

# Student Conduct and Special Needs Policy

The conduct of each student at Pacific School of Religion shall at all times be consistent with the character and purpose of the school, as an educational institution committed to serving God by equipping leaders for ministries of integrity, compassion and justice. On rare occasions in every institution, questions arise about whether a student's conduct on the campus, in academic and non-academic settings, is compatible with the nature and purpose of the institution. When these questions arise, the School has established a Committee on Student Conduct to hold an objective assessment of the facts and make recommendations and/or decisions on what action should be taken.

In the case of theological students, the Special Needs Policy, a sub-category of the Student Conduct Policy, may be invoked.

## **Special Needs Policy**

### **Policy**

Pacific School of Religion (PSR) shares responsibility with the ordaining and commissioning agencies of churches and other religious communities for judgments concerning a person's fitness for professional religious leadership. Special needs policy and process involves, in part, the School's exercise of this responsibility. Master of Divinity students and other students preparing for ministry agree by their enrollment at PSR, to accept the policy and procedures described below as part of their education and to be bound by the decisions. These standards do not preclude the School's application of other policies such as those pertaining to the occupancy of school housing, academic discipline, and student conduct.

### **Definition: Special Needs**

A "special need" refers to any situation or condition which brings into question the personal and professional development of a student that makes consultation and/or intervention necessary beyond the usual teacher-student or advisor-advisee relationship. In such instances, this process assesses questions of fitness and of professional development for ministry.

Examples of possible special need situations include, but are not limited to: personal and professional difficulties arising from field placement; matters of character, self understanding or integrity that raise questions about the student's fitness, competencies, readiness or effectiveness for religious leadership;

behaviors suggesting short or long term emotional difficulties which may impact the student's ability to attend to personal and professional development.

The primary purpose of this process is to identify needs relevant to the appropriate preparation for ministry, and resources to meet those needs for students in the professional degree programs. When it does not appear that a student in PSR's judgment, can appropriately attend to those needs, the policy may lead to limits on the range of the student's participation in PSR classes and other activities up to and including temporary removal from classes or permanent expulsion.

The following procedures refer to both Student Conduct and Special Needs cases unless a distinction is clearly stated.

Before the completing of either policy procedure, the student shall retain all rights and privileges as a student unless the President and/or Dean, with the consultation of the Committee, determine that immediate suspension from student rights and privileges or greater on different sanctions is in the best interests of the School. At all times in this process, the School has all rights and obligations otherwise imposed by law to notify law enforcement agencies if appropriate. See section on "Immediate Interim Suspension" for more details.

### **Complaints**

Specific reports about a PSR student shall be brought to the attention of the Dean's Office by one student, any faculty, staff, field education supervisor, other student, on-campus residential member, or others with whom the student associates.

### **Initial Respondent**

Such reports may be referred to the Director of Community Life to be addressed informally and without reference to disciplinary measures (i.e. offering conflict management counseling, providing a referral to mental health services or substance abuse treatment). If such a report is not informally resolved through the involvement of the Director of Community Life, the report may be referred to the Dean, and a phase of more formal information gathering will follow.

### **Information Gathering & Policy Determination Phase**

1. The Dean, or the Dean's designee, gathers preliminary information from relevant sources and decides if the situation warrants initiation of either the Student Conduct process or the Special Needs process, or not
2. The Dean, or the Dean's designee, notifies the student's advisor of the situation

and meets with the advisor and one other member of the PSR faculty or staff (e.g., the Assistant Deans, Housing Director, etc.), selected by the Dean, normally within five business days following determination of either a Student Conduct or a Special Needs situation.

### **Consultative Phase**

1. The information gathering phase leads to a consultation with the Dean, the student, the advisor, and if needed, one more appointment at the Dean's discretion in light of the type of issues raised by the alleged conduct. A course of action is outlined to define and deal with the student conduct.
2. If the proposed course of action is accepted by the student, then a written statement of the proposal, and a signed statement of the student's assent is placed in the advisor's file, the Dean's office, and a copy sent to the student.

### **Committee Phase**

1. If the proposed course of action is not accepted by the student, or if the Dean thereafter determines that the action plan is not being followed by the student, or for other good reasons, the Dean may then convene a Committee, normally within 10 business days. The student will be notified in writing of the convening of the Committee.
2. The Committee shall consist of
  - a. For Student Conduct: the Dean, Director of Community Life, Advisor, faculty member, and if needed, one more appointment by the Dean.
  - b. For the Special Needs: three faculty members appointed by Dean for the academic year.

The Dean serves as an ex officio member.

3. The Committee reviews the case, the steps taken to date, and any documentation considered relevant. The Committee chooses a chair for its work with the particular student. The Committee chooses a recorder/secretary. The Committee sets place, time, and date within ten business days for a hearing with the student.

### **Hearing of the Committee**

1. The student is informed in writing of the time, date and location for the hearing with the special needs Committee; at least four business days in advance.
2. These proceedings may be conducted in the absence of a student who fails to appear after proper notice.
3. The Committee, together with the student's advisor, shall meet with the student in a hearing. Formal rules of evidence will not be used. Any person who disrupts the hearing may be excluded.

