



**Medical College of Georgia  
Office of Academic Affairs**

**ACHIEVING A POSITIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT POLICY**

**POLICY STATEMENT**

The medical learning environment is expected to facilitate students' acquisition of the professional and collegial attitudes necessary for effective and compassionate health care. All students deserve a learning environment that promotes their acquisition of knowledge and skills without experiencing or fearing mistreatment. The development of these attitudes is based on the presence of mutual respect between teacher and learner and represents the AAMC Teacher-Learner Compact.

The Medical College of Georgia (MCG or the College) is committed to maintaining a safe and supportive academic environment at all teaching/clinical sites 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 delineate how mistreatment is reported and addressed at MCG. It is understood that all faculty, residents, and staff will treat students in a collegial, respectful, and professional manner. It is also understood that students will treat each other in a collegial, respectful, and professional manner.

**DEFINITIONS AND EXAMPLES**

**Complainant:** An individual who is alleged to have experienced conduct that violates applicable Policies.

**Mistreatment Response Team (MRT):** Task force assigned to investigate complaints, comprised of the Associate Dean for Student Affairs, Campus Associate Dean for Student Affairs (Athens), Associate Dean for Graduate Medical Education (GME) or designee, and Senior Associate Dean for Faculty Affairs. Should a complaint be made about a member of the Mistreatment Response Team, that person will be recused from the MRT and treated as any other accused.

**Mistreatment Council:** Will meet at the request of the MRT. A larger council comprised of the Associate Dean for Student Affairs, Class Deans, Senior Associate Dean for GME, Senior Associate Dean for Faculty Affairs, Campus Associate Dean for Student Affairs (Athens), Campus Dean (Athens), Associate Dean for Regional Campuses.

**Prohibited Discrimination:** Prejudice and discrimination based on one's gender, racial, ethnic, religious identity, national origin, disability, or sexual orientation.

**Respondent:** An individual who is alleged to have engaged in conduct that violates applicable policies.

**Sexual Harassment:** Unwelcome verbal, nonverbal, or physical conduct, based on sex (including gender stereotypes) that may include: (a) offensive comments to or about the student, (b) unwanted attention or unwelcome verbal advances, (c) unwanted, persistent invitations, (d)

unwelcome, explicit propositions, (e) offensive displays, (f) offensive body language, (g) unwanted physical advances, and/or (h) sexual bribery.

**Student Mistreatment:** Any behavior outside the bounds of acceptable conduct in which a student is abused or perceived to be abused in any way.

### **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. Aggressive behavior (e.g., yelling, throwing objects, cursing, and threatening physical harm) that creates a hostile learning environment.
- Treating students in an 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.). Assigning tasks or denying educational opportunities with the intent of punishment.
- Threat of grading and other forms of assessment as a reward or punishment for inappropriate requests.
- Offensive remarks based on one's gender, racial, ethnic, religious identity, national origin, disability, or sexual orientation.
- Having grades lowered based solely on gender, race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, national origin, or disability.
- Telling inappropriate stories or jokes (e.g., ethnic, sexist, racist).
- Taking credit for a student's work.
- Intentional neglect/ignoring of a student.
- 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 should be reported under the procedures contained within Augusta University's Sexual Misconduct Policy and the Title IX Office.

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

- Pointing out that a student has not adequately prepared for his/her assignments during rounds.
- Asking students questions on rounds.
- 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 gender, race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, national origin, or disability.

## **EXPECTATIONS**

The medical learning environment is expected to facilitate students' acquisition of the professional and collegial attitudes necessary for effective and compassionate health care.

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 raise questions, ask for help, make suggestions, and respectfully 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 student.

### **Expectations of Students**

- Student acknowledgement 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 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.

## **PROCESS AND PROCEDURES**

### **Reporting Mistreatment**

A student who believes they have experienced mistreatment can consult with one of the following individuals who can assist the student with determining whether an identified or anonymous report should be made:

- Associate Dean for Student Affairs (Augusta)
- Campus Associate Dean for Student Affairs, Diversity, and Inclusion (Athens)

- Class Dean (Augusta)
- Campus Associate Dean (Regional Campuses)

A student may also take one of the following steps:

- Report a Complaint via the MCG Mistreatment Form online or in person.
- Report a Complaint to the Vice Dean for Academic Affairs (who takes the incident to MRT)

### **Online Reporting**

The reporting form can be found on both the Office of Academic Affairs and Office of Student Affairs websites: <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, either named or anonymously. 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.

### **In Person Reporting**

- Augusta and regional campus students should contact the Associate Dean for Student Affairs.
- Athens Medical Partnership students should contact the Campus Associate Dean for Student Affairs.

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

- It is expected that the complainant, respondent(s), witness(es), committee members, and all other participants in the mistreatment reporting process will maintain confidentiality throughout the entire process and after the process is complete in perpetuity, unless otherwise required by law or another binding authoritative body.
- All complaints will be handled promptly and appropriate action taken with the goal of protecting the student from harm or any type of retaliation.
- Personnel actions by the College and/or University against the perpetrator are often confidential.
- Exceptions to confidentiality can be made in cases where there appears to be imminent risk of serious harm or if evidence of criminal behavior is uncovered which requires reporting per state or other applicable laws.

### **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.

## Investigation and Resolution

After receiving a formal complaint, the Mistreatment Response Team (MRT) will investigate the allegations and determine recommendations for resolution in the following manner.

1. The MRT will gather information from the complainant, respondent(s), witness(es) and others as appropriate. The accused party has the right to engage the MRT to present their side of the allegation.
2. The MRT will notify legal counsel if necessary.
3. The MRT will consult and bring-in resources within and outside MCG as needed to determine the appropriate course of action.
4. The MRT will facilitate resolution, whenever possible, which may include direct intervention with an accused party to solve the situation.
5. The complainant who elects to file an identified report will be contacted by the Associate Dean for Student Affairs within 5 business days of the complaint. Human Resources policies and procedures may limit what can be shared with the complainant.
6. If the findings indicate a violation has occurred, the Associate Dean for Student Affairs will notify the appropriate senior leader(s) and provide recommendations made by the MRT.
  - a. Attending/faculty: Department Chair
  - b. Resident/fellow: Department Chair, Residency Program Director
  - c. Preceptor: Department Chair, Clerkship Director
  - d. Allied health care worker: Relevant Dean
  - e. Site leader: Vice Dean for Academic Affairs
7. If findings indicate a violation occurred by a resident, the Associate Dean for Graduate Medical Education will notify the Department Chair and provide recommendations made by the MRT.
8. If the MRT deems it necessary, the Mistreatment Council will convene to interview both the student and accused party.
  - a. If deemed necessary, the MRT will add other regional campus leadership to the Mistreatment Council.
  - b. If the accused party is a resident, leadership from the residency program and/or department should be present at the Mistreatment Council meeting.

## 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

Augusta University's Policy Library

## Policy Review and Approvals

Created and approved by Curriculum Office November 4, 2014; amended and approved by Curriculum Oversight Committee: January 5, 2021, January 3, 2023.