SOM OP: 40.04, Student Promotion

PURPOSE: The purpose of this School of Medicine (SOM) Policy and Procedure is to describe policies and procedures related to student promotion and progress through the School of Medicine curriculum.

REVIEW: This SOM Policy and Procedure will be reviewed on or before November 1 of each odd-numbered year by the Student Promotions and Professional Conduct Committee. The result of this review will be communicated to the Dean by November 30.

POLICY/PROCEDURE:

1. General. This policy is intended to provide guidelines for faculty and administrators on procedures that should be used in determining the status of students relevant to promotion through the curriculum. Information gathered in accordance with this policy should be used by the Student Promotions and Professional Conduct Committee to identify and evaluate students deemed to be in academic difficulty.

2. Introduction.

   a. The responsibility for evaluation of students rests with the faculty of the Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center School of Medicine. Faculty have an obligation to the students, to the school, and to the larger society to award passing grades only to those students who have demonstrated mastery of the course material. For purposes of this policy, the term “course” includes the basic sciences blocks, clinical clerkships, and other clinical rotations (selectives, electives), which must be successfully completed for promotion and graduation. In addition to evaluation of students’ knowledge and skills, the faculty has the obligation to determine whether students’ behavior or conduct is suitable for the practice of medicine. It is inappropriate to give a passing grade to a student when unacceptable behavior or conduct in the treatment and care of patients and/or in relationships with staff and peers have been established, even if grades on tests or other forms of evaluation have been satisfactory. Expectations for student behavior are described in the SOM Student Handbook (available at www.ttuhsc.edu/som/studentaffairs/) and encompass the following documents:

      1) Student Honor Code
      2) Compact between Teachers and Learners of Medicine
      3) TTUHSC Code of Professional and Academic Conduct

The faculty of the School of Medicine has the responsibility for recommending students for promotion and graduation. This responsibility is administered through the Student Promotions and Professional Conduct Committee (SPPCC) that
represents the faculty at large. Every attempt will be made to apply principles of fairness and due process when considering actions of the faculty or administration that might adversely affect the students. Comments, questions, and concerns should be directed to the Office of Student Affairs.

b. **Students covered by this policy:** These promotions policies apply to students enrolled in the courses necessary to complete the requirements for the Doctor of Medicine degree in the TTUHSC School of Medicine. These policies do not cover the course work done for the other degree programs in which the student is enrolled, for instance the joint degree programs with the TTUHSC Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences (MD/PhD program), Texas Tech University (TTU) Rawls College of Business Administration (MD/MBA program), or TTU School of Law (MD/JD program).

c. **Responsibilities of the SPPCC:** The SPPCC is appointed by the Faculty Council Executive Committee. The SPPCC is charged with the following responsibilities:

1) Formulate and modify promotions policies.

2) Review and evaluate the academic and behavioral progress of each medical student enrolled at TTUHSC School of Medicine.

3) Determine the conditions for promotion, reinstatement, or dismissal for each student in accordance with the policies and procedures described herein.

All policies of the SPPCC are subject to approval by the Executive Committee of the Faculty Council and referred to the Dean of the School of Medicine for final approval.

d. **Responsibilities of the Office of Student Affairs:** The Office of Student Affairs is responsible for monitoring the progress of medical students during their course of study in order to provide or refer students to the appropriate academic or personal counseling services, if applicable. It will provide staff support to the SPPCC and will maintain permanent minutes of SPPCC actions. The Assistant Dean for Student Affairs serves as advocate for due process for students.

e. **Responsibilities of the Dean:** The Dean, as the Chief Academic Officer, has the final responsibility for actions taken regarding a student. The initial recommendation and subsequent action for each student are delegated to the SPPCC. However, the Dean is responsible for executing the appeals process in which a final decision is made.

3. **Curricular Progression and Length.**

a. Normal progression through the School of Medicine curriculum requires that a student demonstrate a consistently satisfactory level of performance. Course grades generally serve as indicators of performance. Students will be expected to complete the medical school curriculum within four (4) years of the initial date of matriculation. This does not include time spent in course work for other degree programs, for example the joint degree programs with the TTUHSC Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences (MD/PhD program), the TTU Rawls College of Business Administration (MD/MBA program), or the TTU College of Law (MD/JD program).
b. The curriculum may be extended due to 1) a leave of absence, 2) academic difficulty requiring repetition of an academic year as per this policy, or 3) request for decompression of the medical school curriculum related to an established disability as noted in the Standards for Curricular Completion. However, inability to complete Years 1 and 2 of the curriculum in three years or Years 3 and 4 of the curriculum in three years will result in a recommendation from the SPPCC for automatic dismissal.

c. The completion of the medical school curriculum and the approval of overall performance by the SPPCC are required for graduation. The Office of Student Affairs will annually present to the Dean and HSC Registrar a list of candidates for receipt of the Doctor of Medicine Degree based on the policies described herein.

