



Rush Medical College Teacher-Learner Relationship

Expectations for the Teacher-Learner Relationship

Rush Medical College has a long-standing tradition of valuing and creating a productive and positive learning environment for its students – this environment is an institutional asset that is vital to carrying out our missions in teaching, patient care, and research. The relationship between teachers and learners should be based on mutual trust, respect, and responsibility. The expectations for maintaining a professional teacher-learner relationship are relevant to all faculty, residents, staff, and students who participate in educational activities in the classroom, laboratory, research, or clinical settings where there is a focus on education, patient care, and ethical conduct.

Expectations for Learners

Students are expected to participate in the learning process in an active, respectful and professional manner. Students' motivation and actions should be appropriately directed at gaining the knowledge, skills, and values that are required to become a competent, ethical, and compassionate physician. This includes the following:

- Being adequately prepared for learning activities in the classroom, laboratory, research, and clinical settings,
- Treating faculty, residents, staff, and fellow students with respect and collegiality,
- Actively and appropriately seeking information to improve their own performance,
- Reflecting on their performance and educational experiences to inform their self-directed learning and study,
- Adhering to the tenets of the "University Statement on Student Conduct" and the "University Statement on Academic Honesty," as well as the student-authored "Student Honor Code," "Resolving conflict in an appropriate and professional manner, and
- Providing constructive feedback and evaluation about their learning experiences.

Expectations for Teachers

Teachers are expected to participate in the learning process in an active, respectful and professional manner. Faculty, residents, and staff who work with students and residents are charged with helping these learners to become competent, ethical, and compassionate physicians. This includes the following:

- Being adequately prepared for learning activities in the classroom, laboratory, research, and clinical settings,
- Treating learners and fellow teachers with respect and collegiality,
- Providing learners with clear expectations for performance, and when applicable, a detailed, written outline of course objectives and expectations,
- Providing learners with ongoing, specific and constructive feedback about their performance, Reflecting on their teaching to inform their own self-directed learning and study,
- Actively participating in the development and improvement of courses and their content, Timely completion of fair and accurate evaluation of student performance,

- Holding students accountable to the tenets of the “University Statement on Student Conduct” and the “University Statement on Academic Honesty,” as well as the student-authored “Student Honor Code,”
- Resolving conflict in an appropriate and professional manner, and
- Utilizing feedback and evaluation to improve their teaching.

Behaviors that Undermine Productive Teacher-Learner Relationships

While student mistreatment is rare, any occurrence is unacceptable, and Rush Medical College’s policy is one of zero tolerance of behaviors that undermine productive teacher-learner relationships such as violence, sexual harassment, discrimination, and abuse. Student mistreatment may be verbal, psychological or physical. It includes, but is not limited to, sexual harassment, discrimination due to age, racial and ethnic background, religion, sexual orientation, national origin, or disability.

All personnel will treat students in a collegial and professional manner. Other types of behavior can be inappropriate if the effect interferes with professional development. Behaviors such as making demeaning or derogatory remarks, belittling comments or destructive criticism fall into this category.

Student mistreatment includes but is not limited to treating students in a harmful, injurious or offensive way: attacking in words, speaking insultingly, harshly or unjustly to or about a student¹, reviling or demeaning a student, undermining the self esteem or confidence of a student. Sexual harassment includes but is 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 bribery². Mistreatment creates a hostile environment in which to work, and is also addressed in the Rush University Medical Center Policies and Procedures. Incidents of mistreatment may cover a spectrum from flagrant to ambiguous. The person responsible for mistreatment may be a member of the faculty, a resident, a nurse, another student, a member of the administration, a hospital employee, or even a patient. Examples of inappropriate behaviors are:

1. physical punishment or physical threats,
2. sexual harassment,
3. discrimination based on race, religion, ethnicity, sex, age, sexual orientation, or physical disabilities,
4. psychological punishment of a student by a superior (e.g. public humiliation, threats and intimidation, removal of privileges),
5. grading used to punish a student rather than to evaluate objective performance,
6. assigning tasks for punishment rather than educational purposes,
7. requiring the performance of personal services,
8. taking credit for another individual's work,
9. intentional neglect or intentional lack of communication.

Providing critique and receiving feedback are essential components of the learning process. Effective and constructive feedback focuses on observed behavior rather than personal characteristics and should be provided in a way that promotes learning and maintains a positive learning environment.

Procedures for Reporting Allegations of Mistreatment

¹ Silver, HK, Glickman, AD. Medical student abuse, JAMA 263: 527-532, 1990.

² Komaroy, M, Bindman, AB, Haber, RJ, Sande, MA. Sexual harassment in medical training. NEJM 328: 322-326, 1993.

The reporting and resolution sections of this policy are designed to protect students from retaliation and to protect those charged with mistreatment from unfair accusations. The name of the student, the reporting individual, and the individual(s) responsible for the alleged mistreatment will be held in strict confidence on a need-to-know basis.

