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# CODE OF ETHICS

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National Student Nurses' Association encourages nursing programs to adopt the Code of Ethics.

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## SECTION 1

### CORE VALUES

#### LEADERSHIP and AUTONOMY

- Definition: A process of social influence which promotes innovative problem solving to move an autonomous, independent organization forward by providing a clear vision, maximizing the efforts of others, by respecting each individual and in collaboration with other appropriate resources.
- Interpretive Statement: NSNA promotes each member to build their democratic leadership skills with conflict resolution through shared governance and community, with respect for others. Student

nurses in leadership positions of NSNA make their own decisions based on fiduciary research, and historical and current evidence along with membership input when appropriate. NSNA chapter leaders establish and acknowledge their autonomy and independence in bylaws, policies and procedures.

### QUALITY EDUCATION

- Definition: An act or process of imparting or acquiring general knowledge, developing the powers of reasoning and judgment, and generally of preparing oneself or others intellectually for a profession
- Interpretive Statement: NSNA informs, prepares, and inspires members to develop continuous, life-long learning and ethics of the profession. Nursing students are encouraged to take full advantage of their education and develop their professional leadership skills as members of NSNA.

### ADVOCACY

- Definition: An activity or process to work on behalf of self and/or others to raise awareness of a concern and to promote solutions to the issue
- Interpretive statement: The nursing profession is based on advocating for patients and families in order to help facilitate the healing process; NSNA serves as an advocate for nursing students by representing them as one united voice.

### PROFESSIONALISM

- Definition: Characteristics that describe an individual striving to maintain the highest standards for one's chosen path – honesty, integrity, responsibility and conducting oneself with responsibility, integrity, accountability, and excellence.
- Interpretive Statement: As NSNA members, it is important to create a culture of professionalism in our organization and to uphold the values of professionalism in order to conduct ourselves and our organization in the most respectful, honest way. This value translates into respecting our patients and maintaining the ethics of our profession.

### CARE

- Definition: A feeling and exhibiting concern and empathy for others while showing or having compassion for others.
- Interpretive Statement: Caring is a fundamental value of registered nurses and the nursing profession. The NSNA cultivates a climate of caring in its publications, programs, relationships, and leadership development. NSNA members care for their patients, peers and the future of the profession.

## DIVERSITY

- Definition: Differences that can be along the dimensions of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, age, physical abilities, religious beliefs, political beliefs, nationality or other ideologies.
- Interpretive Statement: Each individual is unique, and we recognize our individual differences through acceptance and respect. We explore these differences in a safe, positive and nurturing environment. It is about understanding each other and moving beyond simple tolerance to embracing and celebrating the rich dimensions of diversity contained within each individual.

*Adopted in March 2015 by the 2014-15 NSNA Board of Directors.*

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## SECTION 2

### CODE OF PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT

As a member of the National Student Nurses' Association, I pledge myself to:

1. Maintain the highest standard of personal and professional conduct.

Interpretive Statement: The National Student Nurses' Association recognizes that membership carries unique responsibilities. Members of this pre-professional organization are driven by a profound understanding of the worth and dignity upheld by the nursing profession. They recognize and value the need to maintain the integrity of the nursing profession and advance a positive image of nursing.

2. Actively promote and encourage the highest level of ethics within nursing education, the profession of nursing, and the student nurses' association.

Interpretive Statement: NSNA members are knowledgeable of the ethical principles and values that govern individual activities and decisions. Upholding these ethical principles will guide the organization, academic programs, policies, and decisions. The ethical philosophy an organization uses to conduct business can influence its reputation, productivity, and outcomes.

3. Uphold and respect all Bylaws, policies, and responsibilities relating to, the student nurses' association at all levels of membership, reserving the right to propose changes and to critique rules and laws.

Interpretive Statement: Bylaws are the framework used to govern and regulate the operations of an organization. It is understood that Bylaws are legally mandated by law if an organization is incorporated. The responsibility of the organization's leaders is to ensure that the internal and public policies and Bylaws that guide the organization are appropriately carried out and honored.

4. Strive for excellence in all aspects of communication, collaboration, decision making, leadership, and management at all levels of the student nurses' association.

Interpretive Statement: The success of an organization depends on the collaboration of all NSNA members who commit to learning shared governance and serving as stewards of the association. NSNA members make a tremendous impact on the organization and the future of the nursing profession by promoting excellence and advocacy at all levels.