4. The student shall have the privilege of presenting to the Committee written or oral statements from others with knowledge of pertinent facts or of presenting other pertinent materials.
5. If a psychological or other professional evaluation has been requested by the Committee, the professional who prepared the evaluation may be requested to appear at the hearing and to respond to relevant questions, upon request of any party, if the chair of the Committee determines that such participation is important to the resolution of the case.
6. The Committee may require the attendance of persons from the PSR community. The Committee may also request the attendance of persons from outside the community, whose participation is deemed important to the adjudication of the case.
7. The student may choose to be accompanied by no more than one person, such as a family member, a licensed mental health professional, a member of the faculty or staff, or a fellow student. The student may consult with, but not be accompanied by, an attorney. The student shall communicate to the Committee chair the name of the person who will accompany him/her to the hearing, doing so two days in advance of the hearing.
8. The hearing may be tape recorded by the Dean or designee. This recording will be available only to the student, the Committee and, if needed for appeal, to the president. The Dean shall store this tape for 90 days following the hearing.
9. When the Committee determines by majority vote that it has received all information necessary to its determination, it shall terminate the process and, in private session, reach its decision with respect to the matter under consideration.

## **Reporting**

1. The Committee's decision shall be transmitted to the student in writing, by the Dean or designee doing so within five business days (if practicable) after the completion of the hearing. The written decision should contain a statement of reasons for the Committee's determination. In the case of a decision for expulsion, the student should be advised as to when or whether a petition for reinstatement would be considered, along with any conditions for petitioning for reinstatement. The student should also be advised of his/her right of appeal.
2. If the Committee makes a decision not affecting the student's matriculation, it may initiate a process of consultation and/or action which it considers appropriate to meet the student's need. Examples of appropriate action include, but are not limited to the following: special training in study skills; the requirement of additional course work in writing or academic research skills; an appropriate term of psychological counseling; removal from or change of field education or internship placement; specified medical treatment; etc.
3. When in the judgment of the Committee a process has met the student's need, no further action is needed. A brief report shall be made to the faculty, enclosed in the student's file.

4. If the Committee makes a decision affecting the student's matriculation, that is, expulsion or a conditional or non-conditional leave of absence, the chair shall present at the following executive faculty meeting as full a report as needed to inform the faculty of the case. The faculty may accept the report or, if presented with new substantive information within 30 days, ask the Committee to reconsider its decision.

### **Professional Evaluation**

1. After initial review of the situation and at any time during these proceedings, the Committee may refer a student for appropriate professional evaluation. For example, a student may be referred to a mental health evaluation approved by the School..
2. Students referred for professional evaluation shall be informed in writing and shall be given a copy of these standards and procedures.
3. The cost of the professional evaluation is the responsibility of the PSR.

### **Immediate Interim Suspension**

1. An interim suspension may be implemented immediately if the Dean determines that a student's behavior poses a danger of causing physical or emotional harm to the student or others; substantially impeding the academic or other lawful activities of others; or causing property damage.
2. The Dean shall determine whether the student will be suspended from classes, campus and/or housing.
3. A student subject to an interim suspension shall be given written notice of the suspension and shall be given a copy of these standards and procedures.
4. The student shall then be given an opportunity to appear personally or by conference call before the members of the special needs Committee (or substitute faculty members, if necessary), within five business days from the effective date of the interim suspension, in order to review the following issues only: the reliability of the information concerning the student's behavior and whether or not the student's behavior poses a danger of causing physical or emotional harm to the student or others, impeding the academic and other lawful activities of others, or causing property damage.
5. The student has the right to present a current professional psychological evaluation relevant to any and all of the issues listed above.
6. When appearing before the Committee the student may be accompanied by a family member, licensed mental health professional, a member of the faculty or staff, or another student.
7. The student will be allowed to enter campus to attend hearings, or for other necessary purposes, only if authorized by the Dean.
8. A student on interim suspension will remain suspended unless and until the suspension is reversed by this Committee (defined below).
9. The Dean will notify the student in writing of the decision of the special needs Committee.

## **Appeals**

1. The student may appeal the final decision of the Committee to the president, doing so within ten business days after the Dean's written communication of the decision to the student.
2. The president may consult with the Committee and any other persons of his/her choosing. The president shall have access to the tape recording of the proceedings of the informal hearing (if any exists) as well as any documentation pertinent to the case. The president may then meet with the party or parties involved in the complaint. If the president chooses to meet with them, the student or students involved may be choose to be accompanied by a family member, licensed mental health professional, faculty member, staff member or another student. Students may not be accompanied by an attorney. Students must communicate the name of the accompanying person two business days in advance of the meeting.
3. The president may affirm the decision of the Committee, overrule the decision, or return it to the Committee for further consideration and resubmission with appropriate time limits set by the president. The president's decision shall be final and conclusive and not subject to appeal within the institution.
4. If the matter before the Committee is one in which the president is directly involved, then the president shall delegate the review powers described herein to a member of the faculty, administration, Board of Trustees or third party unaffiliated with PSR who is not otherwise involved in the matter.

## **Confidentiality**

Records of proceedings under this policy shall be maintained in a manner calculated to limit access only to those persons with institutional need to know or right to know.

*last approved by faculty in April 2012*

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