

## The Facundo Valdez School of Social Work

### Standards for Professionalism

#### Introduction

This document outlines the professional expectations and shared values upheld by the Faculty and Staff of the Facundo Valdez School of Social Work (FVSSW). Social work practice requires students to meet higher professional standards than non-professional academic programs. These standards are essential for students to become effective social work professionals.

The purpose of this guide is to ensure that students, faculty, and staff have a clear understanding of these expectations and the procedures for addressing performance concerns. It does not cover academic or university-wide policies; for those, students should refer to the [NMHU Student Handbook](#), the NMHU Graduate or Undergraduate Catalogs, or the NMHU Graduate Handbook, which provide information on academic integrity and other university expectations.

Our goal is to support students in achieving success at FVSSW by clarifying the non-academic criteria necessary for both social work education and professional practice.

While this document is directed at students, all members of the FVSSW community—including faculty, staff, students, and field consultants—are expected to be aware of, model, and uphold these professional values in all educational and professional settings.

In addition to maintaining academic excellence, students are expected to demonstrate competency in professional and interpersonal areas in accordance with:

- The [National Association of Social Workers \(NASW\) Code of Ethics](#)
- The **professional expectations of the Facundo Valdez School of Social Work**

All students are required to read the NASW Code of Ethics and the Standards for Professionalism. They will be asked to sign an acknowledgment confirming their understanding and commitment to abide by these guidelines.

#### List of Standards for Professionalism

1. **Interpersonal Skills**
2. **Professionalism**
3. **Embracing Diversity**
4. **Self-Awareness**
5. **Respect**
6. **Integrity**
7. **Confidentiality**
8. **Communication**

## Description of Standards for Professionalism

*Please note that the examples provided are not intended to be an exhaustive list, but rather to illustrate behaviors that support or undermine professionalism in social work.*

### 1. Interpersonal Skills

Social work is a person-centered profession that requires strong interpersonal, relational, and self-regulation skills. FVSSW students are expected to develop social and emotional intelligence to create and maintain meaningful relationships. Examples of this include but are not limited to:

#### ✓ Best Practices:

- ✓ Demonstrate empathy, respect, and kindness in interactions.
- ✓ Engage with curiosity rather than assumptions.
- ✓ Listen actively and validate others' experiences.
- ✓ Use reflective self-awareness to monitor emotional reactions.

#### ✗ Concerning Behaviors:

- ✗ Interrupting, dismissing, or talking over others.
  - ✗ Responding with defensiveness or judgment.
  - ✗ Making assumptions based on personal biases.
  - ✗ Ignoring or minimizing emotions (your own or others').
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### 2. Professionalism

Social workers identify with the profession's values and ethics and model professionalism in all interactions. This includes considerations of appearance, behavior, and communication. Professionalism encompasses many aspects of how a person engages in academic and practicum settings. Please consider the following dimensions of professionalism as well as the ones described in other parts of this document.

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#### A. Attire

#### ✓ Best Practices:

- ✓ Follow dress codes in class, at practicum sites, and in online settings.
- ✓ Adhere to practicum site policies regarding professional appearance.
- ✓ Dress appropriately for the setting, including virtual environments.

#### ✗ Concerning Behaviors:

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- ✘ Wearing clothing that is overly casual or inappropriate for an academic or professional setting.
  - ✘ Appearing in class or professional settings in sleepwear, athletic wear, or revealing attire.
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### B. Attendance & Punctuality

#### ✔ Best Practices:

- ✓ Arrive on time for all classes, practicum hours, and program-related commitments.
- ✓ Notify instructors and supervisors promptly regarding absences or delays.
- ✓ Maintain and update practicum hour logs with required supervisor signatures.
- ✓ Submit coursework and required documentation by deadlines.

#### ✘ Concerning Behaviors:

- ✘ Missing or being late to commitments without communication.
  - ✘ Submitting late work without notifying instructors.
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### C. Initiative

#### ✔ Best Practices:

- ✓ Engage actively in coursework and practicum activities.
- ✓ Follow through on assigned tasks and use available resources effectively.

#### ✘ Concerning Behaviors:

- ✘ Not asking questions when an assignment or direction is unclear.
  - ✘ Using “no one told me” as an excuse.
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### D. Accountability

#### ✔ Best Practices:

- ✓ Acknowledge mistakes and learn from them.
- ✓ Accept responsibility for academic and professional choices.
- ✓ Follow agency guidelines and university policies.

**✗ Concerning Behaviors:**

- ✗ Blaming others for mistakes rather than reflecting on personal contributions to a problem.
- ✗ Repeating the same errors without evidence of learning or efforts to improve.