5. Use only legal, ethical, and human rights standards in all association decisions and activities in accordance with NSNA's Core Values.

Interpretive Statement: NSNA Members believe and uphold the fundamental rights, freedoms, and standards of respect to which all people are entitled.

6. Ensure the proper use of all association funds and resources in accordance with the fiduciary responsibilities set forth in NSNA Bylaws, policies and state/federal law.

Interpretive Statement: The association's officers and directors recognize their duty to act in the best financial and ethical interest of the association. They understand and practice their fiduciary responsibilities and conduct the organization's business within the legal requirements and guidelines of local, state and federal laws and regulations.

7. Ensure impartiality and prevent conflicts of interest, neither provide nor accept personal compensation to or from another individual and/or organization while serving as members of student nurses' associations.

Interpretive Statement: All NSNA members understand that they function from a place of trust of the membership. Members will avoid any situations that promote self-interest and conflicts with the best interest of the association.

8. Maintain the confidentiality of privileged information entrusted or known to me by virtue of an elected or official position in the student nurses' association.

Interpretive Statement: All NSNA members must uphold confidentiality and privacy in all matters. Information of private or personal nature cannot be communicated in any undesignated setting or venue, including any forms of media.

9. Affirm and support diversity and inclusion by refusing to engage in or condone unjust discrimination on the basis of race, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, citizenship, religion, national origin, disability, illness, legal status, or personal attributes.

Interpretive Statement: NSNA members understand the principle that all nursing practice supports respect for the inherent dignity, worth, unique attributes, cultural diversity, and human rights of all individuals. The need for and right to health care is universal, transcending all individual differences. Nurses consider the needs of and respect for the values of each person in every professional relationship and setting; they provide leadership in the development and implementation of changes in public and health policies that support this responsibility.

10. Uphold integrity in personal, professional, and academic life by refraining from and reporting any form of dishonesty, using proper established channels of communication and reporting as set by the policies of the organization in question.

Interpretive Statement: NSNA members are responsible for conveying the highest standards of excellence, honesty, and character not only through patient care but also by reflecting a positive image of the nursing profession and personal integrity, embodying the core values of the NSNA.

11. Always communicate internal and external association statements in a truthful and accurate manner by ensuring that there is evidence-based data and objective information used by the student nurses' association.

Interpretive Statement: When communicating with others, NSNA members support and maintain the overall association integrity and always promote and represent the organization truthfully and honestly

12. Cooperate in every reasonable and proper way with association volunteers and staff by working with them to advocate for student rights and responsibilities and the advancement of the profession of nursing.

Interpretive Statement: Through the integration of core values and beliefs NSNA's shared governance provides a framework for active participation in decision making and advocates for lifelong learning and increased professional representation. Every volunteer, staff, and advocate is treated with professionalism and respect.

13. Use every opportunity to improve faculty and student understanding of the role of the student nurses' association.

Interpretive Statement: NSNA members continually strive to create a culture of understanding of the benefits of NSNA membership with faculty and other students, to maintain relationships and promote environments that support student nurse involvement in NSNA.

14. Use every opportunity to raise awareness of the student nurses' association mission, values, purpose, and goals at the school, state and national chapter level as defined in bylaws and policies.

Interpretive Statement: Members continually support NSNA's core values, mission, purpose, and bylaws. Members support educating faculty, students, and interested parties of the importance of preparing future nurse leaders in their communities and beyond.

15. Use NSNA opportunities to form your Professional Identity in Nursing.

Interpretive Statement: To be determined by the NSNA Board of Directors.

*First adopted by the 1999 House of Delegates, Pittsburgh, PA.  
Amended by the House of Delegates at the NSNA Annual Convention on April 7, 2017, in Dallas, TX.  
Interpretative statements added November 2017. Further amendments were adopted by the House of Delegates at the NSNA Annual Convention on April 8, 2022, in Salt Lake City, Utah.*

## SECTION 3

# CODE OF ACADEMIC AND CLINICAL CONDUCT AND INTERPRETIVE STATEMENTS

As students are involved in clinical and academic environments, we believe that ethical principles are a necessary guide to professional development. The following *Interpretive Statements* are offered as a framework to help guide nursing students in ethical analysis of responsibilities, professional conduct, and decision making in academic and clinical settings as they adhere to the *NSNA Code of Ethics for Nursing Students*.

