

Toronto School of Theology

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Standards of Professional Practice Behaviour for Students at the Toronto School of Theology

Preamble

Students in the Master of Divinity program, the Master of Religious Education program, and other professional programs at TST often serve placements in settings of ministry under supervision as part of their academic programs. These settings of ministry may include congregations (“pastoral charges”, “parishes”, etc.), hospitals, correctional institutions, counselling services, urban ministries, para-church organizations, and community agencies. Educationally these placements may take many forms, including internship, practicum, clinical training, contextual education, and field education. Students in non-professional programs at TST also sometimes take a course or training involving a placement in a ministry setting.

Theological students in placements are expected by the Toronto School of Theology, the University of Toronto, the placements in which they serve, and society more generally to adhere to appropriate standards of behaviour and ethical values. All theological students accept that the profession of ministry demands integrity, exemplary behaviour, dedication to the search for truth, and service to humanity in the pursuit of their education and the exercise of their ministry.

These Standards express professional practice and ethical performance expected of TST students in TST placements.

- For the purposes of this policy, the term ‘students’ includes basic degree students, advanced degree students, trainees, interns, chaplaincy students, or the equivalents, whether registered in programs, courses, or other forms of training.
- The term ‘TST placements’ means placements earning TST credit, or required for a course earning TST credit, or required for a degree at a TST member college; it does not include placements administered by a church or denomination independently of TST.)

- These Standards will employ a form of the term “persons ministered to” to refer to any person or persons in reference to whom the student engages in the exercise of ministry. The term as used here should be understood to include members (or adherents) of congregations, churchgoers, patients, clients, institutionalized persons, schoolchildren, and all other persons who are served by the student in a setting of ministry as part of his or her academic program.

By registering at the Toronto School of Theology or any of its member colleges or in courses they offer, a student accepts that he/she shall adhere to these Standards. These Standards apply to students in practice-related settings such as fieldwork, practica, clinical settings, and other such activities arranged through the TST, a member college, or a member of the teaching staff of a college.

A student’s ministry base in the Doctor of Ministry program is not a placement, and the TST has no authority over the student’s appointment to it. However, the professional and ethical Standards of this policy apply fully and equally to Doctor of Ministry students in respect of activities related to their academic program, including behaviour connected to their Ministry Base Committee, and research.

These Standards do not replace legal or ethical standards defined by professional, denominational, or regulatory bodies or by a placement or field setting, nor by other academic standards or expectations existing at the TST, the University of Toronto, or TST’s member colleges. Action respecting these Standards by the college or other authority responsible for the program or course does not preclude any other action under the applicable policies or procedures of TST or the University, or other action by program regulatory bodies, professional bodies, or practice/field settings, or other action under applicable law including the Criminal Code of Canada.

Breach of any of these Standards may, after appropriate evaluation of a student, and in accordance with applicable procedures, be cause for loss of credit in a course, or dismissal from a course, or loss of eligibility to continue in a program, or dismissal from a program, or a combination of such sanctions.

Standards of Professional Behaviour and Ethical Performance

A. Best practices

Every student must strive to pursue excellence in their acquisition of knowledge, skills, and attitudes in their profession, and should aim at exemplary ethical and professional behaviour. At a minimum, every student must uphold the relevant behavioural and ethical standards of his or her denominational judicatory, educational authority, and/or professional body, and in particular every student will observe the following minimum standards of behaviour and ethical performance:

1. Keeping proper records of ministry as required or appropriate.
2. In cases where the free and informed consent of a person ministered to is required, acting only after valid informed consent has been obtained from him or her (or from an appropriate substitute decision-maker).

3. Recognizing the limits of his or her expertise, training, and scope of authority, and, whenever indicated, providing appropriate transfer of responsibility for pastoral care.
4. Communicating and interacting appropriately with persons to whom he or she ministers, including families, faculty/instructors, peers, colleagues, and other ministry personnel.
5. Not exploiting the pastoral relationship for personal benefit, gain, or gratification; avoiding or correcting conflicts of interest, or the appearance of conflicts of interest.
6. Attending all mandatory educational sessions and supervisory meetings, or providing appropriate notification of absence.
7. Demonstrating the following qualities in the provision of care:
 - a. empathy and compassion for the person to whom he or she is ministering, and, as appropriate, his or her family and caregivers;
 - b. concern for the needs of the person to whom he or she is ministering, with a view to understanding the nature of the pastoral issue or problem, and the goals and possible complications of ministry;
 - c. concern for the psycho-social aspects of the pastoral issue or problem with respect to which the student is exercising ministry;
 - d. assessment and consideration of the motivation and physical and mental capacity of the person ministered to, when the student is arranging for appropriate services;
 - e. respect for, and ability to work harmoniously with, instructors, peers, and other ministers and professionals;
 - f. respect for, and ability to work harmoniously with, the person ministered to and all those involved in the promotion of his/her wellbeing;
 - g. recognition of the importance of self-assessment and of continuing education;
 - h. willingness to teach others in ministry and in other professions;
 - i. understanding of the appropriate requirements for research involving persons ministered to;
 - j. awareness of the effects that differences in gender, sexual orientation, and cultural and social background may have on issues of ministry;
 - k. awareness of the effects that differences in gender, sexual orientation, and cultural and social background may have on the care we provide;
 - l. respect for confidentiality of all information relating to persons ministered to; and
 - m. ability to establish appropriate boundaries in relationships with persons ministered to and their families, and with other students or professionals associated with the TST placement.

