

Approved by COC on November 4, 2014

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## **Medical College of Georgia Academic Affairs**

### **Achieving a Positive Learning Environment Policy**

The medical learning environment is expected to facilitate students' acquisition of the professional and collegial attitudes necessary for effective and compassionate health care. Achieving a positive learning environment is supported at the campus level by the Healthy Respect program as well as the AU Health System policy on Disruptive Physician Behavior and at the national level by the Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 federal law. The development of these attitudes is based on the presence of mutual respect between teacher and learner and represents the AAMC Teacher-Learner Compact. Additionally, this policy applies to residents as they experience dual roles as both teacher and learner.

The Medical College of Georgia (MCG or the College) is committed to maintaining a safe and supportive academic environment that is free of all mistreatment, including intimidation, disrespect, belittlement, humiliation and abuse. The College has a policy of zero tolerance with respect to student mistreatment. The policy is intended to protect students and discipline and/or take other appropriate actions for those responsible for inappropriate behavior. It is understood that all personnel will treat students in a collegial, respectful, and professional manner.

#### **What is Abuse?**

In general, student mistreatment is defined as any instance in which a student is abused in any way. This includes abuse of power by asking the student to do things beyond the scope of the medical student's role. Examples of abuse include, but are not limited to:

- Threat of harm or being physically abused
- Treating students in a harmful, injurious or offensive way
- Attacking in words, speaking insultingly, harshly or unjustly to or about a student;
- Public belittling or humiliation (feeling dehumanized, disrespected or undignified, being shouted at, cursed or ridiculed)
- Being asked to perform services unrelated to education or patient care (shopping, running errands, etc.)
- Threat of grading and other forms of assessment as a reward or

punishment for inappropriate requests

- Sexual harassment, including but not limited to offensive comments to or about the student; unwanted attention or unwelcome verbal advances; unwanted, persistent invitations; unwelcome, explicit propositions; offensive displays; offensive body language; unwanted physical advances; and/or sexual bribery. This form of abuse, however, should be reported under the procedures contained within Augusta University's Sexual Misconduct Policy, available at:  
<https://augusta.policytech.com/dotNet/documents/?docid=5640&public=true>

This policy is included in the Augusta University Student Manual, Section 4.

- Offensive remarks based on one's gender, racial, ethnic, religious identity, national origin, disability, or sexual orientation; having grades lowered solely on the basis of gender, racial, ethnic, religious identity sexual orientation, national origin or disability. These forms of abuse, however, should be reported under the procedures contained within Augusta University's Non-Discrimination/Anti-Harassment Policy, available at:  
<https://augusta.policytech.com/dotNet/documents/?docid=787&public=true>

This policy can be found in the Augusta University Student Manual, Section 3.10

- Telling inappropriate stories or jokes (e.g., ethnic, sexist, racist).
- Behaving in an aggressive manner (e.g., yelling, throwing objects, cursing, and threatening physical harm) that creates a hostile learning environment.
- Assigning tasks or denying educational opportunities with the intent of punishment.
- Taking credit for a student's work.
- Intentional neglect.

**Examples of appropriate behavior include, but are not limited to:**

- Conducting all interactions in a manner free of bias or prejudice of any kind.
- Providing a clear description of expectations by all participants at the beginning of all educational endeavors, rotations and assignments.
- Encouraging an atmosphere of openness in which students will feel welcome to offer questions, ask for help, make suggestions and disagree.
- Providing timely and specific feedback in a constructive manner, appropriate to the level of experience/training, and in an appropriate setting, with the intent of guiding students towards a higher level of knowledge and skill.

- Focusing such feedback on observed behaviors and desired outcomes, with suggestions for improvement.
- Encouraging an awareness of faculty responsibilities towards all individual learners in a group setting.
- Providing an educational experience of the highest quality, along with the time, preparation and research necessary to achieve that goal.
- Basing rewards and grades on merit, not favoritism.
- Focusing constructive criticism on performance rather than personal characteristics of the resident.
- All faculty and staff at any Medical College of Georgia teaching/clinical site are expected to adhere to the expectation to treat students with dignity and respect.
- The acknowledgement by learners of course or rotation expectations and the responsibility for fulfilling those requirements to the best of one's ability.
- Asking for feedback from professors, interns, residents, nurses, and attending physicians as appropriate.
- The acceptance of feedback provided by faculty in an objective manner and the incorporation of such feedback into future efforts so as to achieve the desired educational outcome.
- An understanding that feedback is given with the intention of helping to further the student's progress in meeting course and/or rotation expectations.
- Promptly and properly addressing, through appropriate administrative avenues, of any incidents and circumstances that fall outside the tenets set forth here.
- An honest and earnest effort to provide constructive criticism-written, verbal or otherwise to peers and supervisors, when such feedback is likely to enhance their colleague's skill as a physician.

### **What is Not Abuse?**

- Pointing out that a student has not adequately prepared for his/her assignments during rounds.
- Asking students questions on rounds.
- Informing students that they were not adequately prepared

Providing feedback about these behaviors is not abuse or mistreatment unless done in an abusive manner or if such correction is disproportionately directed at specific individuals based on their race, gender, sexual orientation, or other protected status.