4. **Grade Assignment and Tracking of Student Progress.**

a. Grades are assigned as described in [SOM OP 30.01, Grading Policies](#).

b. The Office of Student Affairs is responsible for maintaining a comprehensive database of student grades.

c. The progress of each student enrolled in the School of Medicine will be reviewed by the SPPCC on an annual basis, based on data provided by the Office of Student Affairs. Prescribed courses of action and decisions by the SPPCC will be based on the cumulative performance of the student.

5. **Notification of Students with Satisfactory Progress.**

a. The Office of Student Affairs will notify students in both Year 1 and Year 2, in writing, regarding satisfactory progress and promotion to the next academic year.

b. Promotion from Year 1 to 2 requires satisfactory performance in all blocks that constitute the Year 1 curriculum (see Table 1).

c. Promotion from Year 2 to 3 requires satisfactory performance in all blocks that constitute the Year 2 curriculum (see Table 2). In addition, students must achieve a minimum score on the NBME Comprehensive Basic Sciences Exam (CBSE) that is predictive of the passing score on USMLE Step 1. This minimum score established by the Office of Curriculum, is equivalent to the passing score on USMLE Step One plus the Standard Error of Measurement (SEM) of the CBSE. For example, if a CBSE score of 65 is equivalent to a passing score on USMLE Step One and the SEM of the exam is 4, then students would have to post a score of 69 to satisfy this requirement. The CBSE is administered at least three times and the dates of administration are determined by the Office of Curriculum.

d. Students in Year Three and Year Four are evaluated on a continuous basis. Unless problems arise, students will proceed through the clinical curriculum with no formal notice of promotion.

6. **Notification of Students with Unsatisfactory Progress.**

a. The Office of Student Affairs will identify students with unsatisfactory academic performance on a continuing basis. Specifically, the Office of Student Affairs will identify students who obtain grades of Marginal or Fail in blocks, or who obtain a grade of Fail (or, more frequently, PR (grade in progress)) in clinical activities. These
students will be reviewed by the SPPCC Executive Committee, which will determine the appropriate action for each student based on these policies.

b. The SPPCC Executive Committee will use the guidelines presented in Tables 1 and 2 below to determine the appropriate action step for each student and will prepare documentation for each student whose academic performance warrants a meeting with the SPPCC. The office of Student Affairs will provide this information to each identified student and will arrange for them to attend a meeting of the appropriate subcommittee of the SPPCC (see SPPCC Bylaws).

c. Students reviewed by the SPPCC will be notified in writing of the SPPCC decision and informed of stipulations for continuation in the curriculum.

7. USMLE Step Exams.

a. In order to become fully licensed to practice medicine in the United States, individuals must have passed all 4 USMLE Step exams – Step 1, Step 2 Clinical Knowledge, Step 2 Clinical Skills, and Step 3. Each state’s medical licensing board determines the number of attempts individuals may make at each Step in order to remain eligible for licensure. Individuals must pass each Step exam within three attempts to be licensed in the state of Texas.

b. USMLE Step One:

1) Students are required to take USMLE Step 1 by June 30th prior to the start of Year Three, unless a delay is granted by SOM administration. Students may request a delay in taking Step 1 if they are remediating a block, do not have the requisite score on the NBME Comprehensive Basic Science Exam, or have other circumstances or concerns regarding their readiness to take Step 1 and proceed with Year Three.

2) All students who take the USMLE Step 1 prior to the scheduled start of Year Three will be eligible to start the Year Three clerkship rotations.

3) Students are required to pass USMLE Step 1 to proceed in Year Three beyond the end of the first clinical rotation (currently July – August).

4) Students who fail USMLE Step 1 on their initial attempt will be assigned to Independent Study to prepare for and retake Step 1. Students may return to the Year 3 curriculum upon passage of Step 1.

5) Students must pass USMLE Step One within one year of completing the Year 2 curriculum. In practice, the date for passing Step One is set at three years after the date of matriculation.

c. USMLE Step 2:

1) Students are required to pass USMLE Step 2 Clinical Knowledge and Step 2 Clinical Skills for graduation.

2) Students must have completed all requirements for Year 3, including the remediation of any failing grades, before taking USMLE Step 2CK.

3) Students may not take USMLE Step 2CS until two weeks after the last day of the All Campus OSCE.
4) Students must take Step 2 exams by December 31 of the year preceding graduation. Students who fail to do so will not be allowed to participate further in clinical rotations until these exams are taken. Off-cycle students may delay taking either or both of the exams by the amount of time they are off-cycle. For example, the due date for taking these exams for a student who misses one clerkship period would be eight weeks after the December 31 due date.

5) Passing scores must be documented no later than May 1 of the year of graduation. Failure to document a passing score by May 1 will result in a delay in graduation. It is the responsibility of each student (particularly off-cycle students) to monitor the reporting dates of USMLE exams to ensure that their score is received by the May 1 deadline.

