of the Review Committee.

### 700.2.4 Notification of the Review Outcomes

At the conclusion of the Review, the Chair of the Committee will meet with the student under Review to inform the student of the committee's findings and decisions. A written letter from the Chair of the Review Committee will serve as a summary document. The Summary document which will be sent to the reviewed student, members of the Review Committee who participated in the Review, and in practicum-related reviews, to the Chair and Associate Director of Practicum Learning and to the Dean of the School will include:

- Information on the notice of the Review;
- the reason for the Review;
- the names of the Review Committee members and presenters who participated in the Review;
- the Committee's decisions and the recommended sanctions;
- the salient facts the Committee relied upon in making its decisions, including information regarding outcomes from the summary of the Action Plan (CAP) as applicable.

### 700.2.5 Non-Exhaustive List of Authorized Sanctions

- **No action**, which means that the Committee determines that the student under Review may continue in good standing.
- **Warning, or a reprimand**, which becomes part of the student's official record but is not considered a formal disciplinary action.
- **Additional work** such as writing extra papers or accumulating extra credits in order to graduate.
- **Probation**, for a period to be specified by the Committee, with or without conditions, which is intended to serve as a serious warning to students whose performance and/or conduct give cause for concern. The student will be relieved from probation if, at the end of the set period of time, satisfactory conduct, as outlined by the Committee, has been maintained. Failure to meet the conditions of probation is a serious matter and will ordinarily result in mandatory leave or dismissal.

- **Mandatory leave of absence** which requires that the student not register for a specified period of time and is recorded on the student's permanent transcript.
- **Dismissal**, an action taken in the most serious cases, which ends a student's connection with the School and is recorded on the student's permanent transcript.

A combination of sanctions is also authorized.

### 700.2.6 Confidentiality

All deliberations of the Review Committee are held in private and are to be treated as confidential by all those participating in the Review. Information regarding the activities of the Committee and/or its decision making process should be kept as confidential and only shared with School and College employees who have a legitimate educational need to know; moreover, such information should not be shared with external entities except where deemed necessary (e.g., where supervisor support is required to meet the educational goals in an Action Plan, among other possibilities) as described above in the Notification of Review Outcomes, or if legally required (e.g., in response to a valid subpoena).

### 700.2.7 Student's Request to Withdraw or Take a Leave of Absence Prior to a Review

For policy regarding requests to withdraw in light of an upcoming Review, see section on Withdrawal from the Program. For policy regarding requests to take a leave of absence in light of an upcoming Review, see section on Leave of Absence.

### 700.2.8 Appeals Procedures

Any decision by the Academic Progress Review Committee can be appealed to the Dean, whose decision shall be final. The following procedures regarding appeals shall govern.

### 700.2.9 Appeal of the Academic Progress Review Decision

The student Reviewed, any member of the Academic Progress Review Committee, and any other participant of the Review who believes the Committee did not follow its procedures as delineated in this Handbook may appeal to the Dean in writing within seven (7) days after the date of the written notice of the Committee's decision to the student is issued by the Chair of the Committee. The Dean's decision shall be final.