

University of North Carolina at Greensboro
Department of Nutrition

Policy for Professional Impairment

Nutrition faculty are responsible not only for the development of their students, but also to the profession and to the public. The faculty has a responsibility to teach and supervise their students, which is typically done in the context of an amicable relationship. However, they also have a responsibility to protect the public from incompetent professionals and to maintain the standards of the profession. Unfortunately, it is possible that not all students are capable of becoming competent professionals who will maintain standards of the profession. In these cases, faculty is obliged to act when they have determined the student is professionally impaired. Students who experience continued serious difficulties and do not function effectively in academic and/or interpersonal situations will be counseled early, made aware of career alternatives, and if necessary, dropped from the program.

1. Definition of Professional Impairment

Professional impairment has been “defined broadly as an interference in professional functioning that is reflected in one or more of the following ways: (a) an inability and/or unwillingness to acquire and integrate professional standards into one’s repertoire of professional behavior, (b) an inability to acquire professional standards skills in order to reach an acceptable level of competency, and (c) an inability to control personal stress, psychological dysfunction, and/or excessive emotional reactions that interfere with professional functioning” (Lamb et al. 1987. Professional Psychology: Research and Practice 18: 597-603).

Examples of behaviors which may be evidence of professional impairment include the following. The list contains examples, and is not intended to be definitive; (1) violation of professional standards or ethical codes, (2) inability or unwillingness to acquire and manifest professional skills at an acceptable level of competency, (3) behaviors that can reasonably be predictive of poor future professional functioning, such as extensive tardiness or poor compliance with supervisory requirements, (4) personal unsuitability to the profession, e.g., substance abuse, chronic and disabling physical problems, (5) interpersonal behaviors and intrapersonal functioning that impair one’s professional functioning such as psychopathology, inability to exercise good judgment, poor interpersonal skills, and pervasive interpersonal problems.

2. Possible Actions to Follow Manifestations of Professional Impairment

This list contains examples and is not intended to be definitive. These actions are not hierarchical and need not be applied in each case; (1) a formal reprimand, (2) an unsatisfactory grade (U) in a practicum course with the requirement that the course be repeated, whether it was an elective or required practicum, (3) personal therapy, (4) leave of absence, (5) required additional practicum or course work, (6) increased supervision (e.g., more frequent supervision, more than one supervisor), (7) formal probation, (8) recommendation of withdraw from the program or changing to another program, (9) recommendation of formal dismissal from the program by the Dean of The Graduate School.

3. Due Process; Evaluation of Professional Impairment

1. There is a written policy on professional impairment that is systematically distributed to all NTR graduate students, with signatures evidencing student review of the policy. Copies of this will be included in each student's folder.
2. Each student/dietetic intern will review this policy and sign a form verifying that she/he has read and understands the policy. The signed form will be kept in the student's permanent file at UNCG.
3. Non-compliance with the Policy on Professional Impairment will be reported to the Director of Graduate Studies and the Graduate Committee for follow-up.
4. Students will be notified by the Director of Graduate Studies of report(s) of non-compliance with the Policy on Professional Impairment, including descriptions of specific incidences that may evidence professional impairment, via written notification and/or in-person meeting. Such notification will be documented and placed in the student's departmental file.
5. The student evidencing professional impairment will usually be given an opportunity for remediation (although individual circumstances may not allow this, and this is not legally required), with specific descriptions of problems, suggestions for remediation, time limit, and notice of consequences if remediation is not successful, all noted in writing. Such written evaluation will also be placed in the student's departmental file. See Section III of this document: Program Retention and Remediation Procedure.
6. When the judgment is made that serious professional impairment exists and that the consequences to the student are major, the student may request a hearing in which the student may present his or her view of the situation. The hearing will be convened by the Director of the Graduate Program in Nutrition and will include members of the Graduate Committee in Nutrition, the member(s) of the faculty who are making judgments of serious professional impairment, the student's adviser, and the departmental chairperson.
7. Following a hearing, the student will receive written notification within one week that includes: the nature of the problem, opportunities for revision if any, the basis for the decision, and the opportunity for appeal. Such written evaluation will also be placed in the student's departmental file.
8. After receiving written notification, the student may request an appeal within 14 days to the Chairperson of the Department of Nutrition. The appeal panel will include some persons who are different from those making the original decision, such as a faculty member within the department or school, a faculty representative of The Graduate School, and a member of the faculty selected by the student.
9. The results of the hearing and appeal will be forwarded to the Chairperson of the Department of Nutrition, who may accept, reject, or modify the recommendations. If the Department Chairperson accepts the recommendation to change to student's program of study, or dismiss the student from the program, this recommendation will be forwarded to the Dean of the Graduate School who, upon further consideration, will notify the student in writing.

My signature indicates that I have read and understand this policy.

Student's signature: _____ date: _____

Student's name (printed): _____