**E. Boundaries**

**✓ Best Practices:**

- ✓ Maintain confidentiality in academic and practicum settings.
- ✓ Seek supervision when ethical uncertainties arise.
- ✓ Avoid social media use related to practicum participation unless officially sanctioned.

**✗ Concerning Behaviors:**

- ✗ Sharing confidential or identifying information about clients, classmates, or colleagues without appropriate consent.
  - ✗ Sharing confidential or identifying with clients, supervisors, or peers through informal or inappropriate channels, including unsanctioned use of social media.
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**F. Emotional Self-Regulation**

**✓ Best Practices:**

- ✓ Practice self-awareness regarding emotional responses.
- ✓ Seek professional support and self-care strategies as needed.
- ✓ Address conflicts professionally.

**✗ Concerning Behaviors:**

- ✗ Escalating conflict through sarcasm, passive aggression, or accusatory language.
  - ✗ Ignoring opportunities to repair relationships or resolve tensions in a professional manner.
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**G. Responsiveness to Feedback**

**✓ Best Practices:**

- ✓ Demonstrate openness to constructive feedback.
- ✓ Use feedback as a tool for development.

**✗ Concerning Behaviors:**

- ✗ Responding with defensiveness.
  - ✗ Dismissing guidance that supports professional growth.
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### 3. Embracing Diversity

Social workers apply principles of Anti-racism, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (ADEI) in education, practice, and community engagement (CSWE). They demonstrate sensitivity to all aspects of diversity, including but not limited to race, ethnicity, nationality, gender identity, sexual orientation, ability, class, religion, immigration status, and tribal sovereign status. Social workers recognize the role of diversity in identity formation and reflect on their own positionality, power, and privilege in relationships with clients, colleagues, and community members.

**✓ Best Practices:**

- ✓ Engage with people of diverse backgrounds non-judgmentally and with compassionate curiosity.
- ✓ Recognize personal biases and strive to unlearn stereotypes and microaggressions.
- ✓ Use inclusive language and refrain from speech that is [racist, sexist, homophobic, transphobic, ableist or classist](#).
- ✓ Take opportunities to learn from different cultures, values, and beliefs.
- ✓ Commit to anti-racist action, actively working to counter prejudice and promote equity.

**✗ Concerning Behaviors:**

- ✗ Using stereotypes or making assumptions about others.
  - ✗ Ignoring or dismissing the impact of bias and privilege in professional interactions.
  - ✗ Remaining passive in the face of discrimination—social workers must actively support inclusion and justice.
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### 4. Self-Awareness

Social workers consider how their verbal and non-verbal behaviors (body language) and overall well-being affect others. FVSSW students are expected to reflect on their own beliefs, values, attitudes, and past experiences and be open to personal growth and adapting behaviors as needed in professional settings.

**✓ Best Practices:**

- ✓ Develop awareness of reactions and responses in all settings.
- ✓ Use supervision and class discussions to identify and manage personal biases.
- ✓ Recognize when aspects of social work are emotionally demanding and seek support.  
*Please note, the FVSSW is prepared to connect students with mental health support and other social services to encourage growth and enhance capacity through challenges.*
- ✓ Engage in self-care to maintain well-being. Self-care for social work students can include seeking professional support as needed, participating in a supportive community, adjusting schedules for manageability, and maintaining healthy routines (e.g., sleep, exercise, and meaningful social connections).

**✗ Concerning Behaviors:**

- ✗ Ignoring emotional regulation and letting personal stress affect professional responsibilities.
  - ✗ Resisting feedback or failing to adjust behaviors that impact others.
  - ✗ Assuming personal challenges do not affect academic or field performance.
  - ✗ Psychomotor agitation (excessive movement of self and objects, etc.) that disrupts the learning environment
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## 5. Respect

Respect is a foundational social work value woven throughout the Code of Ethics. Social workers value the dignity and worth of all people, including themselves.

**✓ Best Practices:**

- ✓ Promote client self-determination.
- ✓ Listen attentively, ask for clarification, and validate others' perspectives.
- ✓ Be courteous, attentive, and respectful in all interactions.
- ✓ Communicate schedule changes promptly and professionally.
- ✓ Use positive and supportive language.
- ✓ Be solution-focused and collaborative in addressing conflict.
- ✓ Stay engaged in class (e.g., stay awake, and keep cameras on in Zoom unless discussed with instructors).

**✗ Concerning Behaviors:**

- ✗ Interrupting or dismissing others' opinions.
- ✗ Being rude, disrespectful, or disengaged.
- ✗ Using unprofessional language or behavior.

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- ✘ Using cellphones during class for non-emergency or non-academic purposes.
  - ✘ Engaging in conversations with peers during lectures or presentations.
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### 6. Integrity

FVSSW students model social work values, including honesty, responsibility, and trustworthiness.

