



# Master of Physician Assistant Studies - Procedure for Concerns with MPAS Student Professional Behaviour

## 1. Preamble

This document is complementary to and does not replace nor contradict [College of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies \(CGPS\) policies regarding Professional Conduct](#), the Master of Physician Assistant Studies Policy for [Academic Expectations, Advancement and Promotions](#) and/or the University of Saskatchewan regulations and standards for academic and nonacademic matters (see below). This procedural document works congruently with the development and evaluation of professionalism embedded within course evaluation. Professional behaviours are an important essential competency standard for entry to practice professional Colleges and Schools. This document provides guidance to students, faculty, and staff on processes to address, mentor and re-mediate the development of professionalism throughout the program.

## 2. Purpose

The purpose of the *Procedures for Concerns with MPAS Student Professional Behaviour* is to describe the implementation of the [Regulations on Student Academic Misconduct](#) and [Standard of Student Conduct in Non-Academic Matters](#), and [Regulations and Procedures for Resolution of Complaints and Appeals](#) within the MPAS program, College of Medicine (COM) and the CGPS at the University of Saskatchewan. This Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) provides transparent processes for responding to concerns of lapses in professional behaviour by MPAS students and serves as a learning tool to assist students to recognize and address professional behaviour expectations necessary to attain and maintain licensure as a physician assistant. The educators in our program highly value the importance of training MPAS students to acknowledge and internalize professionalism in health care. The procedures are structured to be consistent with the [Canadian Association of Physician Assistants Code of Ethics](#), Essential Skills and Attributes required to study in the Masters of Physician Assistant Studies program and the [Canadian Physician Assistant Competency Framework](#). It is the expectation that physician assistant students as junior colleagues and members of the profession are held accountable to the same standards as professionals in the physician assistant field. Professional behaviour evaluation in the MPAS program is embedded in both academic and clinical courses and meeting expectations is a requirement for promotion and advancement in the program. Lapses in professional behaviour are monitored through the MPAS Academic Affairs Committee, the Academic Director of the MPAS program, and communicated further as per the processes described below.

## 3. Scope

These procedures apply to instances where graduate students registered in the MPAS program at the University of Saskatchewan, irrespective of their geographical location to which they are currently assigned, engage in behaviour which is generally recognized as being outside the expected standards of professional behaviour.

## 4. Definitions

Definitions applicable to this procedure are in the [\*Professional Behaviours and Expectations Policy\*](#).

## 5. Principles

These procedures cover most concerns with professional behaviour that occur in academic, research or clinical settings or other MPAS events, projects or activities that are related to the student's area of professional study and are informed by the guiding principles identified by [\*Canadian Association of Physician Assistants Code of Ethics\*](#) and the [\*MPAS Mission, Vision, and Beliefs Statements\*](#).

Specifically, the MPAS program is committed to acting in accordance with the following values: Respect for others, Fair and Equitable Treatment, Honesty, Integrity and Ethical Behaviour, Empathy and Compassion and Professional Responsibility (adapted and used with permission from the *University of Saskatchewan College of Medicine Undergraduate Program SOP for Unprofessional Behaviour*). Ethical responsibilities are transferable to all levels of communication and engagement during the course of studies in the MPAS program. These values have been informed and revised by USask's inaugural cohort of Master of Physician Assistant Studies students and are captured in the MPAS Student Code of Conduct and outlined in detail in the [\*MPAS Professional Behaviours and Expectations Policy\*](#).

## 6. Responsibilities:

The Academic Director of the MPAS program is responsible for the oversight and implementation of the *Procedure for Concerns with MPAS Student Professional Behaviour*, in consultation with the MPAS Academic Affairs Committee.

## 7. Procedure:

### 7.1 Reporting a Minor Incident

Many cases of concern for professional behaviour on the part of students result from misunderstanding or lack of familiarity with the expected standards. Examples of minor incidents are indicated in the *Professional Behaviours and Expectations Policy*.

#### Initial Minor Incident

An initial Minor incident can often be addressed through an informal meeting between the reporter who identifies the issue and the respondent. A likely process may be:

- Reporter identifies minor incident
- The reporter should arrange an informal meeting with the respondent to discuss the incident.
  - The respondent has the option to invite the MPAS Learner Experience Coordinator to attend the meeting.
- Generally, the informal conversation and feedback may be sufficient to resolve the concern.

- It may be reasonable to expect the respondent will address the issue in a mutually agreed upon manner.
- The Reporter documents the discussion with the respondent by completing an *Informal Discussion Form*.
- The respondent will be provided with a copy of the completed *Informal Discussion Form*.
- The completed *Informal Discussion Form* is to be submitted to the MPAS Academic Director who will maintain a confidential file of these forms within the Academic Affairs confidential file (electronic).

## **Second Minor Incident**

The MPAS Academic Director will track receipt of Informal Discussion Forms incurred by students. Should a pattern of behaviour be identified (for example, should a student be reported for a second minor incident of a similar type), a likely process may be:

- The Academic Director identifies a pattern of concerning behaviour
- The Academic Director will contact the student to arrange a meeting.
  - The student has the option to invite the MPAS Learner Experience Coordinator to attend the meeting.
- The Academic Director may determine:
  - No action should be taken
  - Pattern of behaviour should be reported to the MPAS Academic Affairs Committee, where a plan for ongoing professional guidance and mentorship may be formulated.
    - This will be recorded in the Academic Affairs Committee in-camera minutes and will be stored in the student's confidential Academic Affairs file.