\*\* Indicates sections taken directly from the *NSNA Code of Ethics: Part II: Code of Academic and Clinical Conduct*

### **Part II: Code of Academic and Clinical Conduct**

\*\* Students of nursing have a responsibility to society in learning the academic theory and clinical skills needed to provide safe, quality nursing care. The clinical setting presents unique challenges and responsibilities for the nursing student while caring for human beings in a variety of health care environments.

\*\* The *Code of Academic and Clinical Conduct* is based on an understanding that to practice nursing as a student is an agreement to uphold the trust society has placed in us. The statements of the code provide guidance for nursing students in their personal development of an ethical foundation and need not be limited strictly to the academic or clinical environment but can assist in the holistic development of the person.

\*\* As students are involved in the clinical and academic environments, we believe that ethical principles are a necessary guide to professional development. Therefore, within these environments we:

#### **\*\* 1. Advocate for the rights of all clients.**

**1.1 Advocacy:** A responsibility of nursing students is to advocate for the rights of all clients. This requires the nursing student to understand the client's rights and responsibilities, the scope and applicable standards of nursing practice to meet the client needs, and the relevant federal (e.g. Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), Patient Self-Determination Act, etc), state (e.g. Nurse Practice Act, etc.), and local laws in accordance with the health care institution's policies and procedures. This knowledge enables the nursing student to function as an advocate for the rights of all clients in collaboration with nursing faculty and members of the health care team.

**1.2 Rights of clients:** Nursing students provide care for persons who have rights both as human beings and as clients. As such, nursing students must be cognizant of public, professional and institutional policies concerning patients' rights and access to resources across the care continuum. For example, nursing students help ensure that these fundamental rights of clients to receive culturally and linguistically appropriate services are protected and maintained.

**\*\* 2. Maintain client confidentiality.**

- 2.1 Confidentiality:** Access to and sharing of information that identifies a specific client, their condition, and other information must be guarded with the best interests of the client in mind. Access to and sharing of such information must be limited to only those personnel with the medical need to know and family members who are authorized by institutional policy and patient consent (according to HIPAA guidelines).
- 2.2 Academic Setting:** In discussing client cases in the academic setting, care must be taken to avoid breeching confidentiality and violating HIPAA regulations; this includes appropriate selection of the time and place of discussion, people attending the discussion, and omitting data that is not necessary to the purpose of the discussion or that discloses the client's personal identity.
- 2.3 Special Circumstances:** In order to protect the safety of the patient, other parties, and in cases of mandatory disclosure for public health reasons there may be times where the nursing student is obligated to report confidential information. The nursing student must immediately share these concerns in a confidential setting with the nursing faculty or clinical preceptor and with the registered nurse in charge of the patient's care who will provide appropriate guidance.

**\*\* 3. Take appropriate action to ensure the safety of clients, self, and others.**

- 3.1 Appropriate action to ensure safety of clients:** The nursing student must be able to identify hazardous conditions which may include faulty equipment, an unsafe environment, incompetent practices of other healthcare team members and colleagues, suspicious persons and activities, and self-limitations. If an unsafe condition or incident becomes apparent, the nursing student should use good judgment and follow institutional policies and procedures for emergencies, reporting hazardous conditions and incidents. The nursing student should be aware of personnel responsible for directing patient and personnel safety and immediately share these concerns with the registered nurse in charge of the patient's care and with the nursing faculty or clinical preceptor.
- 3.2 Safety of self:** Nursing students cannot be expected to work in unsafe conditions or in situations where they are incompetent to practice. Academic and clinical environments should allow for a nursing student to voice concerns about safety to self without retribution. Nursing students have the responsibility to come prepared to meet the objectives assigned in caring for clients in clinical settings and to ask questions.
- 3.3 Safety of others:** Nursing students should not condone or participate in lateral violence or incivility towards other professionals, students, or faculty. Further, students observing such behavior should take appropriate steps to remove her/himself from the situation and report to the nursing faculty or clinical preceptor.

**\*\* 4. Provide care for the client in a timely, compassionate and professional manner.**

- 4.1 Timely care:** Client care is time sensitive. Therefore, nursing students should be aware that adhering to the schedule set forth by the health care team is important and discharge planning should begin upon the client's admission to the clinical environment. By prioritizing tasks, patient education, treatments and procedures the nursing student will ensure that they are utilizing time in the most effective and efficient way.