B. Unacceptable behaviour

A student will refrain from taking any action which is inconsistent with the appropriate standards of professional behaviour and ethical performance, and in particular must refrain from the following conduct:

8. Misrepresenting or misleading anyone as to his or her qualifications or role;
9. Providing pastoral care or other care without supervision or authorization;

10. Misusing or misrepresenting his/her institutional, ecclesial, or professional affiliation;
11. Stealing or misappropriating or misusing equipment, drugs, or other property;
12. Contravening the Ontario Human Rights Code;
13. Unlawfully breaching confidentiality, including but not limited to accessing electronic records of persons for whom s/he does not have pastoral responsibility or to which she/he has not been granted access;
14. Being under the influence of alcohol or recreational drugs while offering pastoral care or otherwise where professional behaviour is expected;
15. Being unavailable while on call or on duty;
16. Failing to respect the rights and dignity of persons to whom the student is ministering;
17. Falsifying records in the ministry setting;
18. Committing sexual impropriety or sexual abuse with a person for whom the student has responsibilities of pastoral care or ministry;
19. Committing any act that could reasonably be construed as mental or physical abuse;
20. Behaving in a way that is unbecoming of a practising professional in ministry or that is in violation of relevant and applicable Canadian law, including violation of the Canadian Criminal Code.

Academic Assessment of Professional Behaviour and Ethical Performance

The TST and its member colleges value the professional behaviour and ethical performance of their students. Assessment of that behaviour and performance will form part of the academic assessment of students in ministry in accordance with the grading policies in effect at TST and the student's college. Professional behaviour and ethical performance will be assessed in all placements. These assessments will be timely in relation to the end of the placement and will be communicated to the student.

Each member TST college will have specific guidelines related to these Standards that provide further elaboration with respect to their college-specific behavioural standards and ethical performance, assessment of such standards and relevant procedures.

Falling significantly short of any of the Standards identified as "best practices," and acts of what these Standards identify as "unacceptable behaviour," are serious academic matters and represent failure to meet the academic standards of the student's program. Poor performance with respect to professional or ethical behaviour may result in a performance assessment which includes a formal written reprimand, remedial work, denial of promotion, suspension, loss of eligibility to continue in a program, or dismissal from a program, or a combination of these. In the case of suspension or dismissal from a program, the suspension or dismissal will be recorded on the student's academic record and transcript with a statement that these Standards have been breached.

Appeals against academic decisions under this policy may be made according to the policies and procedures in effect. For basic degree students, these policies and procedures are established by the student's college of registration; further appeal may be

available according to the policies and procedures of the *TST Basic Degree Handbook*. For advanced degree students, these policies and procedures are established by the academic handbook for the degree in which he or she is registered.

Non-academic discipline and risks against health or safety

In cases where the allegations of behaviour are so serious as to constitute, if proven, a significant disruption to the program or the placement or a health and safety risk to other students, members of the TST community, members of the University community, or persons ministered to, the head of the college in which the student is registered is authorized to impose such interim conditions upon the student as the college head may consider appropriate. Such conditions may include, but are not limited to, suspension from the program and removal from the placement. In urgent situations, such as those involving threats or violent behaviour, a student may be restricted from entry onto the property of the college and/or the placement. If the student is registered in a member college in which the Code of Student Conduct of the University of Toronto is in effect, the college head may also proceed as authorized or required under the Code.

In the case of Doctor of Ministry students, the Director of the Centre for the Study of Ministry, or in the case of other advanced degree students, the TST Director of Advanced Degree Programs, will without delay bring concerns under the foregoing paragraph to the attention of the head of the student's college of registration, or in urgent situations may act immediately pending the referral of the matter to the head of the student's college of registration, which referral should occur as quickly as possible.