## **Multiple Minor Incidents: Professionalism Concern**

A Professionalism Concern may be triggered at any point during the program, if a student incurs multiple (three or more) Informal Discussion Forms of a similar type (e.g. late assignments) or multiple (three or more) Informal Discussion forms of different types (e.g. one late assignment, one episode of disrespectful communication, and one episode of non-adherence to attendance policy). A likely process may be:

- The Academic Director identifies concern
- The Academic Director will contact the student to arrange a meeting.
  - The student has the option to invite the MPAS Learner Experience Coordinator to attend the meeting.
- The Academic Director will document the meeting and complete a *Professionalism Concern Form*.
- The student will have an opportunity to include a comment on the form.
- The completed *Professionalism Concern Form* will be submitted to the MPAS Academic Affairs Committee for consideration.
  - The *Professionalism Concern Form* and any report or correspondence by the Academic Affairs Committee will be recorded in the Academic Affairs Committee in-camera minutes and will be stored in the student's confidential Academic Affairs file.

See Appendix A for Minor Incident Flowchart.

## Minor Incident following Professionalism Concern

If a student incurs a subsequent minor incident after receiving a Professionalism Concern Form, a second Professionalism Concern Form will be completed, and a meeting will be arranged with the Academic Director to discuss. A likely process may be:

- The Academic Director will contact the student to arrange a meeting.
  - The student has the option to invite the MPAS Learner Experience Coordinator or other support person to attend the meeting.
- The MPAS Director may inform the student that a consultation about the matter might be made to the College of Medicine Professional Conduct Committee (PCC) - it will depend on the nature of the incident.
- If required, the PCC will meet to determine whether a Formal Professionalism Hearing is required.
  - If the PCC determines that a Formal Hearing is not required, the student will receive correspondence indicating the discussion and identified plan resulting from the meeting.
    - Based on the recommendations from PCC, the Director will meet with the student to discuss a plan to address the concerns.
  - If the PCC determines that a Formal Hearing is required, the process for a Formal Hearing of the PCC will be followed, as described in 9.0.
    - The PCC's decision and recommendations will be communicated to the Director and subsequently to MPAS Academic Affairs and the Associate Dean of CGPS.
- All correspondence and recordings will be kept on the MPAS student record.

## 7.2 Reporting a Major Incident

A Major Incident is one that has the potential for serious personal or clinical consequences to others, including patients. A Major Incident may also include incidents that have the potential to damage the reputation of the MPAS program. Examples of Major Incidents can be found in the *Professional Behaviours and Expectations Policy* as well as defined in Section B of the [U of S Regulations on Student Academic Misconduct](#).

When a student is alleged to have engaged in a Major Incident, the likely process is as follows:

- the reporter submits a *Professionalism Concern Form* to the Academic Director
- The Academic Director meets with the student to discuss the incident.
  - The student has the option to invite the MPAS Learner Experience Coordinator to attend the meeting.
- The Academic Director documents the meeting adding commentary and completing the remainder of the *Professionalism Concern Form*. The student is provided with an opportunity to include a comment in the Report.
- The Academic Director informs the student that a consultation about the matter will be made to the Professional Conduct Committee (PCC).
- The PCC will meet to determine whether a Formal Professionalism Hearing is required.
- If the PCC determines that a Formal Hearing is **not** required, the student will be notified, and the student will have a follow-up meeting with the Academic Director to determine further action or consequences.
- If the PCC determines that a Formal Hearing **is** required, the student will be notified, and a Hearing will be held.

- The process for a Formal Hearing of the PCC is described in 9.0. The PCC's decision and recommendations will be communicated to the Academic Director and subsequently to the MPAS Academic Affairs Committee and the Associate Dean, CGPS.

See Appendix B for Major Incident Flowchart.

## 7.3 Reporting a Critical Incident

A Critical Incident is an incident which has direct harmful personal or clinical consequences or is an egregious breach of well-recognized standards. Because of the nature of the incidents as evidenced by the examples identified in the *Professional Behaviours and Expectations Policy*, the reporting of a Critical Incident will follow the processes utilized in the University of Saskatchewan [Student Academic Misconduct Regulations](#) and [Standard of Student Misconduct in Non-Academic Matters and Procedures for Resolution of Complaints and Appeals](#).

When a student is alleged to have engaged in a Critical Incident, the likely process is as follows:

- The reporter submits a *Professionalism Concern Form* to the Academic Director
- The Academic Director reports the concern to the MPAS Academic Affairs Committee.
- If the Committee agrees there is evidence of a critical incident, they will file a formal complaint pursuant to [CGPS policies](#) and the University of Saskatchewan Regulations on Student Academic Misconduct (2017) and Standard of Student Misconduct in Non-Academic Matters and Regulations & Procedures for Resolution of Complaints and Appeal (2016). The relevant university-level regulations are as follows:
  - [University of Saskatchewan Regulations on Student Academic Misconduct](#) (2022)
  - [University of Saskatchewan Standard of Student Misconduct in Non-Academic Matters and Procedures of Complaints and Appeals](#) (2017)

If the Critical Incident has the potential to significantly impact the safety or wellbeing of others, particularly patients, the Academic Director may interrupt the participation of the student in clinical activities or clinical courses pending investigation of the allegations.