**4.2 Compassionate care:** Providing care with compassion creates a better nursing student-client relationship. It reflects the nursing student's desire to respect the client as an individual, to help the client maintain their safety and dignity, to provide support and comfort, to assist the client to achieve optimal independence and meet their health goals.

**4.3 Professional care:** Professional communication, appearance, and behavior by the nursing student demonstrates respect for the client and for self. The nursing student has the responsibility to be prepared to meet the objectives assigned in caring for clients and to demonstrate safe, quality nursing care. These professional actions by the nursing student enhance the image of nursing and contribute to building a trusting relationship between the nursing student and the client, and between the nursing student and the health care team. An essential component of professional care by the nursing student and the health care team in the 21st century is to assure that the client receives culturally and linguistically appropriate health education and services (NSNA Resolution #15, 2009).

**\*\* 5. Communicate client care in a truthful, compassionate, and professional manner.**

**5.1 Truthful communication:** Veracity is key to developing trusting relationships in academic and clinical environments. Truthful and thorough communication between nursing students and nursing faculty or preceptors, and between nursing students and healthcare professionals is a key component to providing safe, quality care within an optimal clinical learning environment.

**5.2 Timely communication:** Communicating client care information at the appropriate time is a duty of nursing students. Timely communication allows for assessments, interventions, and that changes to the plan of care be initiated and completed in a timely manner.

**5.3 Accurate communication:** Accurate communication is a responsibility of the nursing student. The nursing student, by providing an accurate, concise and timely report on the client's assessment and status changes helps the nurse in charge of the client's care and the primary care provider to make informed client care decisions and follow-up with further assessment as required.

**\*\* 6. Actively promote the highest level of moral and ethical principles and accept responsibility for our actions.**

**6.1 Promote the highest level of moral and ethical principles:** Nursing students should be familiar with the *NSNA Student Bill of Rights and Responsibilities* and the *NSNA Code of Ethics for Nursing Students (Part I: Code of Professional Conduct and Part II: Code of Academic and Clinical Conduct)* and supporting documents. Being well informed and encouraging others to read and adhere to the *NSNA Code of Ethics for Nursing Students* and the *ANA Code of Ethics for Nurses (ANA House of Delegates, 2001)* actively promotes the values and ethics of the nursing profession. Acting under ethical principles ensures that the care being provided does not jeopardize the client's basic rights or endanger professional relationships.

**6.2 Accepting responsibility for our actions:** Nursing students are accountable to the educational institution, the health care institution that provides the clinical learning environment, and above all to clients and society as a whole. The nursing student must function within the state's Nurse Practice Act, the *Scope and Standards of Nursing Practice (American Nurses' Association, 2004)* and the Policies and Procedures of the health care institution. The nursing student will care for clients only under the supervision of the nursing faculty or preceptor. Supervision must be



completed in accordance with the clinical education agreement between the nursing program and the health institution providing a clinical learning environment to meet the student's clinical learning objectives.

**\*\* 7. Promote excellence in nursing by encouraging lifelong learning and professional development.**

- 7.1 Excellence in Nursing:** Nursing is a profession that demands a nursing student's commitment to evidence-based practice and to the health, well-being, and safety of clients. The client willingly gives the nursing student their trust in her/his ability to provide nursing care in accordance with their clinical education objectives.
- 7.2 Encouraging lifelong learning:** The health care environment is ever changing. Nursing students, after attaining licensure as a registered nurse, have a responsibility to continue to educate themselves formally and informally throughout their careers to remain clinically competent to meet the health care needs of an increasingly diverse client population across an ever changing health care environment.
- 7.3 Professional development:** Professionalism is a key factor for gaining the trust of others. Participation in professional organizations is imperative to one's professional development. It begins by nursing students becoming active members and participants in NSNA; participants in nursing research utilization to advance evidence-based practice (NSNA Resolution #3, 2009); and in advocating for interdisciplinary education opportunities (NSNA Resolution # 13, 2009). Professional development continues for registered nurses as evidenced by membership in state nurses association (ANA) and specialty nursing organizations, and through continuing formal education.