### **Exclusions from this Policy**

Specifically, this policy is not intended to include complaints of sexual harassment or complaints of discrimination on the basis of disability, race, color, sex, creed, veteran's status, age, marital or parental status or national origin. The Medical College of Georgia has specific policies to address these complaints. Please refer to links provided above.

### **Reporting Mistreatment**

A student who believes they have experienced mistreatment should take

one of the following steps:

- a. a. Consult with the Associate Dean for Student and Multicultural Affairs (in either Augusta or Athens) who will assist the student with determining whether an identified or anonymous report should be made.
- b. b. The student's Class Dean in Augusta.
- c. c. The Regional Campus Deans on the Clinical Campuses
- d. d. Report a Complaint to The Early Response Group: comprised of the Associate Dean for Student and Multicultural Affairs, the Class Deans in Augusta, and/or the Chair of Psychiatry and Health Behavior. Should a complaint be made about a member of the Early Response Group, that person will be recused from the ERG and treated as any other accused.
- e. e. Report a Complaint to The Vice Dean (who takes the incident to Early Response Group);
- f. f. Complete the confidential online reporting form Responses submitted on this form are encrypted and sent to a secure server to insure the confidentiality of the process. If you are not comfortable using the electronic reporting form, hard copies are available at Office of Student & Multicultural Affairs, in GB 3300

### **Online Reporting**

- The mistreatment reporting form can be found at the OSMA website: <http://www.augusta.edu/mcg/students/studentmistreatment.php>

This form and process provides MCG students, faculty, staff, and house staff with a web form for reporting acts of student mistreatment and abuse that occur at MCG. Hard copies of this reporting form are also available outside the Office of Student & Multicultural Affairs at both campuses. If you or someone you know is in an emergency situation that requires or could require medical, psychological or police services, please call 911 or the MCG Police at 706-721-2911 or in Athens the UGA police at (706) 542-2200. Use this Web form to report an act of student abuse or mistreatment.

- To report sexual misconduct please contact:  
Michelle Reed  
Title IX coordinator  
micreed@augusta.edu  
706-721-0901

### **In Person Reporting**

Augusta and regional campus students should contact Dr. Kimberly Loomer at (706) 721-2522 or via email at [khalbur@augusta.edu](mailto:khalbur@augusta.edu). Athens Partnership students should contact Dr. Francis, at [jfrancis@augusta.edu](mailto:jfrancis@augusta.edu) or (706) 713-2186.

### **Confidentiality and Protection from Retaliation**

1. All attempts will be made to maintain confidentiality of the complainant to the greatest extent possible. Students are reminded that any complaint will be handled promptly and appropriate action taken with the goal of protecting the student from harm or any type of retaliation.

2. Likewise, personnel actions by the College and/or University against the perpetrator are often confidential.

### **Sources for Student Support**

Situations where abuse and/or mistreatment occur can be stressful. There are many sources of student support including counseling both on and off campus. Please contact your class dean if you are an Augusta student, your regional campus dean if you are at the clinical campuses, or Dr. Francis if you are a UGA Partnership student.

### **Malicious Accusations**

Any complainant or witness found to have been dishonest or malicious in making the allegation of mistreatment will be subject to disciplinary action and the matter brought before the Promotions Committee.

### **After a Report**

The Early Response Group:

- Gathers information from student, others, the accused.
- Notifies legal counsel, as it judges the need.
- Depending on the alleged behavior related circumstances, the Early Response Group may consult with the Director of the Counseling Center, the Chair for the involved department, the Clerkship director, the Senior Associate Dean for Faculty Affairs, the Senior Associate Dean for Graduate Medical Education, and the Vice Dean to determine the appropriate handling of the matter.
- The Early Response Group facilitates resolution, whenever possible, which may include direct intervention with an accused party to solve the situation.
- The accused party also has the right to engage the Early Response Group to present their side of the allegation.
- The findings of the ERG will be shared with students who elect to file an identified report as well as the accused. If the findings indicate a violation has occurred by a faculty member, the Senior Associate Dean for Faculty Affairs will be notified.
- If findings indicate a violation occurred by a resident, the Senior Associate Dean for Graduate Medical Education will be notified.

### **References**

1. Silver, H.K., M.D.; Glicker, A.D., M.S.W: Medical Student Abuse, JAMA 263: 527-532, 1990.
2. Komaromy, M., M.D.; Bindman, A.B., M.D.; Haber, R.J., M.D.; Sande, M.A., M.D.: Sexual Harassment in Medical Training. NEJM 328: 322-326, 1993.

### **Related Policies**

- AU Health System policy on Disruptive Physician Behavior
- Augusta University's Sexual Misconduct Policy  
<https://augusta.policytech.com/dotNet/documents/?docid=5640&public=true>
- Augusta University's Non-Discrimination/Anti-Harassment Policy

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