See Appendix C for Critical Incident Flowchart.

## 8.0 College of Medicine Professional Conduct Committee

The Professional Conduct Committee is a standing committee of the College of Medicine's Faculty Council and is composed of a chairperson who is an MD faculty member and two additional members of the faculty of the college, at least one of whom will be an MD; two faculty from the School of Rehabilitation Sciences; as well as one representative from the MPAS program.

The role of the Committee is to receive the evidence, determine the validity of the allegation and, if warranted, determine, implement, and monitor appropriate remedial action. The Committee may also determine academic repercussions. The primary goal of the process should be educational, leading to the successful remediation of unprofessional conduct and the subsequent successful completion of the program.

The MPAS program Committee representative is determined by the Academic Director, in consultation with faculty during Assignment of Duties processes. Representatives are assigned to the Committee for a 3-year term and may be re-appointed for a second term. Faculty representation could include tenure-track faculty, lecturer, clinical specialist, or clinical faculty appointments. It is recommended that at least one Committee member be a licensed physician assistant with experience in the assessment of professionalism through prior or current participation in clinical education experiences. The Committee maintains its own records, separate from respondents' academic files.

## **9.0 Formal Hearing of the Professional Conduct Committee**

All Committee proceedings should be based on sound principles to ensure a fair hearing within a reasonably short period of time. The respondent is to be treated as innocent until proven guilty and there must be both the perception and reality that all hearings are fair and transparent. Where possible, the Committee will meet within four weeks of receipt of the Professionalism Concern Form from the Academic Director.

### **Hearing Preparation and Initial Communication**

Should a Formal Hearing be deemed necessary, the likely process is as follows:

- The Academic Director will write to the respondent as soon as possible advising the respondent of the allegation, and outlining the date and place of the meeting with the Committee. The Academic Director will also disclose the Committee Hearing membership so that any potential conflicts of interest may be identified.
  - This formal notice will consist of both a physical letter to the respondent's current postal address on file with USask, and an email to the respondent's USask email address.
  - The respondent will be provided with approximately two (2) weeks' notice of the meeting date.
- All information provided in writing to the Committee in advance of the meeting – by any party – should be shared with the other parties appearing before the Committee in advance of the meeting.

### **Membership for an MPAS Student hearing will include:**

- the Chair of the Professional Conduct Committee
- two MPAS faculty (including the MPAS standing Professional Conduct Committee member and an additional MPAS faculty selected by the MPAS Academic Director specifically for the hearing); and
- one MPAS senior student selected by the MPAS Director, in consultation with the applicable student society. \*

\*As outlined, the MPAS Academic Director, in consultation with the applicable student society for MPAS students, will appoint to the Professional Conduct Committee hearing membership a more senior student from the MPAS program or, in the case of a respondent who is a final year student, a recent graduate of the

MPAS program. The selection of the student or recent graduate may be challenged by the respondent if there is reasonable apprehension of bias or conflict of interest. Further, the respondent may choose to waive the requirement for student representation.

See Appendix D for MPAS Professional Conduct Hearing Membership.

### **Hearing Process**

The Committee will meet with the respondent and the reporter at the same time. The Committee may, at its discretion, meet with any other person who, in the opinion of the Committee, can provide relevant evidence bearing on the matter. The Committee may set its own procedures.

A suggested order of proceedings is as follows:

- The reporter outlines the evidence before the Committee followed by questions and points of clarification asked by the Committee members.
- The respondent is then allowed to express their side of the question followed again by questions and points of clarification asked by the Committee members.
- Questions for clarification purposes may then also be asked through the Committee Chair by the respondent and by the reporter.
- After all questions have been answered and all points made, the Committee will meet in camera to decide on the question of validity and, if valid, an appropriate response/remediation plan.
- The decision and plan, if applicable, will be communicated to the respondent and the reporter in writing as soon as is possible after the hearing.
- The respondent and the reporter will be advised that either party may pursue an appeal by the process identified in Section 14.0.

At the hearing, the respondent has the right to be accompanied by another person of their choice. The MPAS Learner Experience Coordinator is available for this purpose, but the respondent may make a different choice. This may include a class representative who may serve as support or character reference.

Similarly, the reporter may be accompanied by a person of their choice. On request, the Academic Director will provide information and assistance in the identification of a suitable escort who is familiar with the procedures associated with this policy.

If the respondent does not respond to the written/email notification of the hearing, or refuses to appear before the Committee, or does not attend the hearing, the Committee has the right to proceed with the hearing. It is obviously in the respondent's interests to be present for the hearing, but the Committee should not be prevented from holding a hearing because the respondent has not appeared.

When the reporter is not a member of the university community, and with the agreement of the Committee members, the respondent may waive the requirement that the reporter be present in person; this assumes that the written documentation is clear and uncontested. In addition, a teleconference or a videoconference may be considered.

In circumstances in which the reporter is particularly vulnerable, the Chair of the Professional Conduct Committee may, at their discretion, permit the reporter to name a proxy to act on the reporter's behalf.