**\*\* 8. Treat others with respect and promote an environment that respects human rights, values and choice of cultural and spiritual beliefs.**

- 8.1 Treat others with respect:** Nursing is based on client care that is supported by a foundation of respect and trust. Respect should be a fundamental component of intra-professional and inter-professional collaboration in which the nursing student participates (*Nursing's Social Policy Statement*, ANA, 2003).
- 8.2 Promote an environment that respects human rights:** As members of NSNA, nursing students pledge to refuse to engage in, or condone discrimination on the basis of race, color, creed, national origin, ethnicity, age, gender, marital status, lifestyle, disability, or economic status (*NSNA Code of Ethics: Part One, 1999; NSNA Bylaws, Article III Purpose and Functions, Section 2, item f, 2007*). By providing an atmosphere that allows clients to voice their needs, and to collaborate with the health care team, clients are empowered to meet their health care goals.
- 8.3 Values:** All clients have a unique set of beliefs that form their values. Nursing students are obligated to holistically provide care to clients in ways that respect the client's belief system and empowers them to attain their health goals.
- 8.4 Choice of cultural and spiritual beliefs:** All individuals have a unique set of values that are influenced by their culture and spirituality. Nursing students have a responsibility to demonstrate respect for the client by seeking to understand the client's health care goals, their strengths and values, their cultural and spiritual beliefs, and how they influence and support the client's care.

**\*\*9. Collaborate in every reasonable manner with the academic faculty and clinical staff to ensure the highest quality of client care**

**9.1 Collaborate in every reasonable manner:** Clinical learning environments are places for applying the skills that nursing students have learned in the classroom and nursing lab. Nursing students are compelled to deliver the highest quality of care possible in these clinical learning environments. If the student has questions or needs clarification on a procedure or nursing intervention, they are obligated to refer those questions to the nursing faculty or preceptor assigned to manage the student's clinical learning experience. The client's safety is the highest priority and the student should not let their questions go unanswered.

**\*\*10. Use every opportunity to improve faculty and clinical staff understanding of the learning needs of nursing students.**

**10.1 Nursing is a fast paced ever-changing field that leaves little or no room for error.** It is imperative for nursing students to communicate what they are learning as well as the need for further education in a clinical practice area through any means possible such as, verbal conferences and written evaluations. Learning as a process may vary for each individual student. However, each student shares responsibility for ongoing evaluation of their clinical learning and participates as an active learner by demonstrating and documenting that their clinical learning objectives have been met and maintained.

**\*\* 11. Encourage faculty, clinical staff, and peers to mentor nursing students.**

**11.1 Encourage faculty:** Nursing faculty are an important and readily available source of information and serve as role models for professional practice .By encouraging faculty to mentor students in evidence-based practice, in professional involvement in NSNA as a student, and in other nursing organizations after graduation, nursing programs prepare students to advocate for clients and to provide safe quality nursing care.

**11.2 Encourage staff:** Clinical staff and clinical preceptors are important sources of information about safe quality nursing practice and evidence-based Policies and Procedures in the clinical practice environment. By encouraging staff to mentor nursing students and to role model professional behaviors, health care institutions can create welcoming and effective learning environments.

**11.3 Encourage peers:** Peer mentoring has a unique advantage because of the shared experience of being a nursing student. Peers provide a different perspective on a nursing student's performance than faculty or staff, which can be facilitated through peer reviews and discussions. These reviews promote a career-long activity of collaborative learning and peer mentoring, and should be practiced as a component of clinical learning.

**\*\* 12. Refrain from performing any technique or procedure for which the student has not been adequately trained.**

**12.1 Operating within appropriate scope of practice:** The client's well being is the highest priority. By performing procedures or interventions that the student is not ready to perform, the student and faculty are placing the client's well being in jeopardy. The student must inform the faculty or clinical preceptor assigned to supervise the clinical experience whenever they are unprepared

to safely provide an assigned intervention or procedure. This allows the faculty or clinical preceptor to provide the needed information for safely conducting the procedure.