8. Student Performance and Progression through the Curriculum. Based on the ongoing review of student grades described above, individual students may be referred to the SPPCC. The SPPCC will use the guidelines in the following tables to determine the appropriate actions for each student.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACADEMIC CONDITION</th>
<th>COURSE OF ACTION*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All final grades of Pass, High Pass or Honors for the year and, for Year Two, receipt of the requisite score on The NBME Comprehensive Basic Sciences Exam.</td>
<td>Advance to next academic year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One or two grades of Marginal with all others Pass or above for the academic year.</td>
<td>Advance to the next academic year after meeting with the SPPCC Executive Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One grade of Fail with all others Honors or Pass for the academic year.</td>
<td>Advance to the next academic year upon successful remediation of Failing grade and meeting with the SPPCC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three grades of Marginal for the academic year OR One grade of Fail with one or two grades of Marginal for the academic year OR Failure to successfully remediate a Failing grade prior to the start of the next academic year</td>
<td>Review by the SPPCC. Options include but are not limited to remediation, repetition of the academic year, or dismissal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two grades of Fail for the academic year OR Four grades of Marginal for the academic year OR One grade of Fail with Three grades of Marginal for the academic year OR One grade of Fail or 2 grades of Marginal during repetition of an academic year OR Inability to complete Years 1 and 2 of the curriculum within three years</td>
<td>Automatic Dismissal*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failure to achieve the requisite score in three attempts on the CBSE.</td>
<td>Review by the SPPCC. Options include but are not limited to: delay beginning Year 3; repetition of Year 2.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failure to Pass USMLE Step 1 after 3 attempts or within 12 months of completing Year 2.</td>
<td>Automatic Dismissal*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Students may appeal any decision of the SPPCC. The mechanism for appealing these decisions is described in Section 11.
### Table 2: Guidelines for Actions by SPPCC for students in Years 3 and 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GUIDELINES FOR YEARS THREE AND FOUR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Failure of three major components within the core clinical clerkships (subject exam, OSCE, clinical evaluation), inclusive of all work undertaken after initial matriculation into the third year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failure to pass USMLE Step 2 Clinical Knowledge (CK) and Step 2 Clinical Skills (CS) as specified in paragraph 7.c. OR Inability to complete Years 3 and 4 of the curriculum within three years OR Failure to pass USMLE Step 2CK or Step 2CS after three attempts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

9. **Repetition of Year 1 or 2.**
   
a. Students who are granted the opportunity to repeat either Year 1 or Year 2 due to unsatisfactory academic performance (see Table 1) will be enrolled in Independent Study versions of the remaining Blocks (excepting Early Clinical Experience I and II). These students will be required to take all exams in the remaining blocks and must obtain a final total score for the block that is no more than 2 standard deviations below the class mean for the block. Any student who does not achieve this minimal level of performance in any subsequent block will be automatically dismissed.

b. Students who are granted the opportunity to repeat either Year 1/Year 2 for a reason other than unsatisfactory academic performance will not be expected to satisfy the requirement in paragraph 9.a.

10. **Dismissal Policy.** A student shall be recommended for dismissal if the SPPCC determines that the student has not performed satisfactorily in academic pursuits, is not competent to pursue the assigned course of study, or has been deemed by the SPPCC, for just reason, unfit to continue the study of medicine. The student shall be notified in writing of the action of the SPPCC.

11. **Appeals Procedure.**
   
a. A student may appeal the recommendation of the SPPCC. This appeal must be made to the Dean of the School of Medicine within five (5) business days, must be in writing, and must cite grounds for the appeal. The appeal may be submitted through the office of the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs.

b. The Dean may issue the decision alone or may appoint an Appeals Committee comprised of three members of the senior faculty to determine whether a basis for appeal exists. The Associate Dean for Academic Affairs and the Chair of the SPPCC (or designee) will serve as ex officio members of the Committee.

c. The Appeals Committee will be convened by the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs within five (5) business days after appointment to consider the student’s appeal.
d. The student shall notify the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs in advance if he/she is to be accompanied by an attorney or other representative. An attorney or representative may appear only in an advisory capacity and may not address the Appeals Committee. Should the student be accompanied by an attorney or representative, the School of Medicine shall be represented by the Office of General Counsel. If necessary, the appeal hearing may be delayed up to five (5) business days of the scheduled date, if needed, to allow personnel from the Office of General Counsel to attend.

e. The student may present a statement to the Appeals Committee relative to the appeal. Collection of additional information to resolve the issue may be pursued. Both the Appeals Committee and student may call witnesses relevant to resolution of the appeal. Should information or witnesses be either repetitious or not relevant, the Appeals Committee shall take action to expedite the proceedings. At the conclusion of the hearing, the Appeals Committee shall forward its recommendation to the Dean. If the recommendation is not unanimous, a minority view will be appended.

f. Unless suspended for some justifiable reason, the student shall remain on the class roll and may pursue appropriate course work until the appeal is resolved.

g. The decision of the Dean is final. The student and the Chair of the SPPCC Committee will be notified of the outcome in writing by the Dean.