Professional Standards Policy

Students at VDS are expected to meet standards of personal and professional integrity associated with professional study and ministry. Standards for student conduct are derived from tradition and evolve with contemporary practice. Accordingly, grounds for action according to conduct are usually not made the subject of precise statement; when commonly held standards of conduct are broken, however, action must be taken for the good of the community. In accordance with established school procedures, the faculty may remove a student from either the M.Div. or M.T.S. program at any time for failure to meet these standards. Beyond suspension or expulsion, other sanctions may be imposed.

Should a concern arise about whether a student has failed to meet the standards of personal and professional integrity associated with professional study and ministry, the matter will be brought to the attention of the associate dean for academic affairs who will investigate the concern(s).

In cases where the conduct of a student appears questionable, the associate dean will advise the student at the earliest reasonable date and counsel the student concerning applicable standards of conduct. The student will have the opportunity to be heard. Should the seriousness of the conduct warrant further action, the associate dean will bring the concern(s) before a committee composed of the associate dean, the assistant dean for student life, and two additional faculty members appointed by the dean.

The following may result:

1. The student will retain his/her current student status and the incident/concern(s) will be considered satisfied and closed.

2. The student may be required to work with a Vanderbilt University-recommended professional (e.g., Student Health Center, Psychological and Counseling Center). Failure to comply may result in the student's being placed on involuntary leave of absence.

3. In consultation with relevant university officials (Vanderbilt Student Health Center, for example), the associate dean will place the student on involuntary leave of absence. Examples of cases where such a leave might occur include:

   • Circumstances exist where the student presents a threat to the safety or health of the student or others in the community or where the student fails to work with university officials to evaluate and address the student’s situation.

   • Alleged criminal behavior where the student has been formally charged or
arrested by law enforcement authorities.

- Where the VDS administration determines that the student poses a risk to the safety or educational environment of the community. In this case, the associate dean will notify the student in writing of the imposed leave of absence. The student may be required to remain away from the Vanderbilt campus. A student placed on involuntary leave may be required to withdraw, carrying accompanying withdrawal obligations (e.g., financial).

4. The student may ask the associate dean to reconsider the decision. At the discretion of the associate dean, the matter may be returned to the review committee for further consideration. Students who are placed on involuntary leave of absence are bound by the same policies regulating financial aid and obligations that apply to other students on leave of absence. A student who has been placed on involuntary leave of absence may petition the Dean’s Office to return from the leave and will be required to demonstrate that the circumstances leading to the involuntary leave have been satisfactorily addressed.

5. The student may be suspended for a set period of time. Suspension will carry certain obligations for the student, including financial charges for courses from which the student is withdrawn. Students who have been suspended may petition the Dean’s Office to return from the suspension and will be required to demonstrate that the circumstances leading to the suspension have been satisfactorily addressed (although such demonstration does not guarantee readmission).

6. The student may be expelled.

7. Any judgment concerning involuntary leaves of absence, suspension, or expulsion are subject to the appeals process outlined in the Vanderbilt University Student Handbook. Appeals begin with the dean of the Divinity School.