**\*\* 13. Refrain from any deliberate action or omission of care in the academic or clinical setting that creates unnecessary risk of injury to the client, self or others.**

**13.1 Academic or clinical setting:** Nursing students must recognize that actions influence the reputation of the nursing program and the profession of nursing. Therefore, whether on campus or in clinical settings, nursing students have a responsibility to come prepared to provide safe quality nursing care under the direction of the faculty or preceptor. By not engaging as an active learner or violating the nursing program's code of conduct (i.e. not coming prepared to class, missing a significant amount of class time, cheating or condoning other student's actions to cheat on exams, etc.) violates ethical and academic responsibilities of nursing students and future nurses. As an NSNA member, nursing students pledge in the *NSNA Code of Professional Conduct* (1999) to refrain from any form of cheating or dishonesty, and take action to report dishonorable practices to proper authorities using established channels.

**13.2 Creating unnecessary risk of injury to the client, self, or others:** Nursing students have shared responsibility with the health care team for maintaining the safety of clients, themselves, and others in the academic and clinical learning environment. Any action that creates the potential for harm or increases the risk for failure to maintain and support the physical or mental integrity of clients, self, or others is contradictory to these responsibilities. Competent delegation and supervision is a shared responsibility between the registered nurses and the health care team to control for unnecessary risks of injury to the client, self, or others. Nursing education should provide nursing students with opportunities to develop competencies related to delegation, including assessment and planning, communication, surveillance and supervision, evaluation and feedback (National Council of State Boards of Nursing (NCSBN), 2005; NCSBN & ANA, 2006).

**13.3 Refraining from any deliberate action or omission of care that creates unnecessary risk to the client, self, or others:** Knowingly withholding action and information, acts of omission of care, and deliberate actions that create unnecessary risk to the client, self, or others is a violation of the ethical and professional responsibilities of nursing students. Such acts are subject to review by the academic institution, and others as deemed appropriate.

**\*\* 14. Assist the staff nurse or preceptor in ensuring that there is a full disclosure and that proper authorizations are obtained from clients regarding any form of treatment or research.**

**14.1 Assist staff or preceptor:** While the nursing student may observe and assist the staff nurse or preceptor with the education and care of the client, primary responsibility for informed consent and managing and implementing the plan of care/research protocols remains with the physician/primary care provider/researcher in collaboration with the client, the staff nurse, and health care team.

**14.2 Ensuring that there is full disclosure:** The nursing student should immediately, in a confidential setting, make full disclosure of any questions the client verbalizes and any concerns pertaining to the client's safety, privacy, or informed consent to the nursing faculty or preceptor as well as to the staff nurse assigned to the client.

**14.3 Proper authorizations are obtained from clients:** The staff nurse assigned to provide the client's care has the responsibility with the physician/primary care provider/researcher to assure that the client understands the treatment and/or research being provided and that proper authorizations are obtained from client after all of the client's questions are answered (National Institutes of Health (NIH), 2006).

**14.4 Regarding any form of treatment or research:** Human subject research requires that participants be given full disclosure of the purpose and procedures in the research study, including the potential benefits and risks. The client maintains the right to decide to participate or not to participate in the research (NIH, 2006).

**\*\* 15. Abstain from the use of alcoholic beverages or any substances in the academic and clinical setting that impair judgment.**

**15.1 Abstain from the use of alcoholic beverages or any substances that impair judgment:**

Nursing students strive to promote client, family, co-worker, and self safety in academic and clinical settings. This cannot be accomplished when health professionals or nursing students are under the influence of any substance, legal or illegal, which impairs judgment. Impaired decision-making can contribute to poor patient outcomes and can lead to disciplinary action.

**15.2 In the academic and clinical setting:** In classroom and clinical settings nursing students gain opportunities to build their critical thinking skills and learn to make sound clinical judgments. Nursing students should hold their colleagues and peers to this same standard. In that regard, if one suspects a colleague of alcohol or substance intake, he or she should discuss the situation in a confidential setting with the nursing faculty or preceptor.

**\*\* 16. Strive to achieve and maintain an optimal level of personal health.**

**16.1 Optimal level of personal health:** As agents of a research-based industry we must remember the objective and scientific guidelines of optimal health. Taking care of one's self is important to providing good nursing care. Personal health encompasses both physical and mental health.

**16.2 Striving to achieve and maintain:** It is important for nursing students to be familiar with and routinely practice a *healthy* lifestyle. Nursing students and nurses are ambassadors, role models, and health educators for clients. It is an important responsibility for nursing students to maintain their own physical and mental health to provide safe quality nursing care to clients.