## **10.0 Two or More Respondents**

When a set of circumstances has led to allegations of unprofessional conduct against two or more respondents, the investigation may include an opportunity for any or all the respondents to be interviewed separately. In a case where unprofessional conduct is ascribed to a group of students, the Committee will try to determine if one person is responsible, or whether varying degrees of responsibility can be delineated. If individual responsibility cannot be determined, the whole group may be sanctioned.

## **11.0 Decision-Making**

When determining the appropriate response, the Professional Conduct Committee will consider responses imposed for similar unprofessional conduct incidents as recorded by the Academic Director, as well as any record of previous reports of unprofessional conduct by the respondent(s). It is intended that most incidents be addressed in a remedial fashion, without adverse impact on the respondent's academic progress or record. However, repeated, and refractory unprofessional conduct, or single incidents of particularly egregious conduct, may lead to the recommendation for academic repercussions as outlined below.

## **12.0 Recommendations & Remediation**

If a majority of members of the Committee conclude that the allegation of unprofessional conduct is supported by the evidence before the Committee, it may recommend one or more of the following responses:

- that a remediation plan specific to the issues at hand be implemented, to be developed and monitored by the Committee;
- that there be a referral for assessment of possible medical and/or psychosocial concerns at play, to be reported back to the Committee for further action and/or referral as necessary;
- that there be a record of the event(s) placed in the respondent's MPAS and CGPS academic file;
- that there is a recommendation made to the MPAS Academic Director and MPAS Academic Affairs Committee for academic consequences such as requirement to re-submit an assignment, re-write an exam, that a mark of zero or 'unmet' or other appropriate grade be assigned for an assessment, module or course, or that a credit or mark for the module or course be modified or cancelled;
- that a recommendation is made to the MPAS Academic Affairs Committee and subsequently to CGPS that the respondent be required to repeat the year of the MPAS program during which the unprofessional conduct was identified;
- that a recommendation for a requirement to discontinue the program is sent to the MPAS Academic Affairs Committee for consideration, is communicated to the student via a meeting, is and subsequently [sent to the College of Graduate Studies for consideration](#).

## 13.0 Communication of the Decision

The Chairperson of the Professional Conduct Committee (PCC) will prepare a report of the board's deliberations which will summarize the evidence on which the board based its conclusion that unprofessional conduct occurred and state the recommended response(s). When a PCC concludes that an allegation is not supported by the evidence, the report will state.

Not later than 15 days after the Committee has completed its deliberations, the chairperson will deliver a copy of the report to the following persons:

- the respondent
- the reporter (where there are multiple reporters, only relevant portions of the report will be shared)
- members of the Professional Conduct Committee
- MPAS Academic Director and Chair of MPAS Academic Affairs Committee

A PCC Recommendation is not adopted until there is a decision by the MPAS Academic Affairs Committee.

If the final recommendation from the MPAS Academic Affairs Committee is to recommend a Requirement To Discontinue (RTD), appropriate processes as outlined in the [MPAS Academic Expectations, Advancement and Promotions Policy](#) and [CGPS Policy and Procedures](#) will be employed.

The process for a formal hearing of the Professional Conduct Committee (PCC) is congruent with the approved processes within the CGPS. Deviations in process specific to the MPAS take into account the oversight and decision-making of the MPAS Academic Affairs Committee and CGPS.

## 14.0 Appeals Process

Decisions made by the MPAS Academic Affairs Committee, based on recommendations from the PCC, may be appealed as per MPAS, [CGPS](#), and [U of S policy and procedures](#).

## 15.0 Professionalism Files

Professionalism files are securely stored, in physical or electronic format, in the office of the Academic Director. They are retained for the entire duration of an MPAS student's academic program and are destroyed five years after a student's graduation, dismissal, withdrawal, or death.

## 16.0 Communicating the Procedures

The MPAS will communicate the *Procedure for Concern with MPAS Student Professional Behaviour* to faculty, staff, and students by ensuring that the most up-to-date version of this procedure is publicly available on the college website. The SOP will be reviewed and updated by the MPAS Academic Affairs Committee.

Furthermore, all students will verify that they have reviewed and attest to abide by the MPAS Student Code of Conduct embedded within the [Professional Behaviours and Expectations Policy](#).

## **17.0 Relevant forms:**

Informal Discussion Form  
Professionalism Concern Form  
Appendix A – Minor Incident  
Appendix B – Major Incident  
Appendix C – Critical Incident  
Appendix D – MPAS Professional Conduct Committee Membership

## **18.0 References:**

### **Internal References**

[Regulations on Student Academic Misconduct](#)

[Standard of Student Conduct in Non-Academic Matters and Procedures for Resolution of Complaints and Appeals](#)