#### ✔ Best Practices:

- ✓ Disclose dual or conflictual relationships as necessary.
- ✓ Uphold ethical standards in all professional settings.

#### ✘ Concerning Behaviors:

- ✘ Engaging in dishonest or unethical behavior.
- ✘ Ignoring conflicts of interest.

### 7. Confidentiality

Confidentiality is essential to ethical and effective social work practice. FVSSW students are expected to uphold ethical standards of confidentiality in the following ways:

#### ✔ Best Practices:

- ✓ Respect the confidentiality of information gained about students, faculty, staff, instructors, clients, or community members. Any personal information shared in virtual or face-to-face settings, small group work, practicum settings, community events, and all FVSSW-related activities should be considered confidential. The only exceptions are when there is an intent to harm oneself or others or in other mandated reporting circumstances.
- ✓ Seek supervision or guidance from faculty, site supervisors, or other staff members if uncertain about mandated reporting responsibilities. Students should familiarize themselves with:
  - New Mexico's mandated reporting laws
  - University policies, including [Title IX](#)
  - Any agency policies applicable to their practicum placement
- ✓ Protect client privacy by refraining from sharing identifying information about clients or individuals served in practicum placements within other classes or settings.
- ✓ Use technology responsibly when handling confidential information. Students should:
  - Avoid discussing practicum placements or clients on social media.
  - Refrain from posting photos of clients, peers, or faculty without explicit permission.
  - Adhere to field policies on social media and technology use.

- ✓ Practice discretion in self-disclosure in classroom discussions, practicum placements, and all professional settings. Self-reflection is encouraged, but students should be mindful of what they share and seek professional support when needed.
- ✓ Access university support services if personal experiences or course content elicit the need for deeper personal reflection. The university offers free counseling services to all students, regardless of location. Students are encouraged to contact CARES Counseling for confidential support.

**✗ Concerning Behaviors:**

- ✗ Sharing confidential information about clients, peers, faculty, or agency personnel without explicit permission or outside of professional supervision.
- ✗ Disregarding mandated reporting obligations—when in doubt, seek guidance from faculty or supervisors.
- ✗ Discussing practicum placements, clients, or sensitive topics on social media, even in private forums.
- ✗ Disclosing personal details in professional settings without careful consideration of context and appropriateness.

**8. Communication**

**Communication** is a fundamental aspect of professionalism and a critical skill in social work education. Given its importance, it warrants dedicated attention as a key area of excellence. Students in the Facundo Valdez School of Social Work are expected to communicate clearly, sensitively, and effectively in all educational and professional settings. Strong communication skills include:

**✓ Best Practices:**

- ✓ **Build Rapport:** Establish respectful relationships with peers, clients, and supervisors, characterized by integrity and consideration.
- ✓ **Be Timely:** Promptly communicate changes in scheduled meetings or participation in classes and fieldwork (e.g., notify about absences or rescheduling).
- ✓ **Problem-Solve:** Address issues using a structured approach, following the organization’s communication guidelines to ensure effective outcomes. For example, if you have a concern, first discuss it with a peer, then escalate to a supervisor if needed.
- ✓ **Seek Help:** Contact faculty or staff when facing disruptions in your participation, such as schedule changes or personal challenges.
- ✓ **Respect Response Times:** Be mindful of others’ schedules; understand that faculty and staff may not be available immediately and will respond when possible.
- ✓ **Use Proper Email Etiquette:**
  - Utilize appropriate conventions in writing emails.
  - Begin with a formal greeting and include a clear subject line.
  - Provide any necessary details while keeping the message concise and to the point.

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- Avoid texting conventions in email.
- Use polite language and refrain from demanding or aggressive tones.
- End with a courteous closing followed by your name.
- Use your student email and include your Banner ID number in your signature.

### ✗ Concerning Behaviors:

- ✗ **Communicating Disrespectfully (using harsh, rude, demanding, or demeaning language).**
- ✗ **Bypassing Communication Channels:** Be sure to use appropriate channels for raising concerns or seeking assistance.
- ✗ **Expecting Immediate Responses:** Understand that immediate responses outside of established communication norms are not realistic.
- ✗ **Neglecting Your Email:** Regularly check and read your NMHU email to stay informed.
- ✗ **Declining or refusing reasonable requests** by faculty, staff, or administration to meet and discuss concerns.

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### Performance Concerns That May Initiate Support Meeting

The Facundo Valdez School of Social Work is committed to supporting students in developing and upholding excellence in social work. Students are responsible for incorporating suggestions for improvement and committing to personal and professional growth through their engagement in the program.