**\*\* 17. Support access to treatment and rehabilitation for students who are experiencing impairments related to substance abuse and mental or physical health issues.**

**17.1 Support access to treatment and rehabilitation for students experiencing impairment:**

Nursing students should be familiar with the established policies and regulations related to substance abuse. Nursing students who are substance abusers must seek assistance to address this issue. By not doing so places both the student and clients in jeopardy and may result in dismissal from the program; disqualification for taking the licensure examination; and in the case of professional misconduct or malpractice, may result in legal action.

**17.2 Mental or physical health issues:** Nursing students suffering from mental and/or physical health issues must address these issues as soon as they become known. Assistance may be available at the student health center or other providers either on or off campus. By maintaining

a high level of mental and physical health, nursing students will have the capacity to help others.

**\*\* 18. Uphold school policies and regulations related to academic and clinical performance, reserving the right to challenge and critique rules and regulations as per school grievance policy.**

**18.1 Uphold school policies and regulations related to academic and clinical performance:**

Adherence to the rules and regulations that are established for students including honesty, integrity, and professionalism within all academic and clinical settings is imperative. Nursing students must hold themselves and others accountable to these high standards. Being aware of the rules, regulations, and policies is part of this accountability; ignorance is not an excuse for violations.

**18.2 Reserving right to challenge and critique rules and regulations as per school grievance policy:** Nursing students have the right to challenge and critique rules and regulations following the process outlined in the school's grievance policy. Student perspectives and evaluations should be integral components of quality improvement for classroom and clinical learning environments, and the curriculum. NSNA adopted the *Student Bill of Rights and Responsibilities (NSNA House of Delegates, 1975, 1991, 2006)* and *Grievance Procedures (NSNA Board of Directors, 1975, 1991)* to provide nursing students, faculty, and nursing programs a resource for developing and revising school grievance policies. Nursing students have a responsibility for adequate preparation for participation in academic classroom and nursing lab environments, and for safe quality clinical practice under the direction and supervision of nursing faculty and clinical preceptors.

*Adopted by the NSNA Board of Directors, October 27, 2009 in Phoenix, AZ.  
Amendments were adopted by the House of Delegates at the NSNA Annual Convention on  
April 8, 2022, in Salt Lake City, Utah.*

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## SECTION 4

### NURSING STUDENT BILL OF RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

1. Under no circumstances should a student be barred from admission to a particular institution on the basis of race, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, citizenship, religion, national origin, disability, illness, legal status, personal attributes, or economic status.

Interpretative Statement: NSNA upholds every student's right to be treated equally and to not have their admission to an institution be denied based on race, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, age, citizenship, religion, nation of origin, disability, illness, legal status, personal attributes, economic status, veteran status, and/or political affiliation/ideation.

2. The freedom to teach and the freedom to learn are inseparable facets of academic freedom and quality education; students should exercise their freedom in a responsible manner.

Interpretative Statement: NSNA recognizes all students' and faculty's rights to academic freedom and

students should pursue their desire to receive a quality education based on standards set by the state boards of nursing and nursing education accrediting agencies with respectability and professionalism to uphold the standards that have been put in place. Academic freedom should be approached through evidence-based practice.

3. Each institution has a duty to develop policies and procedures which provide for and safeguard the students' freedom to learn.

Interpretative Statement: It is the responsibility of each institution to ensure that proper guidelines are in place that allow for a safe environment in which a student can learn. Institutional policies and procedures must demonstrate cultural competence with regards to all individuals. Institutions must have policies and procedures in place to prevent acts of lateral and vertical violence, harassment, or bullying in any form that would inhibit a student's ability to learn or function within the institution. It is the institution's responsibility to make these policies and procedures readily available and public for all students, in addition to educating and informing the students that such policies and procedures exist.

4. Students should be encouraged to develop the capacity for critical judgment and engage in an autonomous, sustained, and independent search for truth.

Interpretative Statement: Each student has the right to come to their own conclusion and engage in activities of higher learning to enhance their knowledge based upon independent, evidence-based research.

5. Students should be free to take reasoned exception in an informed, professional manner to the data or views offered in any course of study. However, students are accountable for learning the content of any course of study for which they are enrolled.

Interpretative Statement: It is well within a student's right to agree or disagree with the views offered in a course, although the student is still responsible for learning the contents of the course material in order to become a well-rounded and versed nurse.

