

State University of New York Downstate Medical Center
College of Medicine
Policy Against Mistreatment

SUNY Downstate College of Medicine subscribes to the ethos that all medical learning must occur in an environment of mutual respect between teacher and learner. All participants in the educational endeavor must assume their responsibilities in a manner that enriches the quality of the learning process in order for effective, caring and compassionate health care to occur. However, we acknowledge that, from time to time, there will be inappropriate actions or mistreatment of individuals. These may be alleged, perceived, or real incidents.

Examples of inappropriate conduct or mistreatment include:

- Words, statements or actions that are disrespectful, berating, humiliating or mocking
- Aggressive behavior such as yelling, swearing, throwing objects, hitting and physically restraining or using silence in a hostile manner
- Exploiting students – asking students to perform personal errands, buy coffee or food, or order them to complete hospital chores on patients that are not assigned to them while they miss educational activities like rounds or classes
- Speaking disparagingly about a student’s race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, gender or gender identity, disability or socioeconomic background
- Telling jokes or relating stories that are inappropriate, racist or sexist, or concerning religion, ethnicity, or disability
- Commenting judgmentally about other students, residents, faculty, patients or staff
- Sexual harassment – inappropriate touching, staring, or using other suggestive mannerisms
- Linking sexual, financial or other favors with grade inflation (or threatening the reverse)
- Making the student perform procedures that he/she does not feel adequately trained for or confident about
- Any other actions that seem strange and are in violation of the inherent trust between teacher and learner

We have a zero tolerance policy regarding student mistreatment at SUNY Downstate College of Medicine. Students who believe that they have been subject to inappropriate conduct or mistreatment have several options for reporting incidents. Most important, reports are handled in an atmosphere that is confidential, safe, and without retaliation.

The reporting options are:

- If the incident occurs during a clerkship, contact the clerkship director and/or site director immediately. Also report it on the end of clerkship evaluation form. This also applies to students who witness mistreatment of a peer.
- Contact the ombudsman. An incident form can be accessed on line via PRIME and after submission, the ombudsman will respond promptly. Anonymity will be preserved in all cases except those in which reporting is mandated by NY state law. There is an option to be contacted for further follow-up, a choice of means of contact and an opportunity to meet privately with the ombudsman if the student wishes.

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Reporting options continued

- Report the incident(s) on the course/clerkship evaluation form, if there is a concern that reporting the incident during the course might affect the final grade. The student's identity is anonymous. Any mistreatment reports are shared with the Senior Associate Dean for Education, and the Dean of Students. For clinical courses, the Dean of Students informs the clerkship director who conducts an investigation and initiates appropriate action. The Ombudsman is also informed of the incident.
- Consult with one of the deans in the Office of Student Affairs to discuss what has occurred and participate in an appropriate course of action.
- Allegations of sexual harassment or discrimination may be reported to the Office of Diversity at SUNY Downstate.
- The Director of Student Counseling Services at SUNY Downstate is another resource for students to discuss mistreatment. This is especially helpful for students who have become anxious, frightened, avoidant, despondent, unable to study, etc as a result of the inappropriate action of others.

In all cases, there will be follow-up, and students who have self-identified will be informed of the process and/or resolution. Students must understand that anonymous complaints can only be taken so far and that it is impossible to give them feedback

SUNY Downstate College of Medicine urges all students who believe that they have been subject to mistreatment or the unprofessional behavior of residents, faculty, other health professionals and staff to use one of the above options. Student well-being, safety, and learning in a healthy and collegial atmosphere are fundamental to our mission.