### **External References**

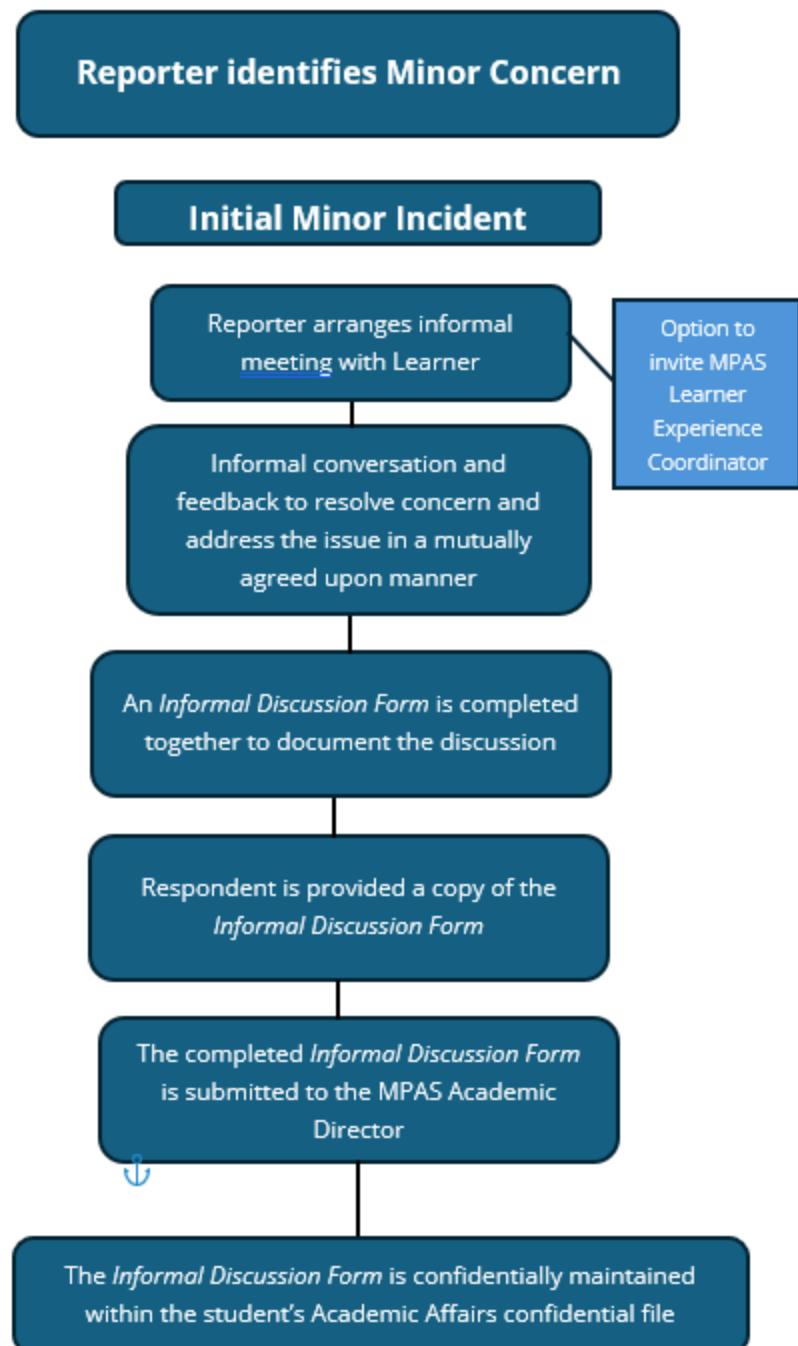
[Dalhousie Medical School Professionalism Committee Professionalism Policy](#)

[CPSS - Physician Assistants Landing](#)

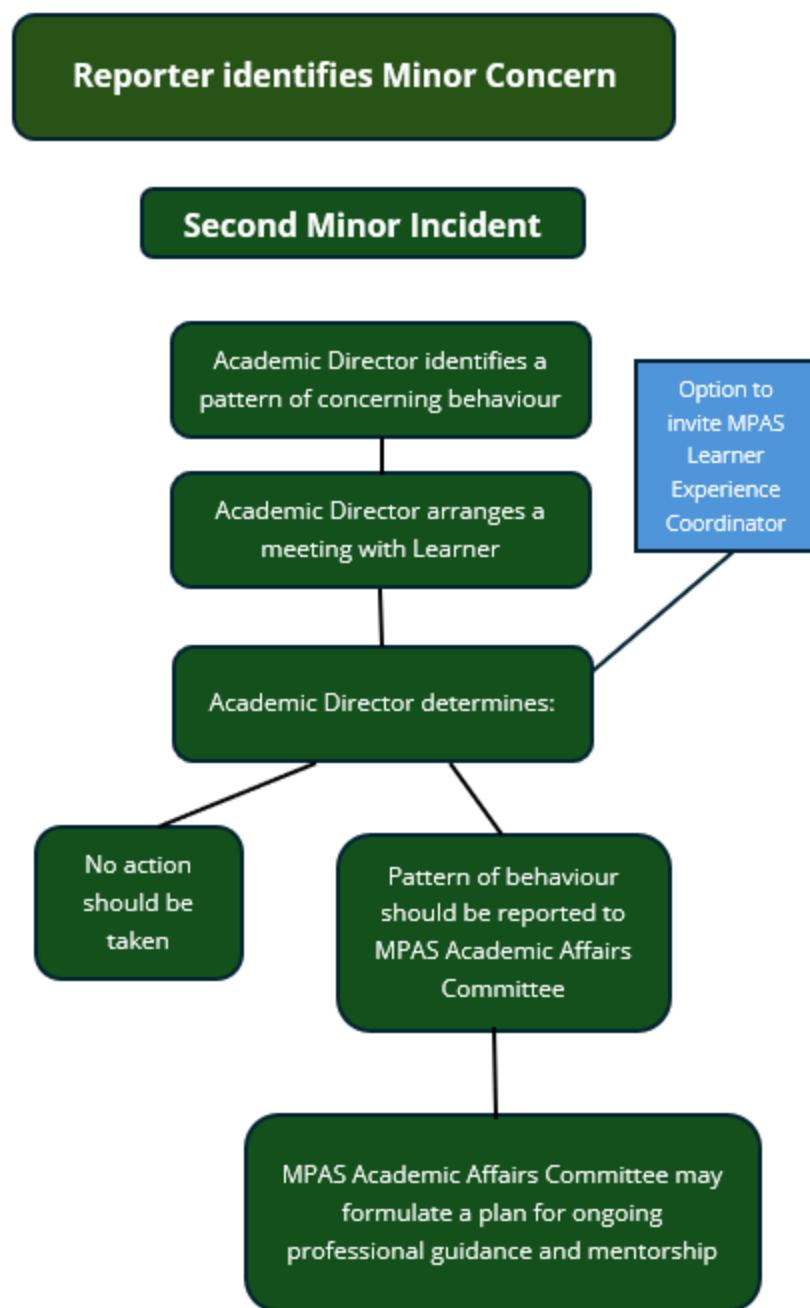
## Appendix A: Procedures for Concerns with Physician Assistant Student Professional Behaviour:

### Minor Incident (Initial Minor Incident; Second Minor Incident; Multiple Minor Incidents)

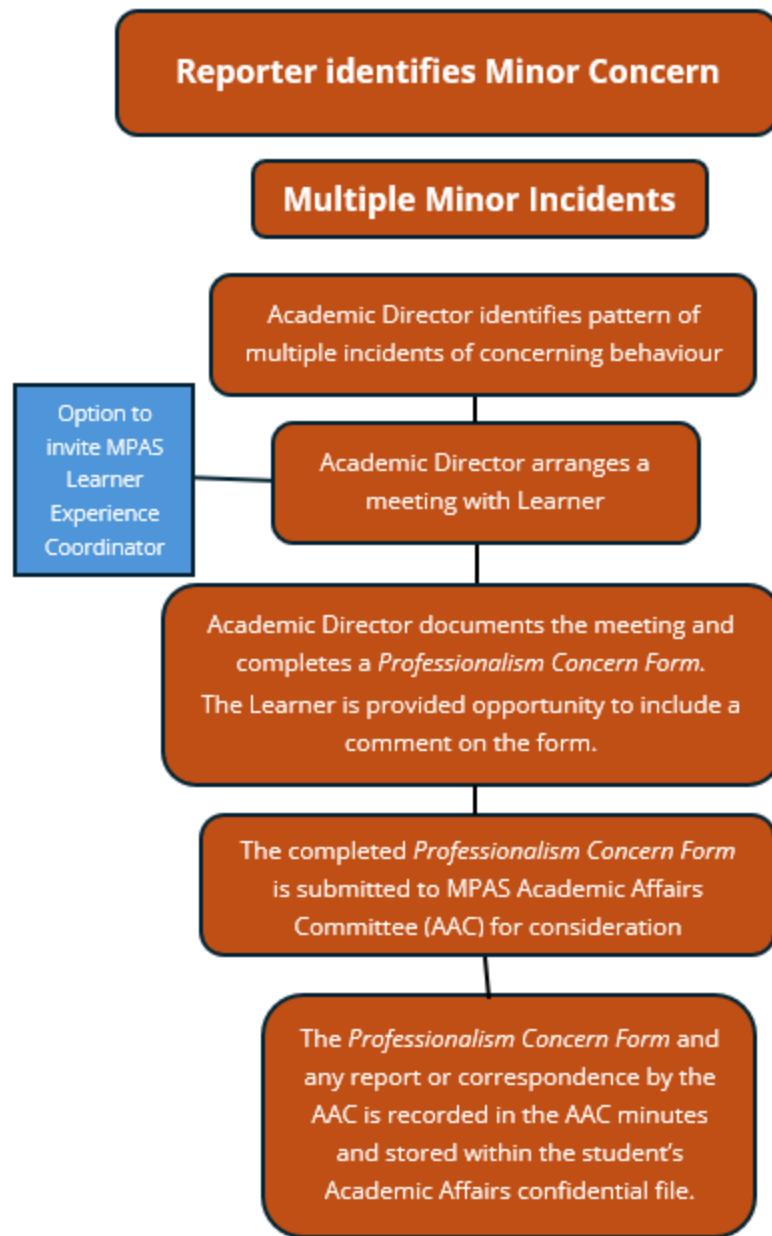
- Initial Minor Incident



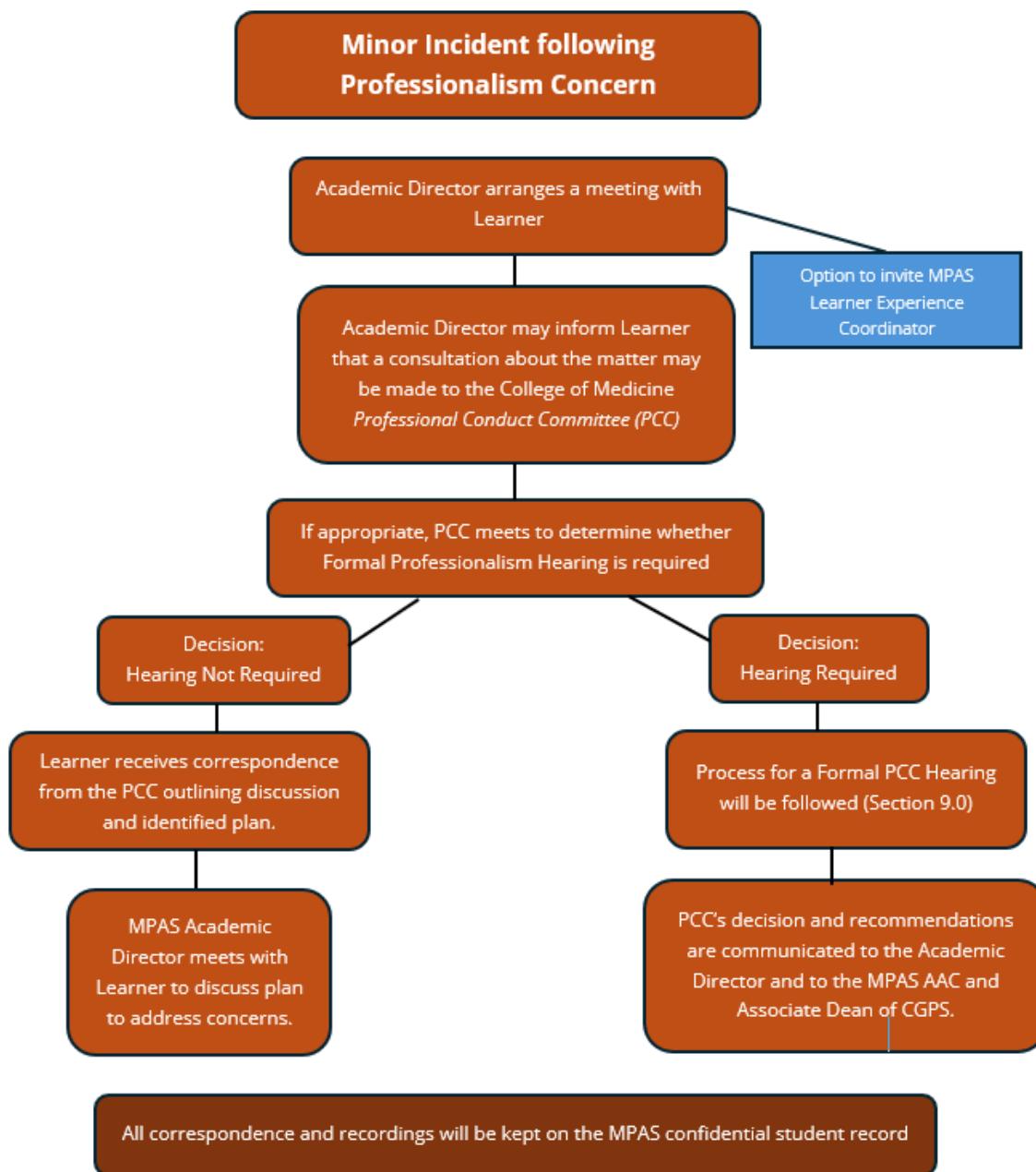
- **Second Minor Incident**