Students may be asked to meet with an advisor and collaborate with them to create a growth plan if concerns arise in any social work education setting, including online and face-to-face classes, practicum sites (both remote and in person), campus activities, orientations, workshops, community events, meetings with advisors, faculty, and staff, electronic communications, and social media platforms.

Students who are asked to leave a practicum placement will be required to participate in a professional support meeting with practicum coordinators and the Standards Committee. Students vacating a field placement without prior discussion with their practicum consultant and agency instructor may face review unless safety issues necessitate immediate action.

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### Potential Areas of Concern

A pattern of problematic behaviors in the following areas may result in a report of concern:

### **Failure to Meet Professional Standards**

- Behavior that does not align with the minimum standards of conduct and professionalism outlined in the program.

### **Inability to Demonstrate Emotional Readiness**

Emotional readiness is demonstrated by:

- Thinking before speaking to avoid impulsive evaluations.
- Listening empathetically to differing opinions.
- Maintaining composure and a calm demeanor in stressful situations.
- Identifying personal reactions and taking time to respond rather than react.
- Seeking appropriate support from relevant sources when needed.
- Expressing one's thoughts and feelings in a kind and respectful manner.

### **Interpersonal Skills Deficits**

- Communication issues that may interfere with professional social work practice.

### **Inappropriate or Disruptive Behaviors**

- Actions that interfere with classroom or practicum functions.

### **Ethical Violations and Safety Concerns**

Ethical violations and behaviors with safety implications will be reported directly to the Dean. Examples of such behaviors include:

- Using substances (e.g., marijuana or alcohol) with clients.
- Engaging in a sexual relationship or an inappropriate emotional relationship with a client.
- Posting hateful comments in class forums or on social media.
- Disclosing confidential client information from agency placements.
- Being suspected of substance use while participating in academic and professional settings, with the exception of side effects from prescribed medications under medical supervision.

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**Examples of Potentially Problematic Behaviors** (these include, but are not limited to, the following):

#### **Engagement in Academic Settings:**

- Regularly arriving late or missing classes or practicum hours.
- Sleeping during class or failing to participate in discussions (e.g., keeping the camera off during Zoom sessions).

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- Using class time to address personal issues rather than focusing on course content.

### **Respect for Boundaries:**

- Ignoring requests for personal space or boundaries, such as standing too close or not respecting an instructor's request to conclude a conversation.
- Failing to respect designated times for discussions or consultations.

### **Communication Style:**

- Engaging in hostile, inflammatory, or unnecessarily confrontational communication with peers or faculty (e.g., yelling, making rude comments, or terminating conversations abruptly).
- Habitually talking over others.
- Participating in unproductive, accusatory, or harassing dialogue in electronic communications (e.g., trolling or sending inflammatory emails).

### **Problem-Solving and Conflict Resolution:**

- Demonstrating an unwillingness to engage in discussions to resolve issues or conflicts (e.g., refusing to meet with faculty or staff to address concerns).
- Avoiding responsibility for personal actions that contribute to conflict or disruption.

### **Emotional Regulation:**

- Leaving the classroom or practicum setting frequently to manage emotions without prior notification.
- Exhibiting persistent physical agitation (e.g., fidgeting excessively, moving furniture, or making verbal outbursts).

### **Acceptance of Diverse Opinions:**

- Displaying an inability or unwillingness to accept differing viewpoints (e.g., arguing aggressively when confronted with opposing opinions).
- Demonstrating contempt for others' contributions through negative body language (e.g., rolling eyes, sighing loudly).

### **Interpersonal Relationships:**

- Failing to establish or maintain positive working relationships with agency instructors, advisors, and classmates.
- Communicating a sense of entitlement regarding faculty and staff attention, making unreasonable demands for immediate responses.

### **Ethical and Professional Conduct:**

- Using discriminatory language or engaging in behavior that promotes racism, sexism, homophobia, or ableism in any setting (e.g., in discussions, online platforms, or in practicum).

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- Engaging in unethical behaviors, such as substance use inappropriately during practicum or failing to disclose conflicts of interest.

### **Confidentiality and Professionalism:**

- Failing to maintain confidentiality regarding client information and program matters.
- Not adhering to dress codes or standards of professional appearance (e.g., wearing inappropriate attire during classes or field placements).

### **Response to Feedback:**

- Failing to adjust behavior after receiving constructive feedback or clear requests for change.
- Vacating a field placement without consulting with the field consultant or agency instructor, unless a safety issue necessitates immediate action.

### **Contact Information**

If you have questions about the Standards of Professionalism, or if you would like to request clarification, guidance, or support in meeting these expectations, please reach out. We are here to help you succeed in your educational and professional development. For inquiries, you may contact:

**Melissa Williamson**, Practicum Coordinator

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