The Special Committee on the RMC Environment (SCORE) is charged with the review of student concerns regarding the learning environment and the development of action plans in response to episodes of alleged medical student mistreatment. A committee of students, faculty, and administration, SCORE works with the RMC community to promote a positive learning environment. SCORE represents one process for reporting and dealing with student mistreatment issues at RMC and Rush University. The RMC Dean's Office, RMC Office of Medical Student Programs (OMSP), RMC faculty and clerkship director offices, Rush University Provost's Office, and RUMC Department of Human Resources (HR) are also points of contact for student complaints about mistreatment.

An incident of mistreatment may be reported by the student or by an individual who witnessed the incident of mistreatment. SCORE and RMC have several mechanisms or channels for making student mistreatment reports. Mechanisms through which students or others may report frank mistreatment or other behaviors that undermine the learning environment include:

- a web-based reporting tool maintained by SCORE³;
- written reports in course reviews;
- written or oral communication with SCORE members, the Ombudsperson, any faculty members, faculty advisors, peer advisors, any member of the OMSP faculty and staff, any member of the RMC Dean's Office, any member of Rush University's Provost's Office, and RUMC's Senior Vice President of Human Resources / Equal Opportunity Coordinator; and
- RUMC's hotline (877-787-4009).

Through several of these mechanisms, particularly the online submission form, students and others have the ability to report complaints anonymously. While anonymous submissions are accepted, reporters are encouraged to identify themselves so that more thorough follow up and action planning can occur. Other individuals may report on behalf of a student, but SCORE will attempt to obtain the consent of the student before proceeding. Some events, however, may require action even if the student does not wish to pursue the complaint.

Process for Addressing Mistreatment Allegations

SCORE is of unique and critical value to RMC, Rush University and RUMC because it directly involves and empowers students to report, review, and resolve mistreatment claims. However, students should be aware that the full resources of RUMC, including RUMC senior leadership, support the process of addressing and redressing allegations of student mistreatment. In fact, the OMSP oversees and provides central management of processes for addressing student mistreatment at RMC, and ultimate investigatory and disciplinary authority is supervised and handled by OMSP and other senior management of RMC and Rush University.

The SCORE process for managing reports of mistreatment is delineated here, but the OMSP and RUMC's HR and Office of Legal Affairs (OLA) may initiate procedures that supplement or, rarely, even supersede this process for complaints involving RMC or RUMC staff, faculty, employees or students that form a possible violation of law, including sexual harassment; unwanted physical contact; discrimination based on

³ Currently: https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/SCORE_Reporting

race, ethnicity, gender, national origin, and/or sexual orientation; retaliatory action against a complainant; similar serious misconduct with legal repercussions; or incidents where there is an established pattern of repeated but less serious misconduct.

SCORE Procedure for Managing Reports

1. Reports of student mistreatment from all sources are monitored by and transmitted to the OMSP and collated by the OMSP support person.
2. OMSP support person communicates complaint to the SCORE Co-Chairs who determine whether the report must be addressed immediately or can be addressed at the next regular meeting.
3. SCORE investigates complaint of student mistreatment. OMSP notifies HR and Office of Legal Affairs (OLA) prior to the initiation of an investigation when there are complaints involving RMC or RUMC staff, faculty, employees or students that form a possible violation of law, including sexual harassment; unwanted physical contact; discrimination based on race, ethnicity, gender, national origin, and/or sexual orientation; retaliatory action against a complainant; similar serious misconduct with legal repercussions; or incidents where there is an established pattern of repeated but less serious misconduct.
4. Any investigation that results in a finding that confirms student mistreatment is reported to OMSP.
5. SCORE develops an action plan to address the complaint and finding.
6. Action plan carried out and results are recorded. Any action plan that recommends discipline of RMC faculty, staff, employees, or students is first conveyed to OMSP, which works with HR, OLA and, as appropriate, the Executive Committee of the Medical Staff to ensure uniform and appropriate discipline can be taken.
7. Information regarding the entire report is recorded in the SCORE database by the OMSP support person and is also tracked by OMSP, which collates RMC mistreatment information from all sources.
8. A summary of the activities of SCORE is reported quarterly to the Dean.
9. Final action plans are reported to the Rush University Diversity and Inclusion group for further tracking.

Prohibition Against Retaliation

Retaliatory conduct against an individual who brings a complaint or provides information during an investigation of such a complaint is not tolerated. “Retaliatory conduct” is conduct that adversely and unjustifiably affects the terms and conditions of another's education status, quality of life, or education experience and that is motivated by intent to cause harm because of the targeted individual's involvement in the filing or investigation of a complaint about mistreatment. Students who believe that retaliatory actions have been taken against them should communicate their concerns immediately to the Office of Medical Student Programs.

Acknowledgement:

Sections of this policy have been adapted from the teacher-learner relationship policies from the UMDNJ New Jersey Medical School, Drexel University School of Medicine, and Georgetown University School of Medicine and from the Rush University Policy and Procedures Concerning Sexual and other Harassment.

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