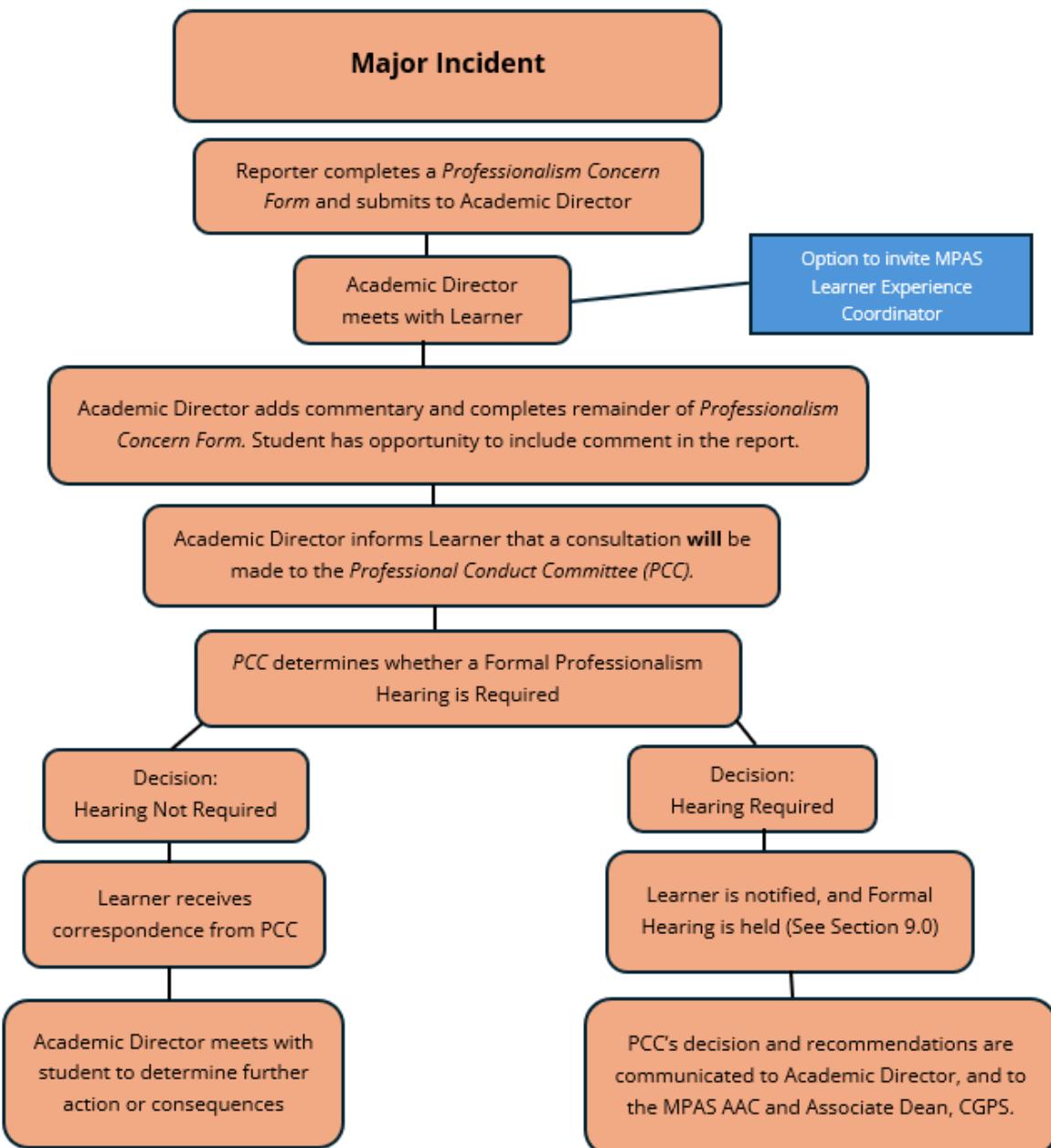
- **Multiple Minor Incidents**



# Minor Incident Following Professionalism Concern

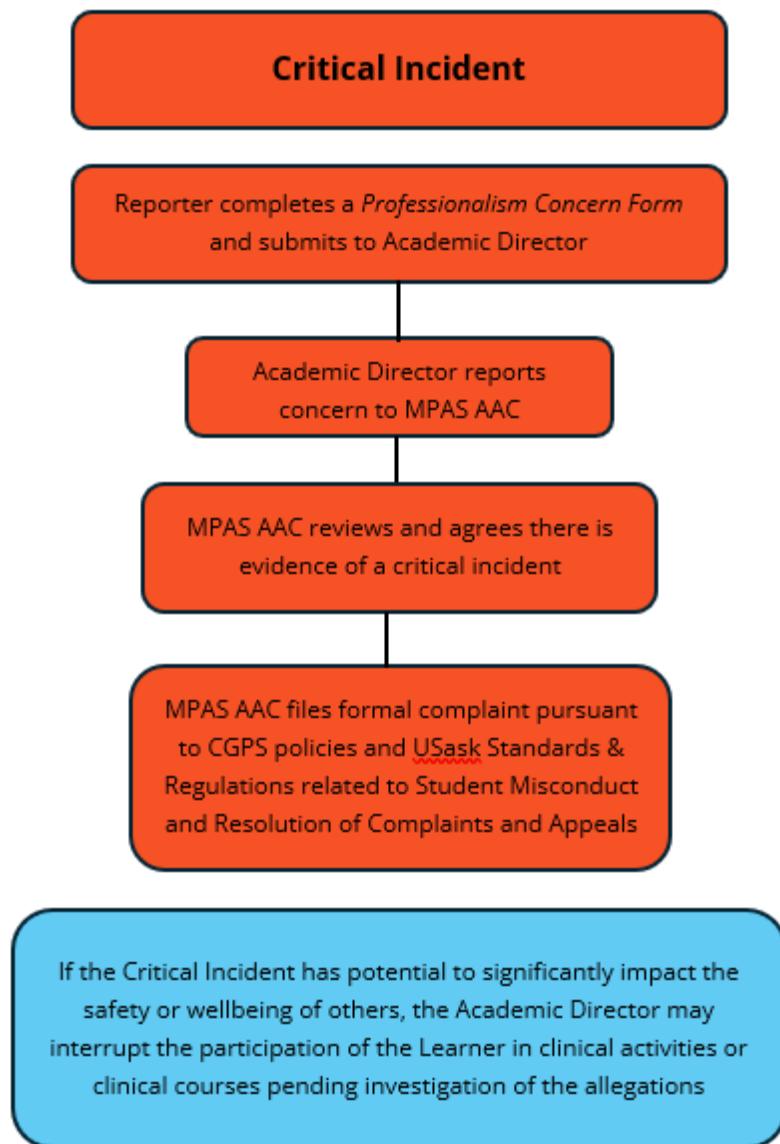


## Appendix B: Procedures for Concerns with Physician Assistant Student Professional Behaviour: Major Incident



## Appendix C: Procedures for Concerns with Physician Assistant Student Professional Behaviour:

### Critical Incident



## **Appendix D: Professional Conduct Committee Membership for MPAS Student Hearings**