6. Students should have protection, through orderly approved standard procedures, against prejudicial or capricious academic evaluation. However, students are responsible for maintaining standards of academic performance established for each course in which they are enrolled.

Interpretative Statement: NSNA recognizes that all students should be protected against academic evaluation that may be biased. NSNA also recognizes that all students are still responsible for adhering to the policies that were outlined prior to the start of the course. The institution's standards should be based on standards set by the state boards of nursing and nursing education accrediting agencies.

7. Information about student views, beliefs, political ideation, legal status, United States citizenship status, sexual orientation or other personal information which instructors acquire in the course of their work or otherwise, should be considered confidential and not released without the knowledge or consent of the student, and should not be used as an element of evaluation.

Interpretative Statement: Information that is obtained by an instructor on a student that might include the student's views, beliefs, political affiliation/ideation, legal status, citizenship status, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, economic status, veteran status, religion or other personal information

should be held in the strictest confidence and only disseminated with the written consent from the student.

8. The student should have the right to advocate for themselves and other students in the construction, delivery and evaluation\_of the curriculum.

Interpretative Statement: It is within the right of a student to speak for themselves and other students in a course on the overall evaluation of the course and course materials. Proper grievance procedures shall be set in place by each institution to ensure due process is followed. NSNA members should review the standards set by the state boards of nursing and nursing education accrediting agencies with respectability and professionalism to uphold the standards that have been put in place.

9. Institutions should have a clearly written published policy as to the disclosure of private and confidential information which should be a part of a student's permanent academic record in compliance with state and federal laws.

Interpretative Statement: NSNA recognizes that each institution should have proper written guidelines in place that are compliant with state and federal laws regarding any private information that is a part of a student's permanent academic record that may be publicly disclosed with student approval.

10. Students and student organizations should be free to examine and discuss all questions of interest to them, and to express opinions in an informed, professional manner, both publicly and privately.

Interpretative Statement: It is the right of students and student organizations to respectfully express opinions, discuss, and conduct new research on matters of interest to them.

11. Students should be allowed to invite and hear any individual of their own choosing within the institution's guidelines, thereby advocating for and encouraging the advancement of their education.

Interpretative Statement: NSNA upholds each student's rights to advance their education. It is within a student's rights to invite any individual to speak or attend an event as a means of advancing their education as long as the invitation is adherence with the institution's policies and does not invoke hatred or crimes against other groups.

12. The student body should have clearly defined means to participate in the formulation and application of institutional policy affecting academic and student affairs, thereby encouraging leadership, e.g., through a faculty-student council, student membership, or representation on relevant faculty committees.

Interpretative Statement: NSNA encourages a student body's ease of participation and collaboration on institutional policy that may affect academic and student affairs through a proper and professional student and faculty deliberation. Proper grievance procedures and faculty-student committees shall be set in place by each institution to ensure due process is followed. The academic institution standards should be based on standards set by the state boards of nursing and nursing education accrediting agencies with respectability and professionalism to uphold the standards that have been put in place.

13. The institution has an obligation to clarify those standards of conduct which it considers essential to its educational mission, community life, and its objectives and philosophy. These may include, but are not limited to, policies on academic dishonesty, plagiarism, punctuality, attendance, and absenteeism.

Interpretative Statement: It is the responsibility of the institution to ensure that all established policies incorporate their educational mission and values and that those policies are easily understood and properly disseminated to the student body. The institution standards should be based on standards set by their respective state boards of nursing and nursing education accrediting agencies with respectability and professionalism to uphold the standards that have been put in place.

14. Disciplinary proceedings should be instituted only for violations of standards of conduct. Standards of conduct should be formulated with student participation, clearly written and published in advance through an available set of institutional regulations. It is the responsibility of the student to know these regulations.

Interpretative Statement: Only when an institution's standards of conduct have been violated may a disciplinary proceeding take place. It is the student's responsibility to be aware of these policies. Students should adhere to state regulations and accrediting body standards.

15. The nursing program should have readily available a set of clear, defined grievance procedures.

Interpretative Statement: NSNA recognizes that nursing programs need to have proper grievance policies in place. Students should have due process as it relates to any formal grievances. Grievance procedures should protect students from lateral and vertical violence, harassment, bullying, or bias.

16. As citizens and members of an academic community, students are exposed to many opportunities and they should be mindful of their corresponding obligations.

Interpretative Statement: It is the student's responsibility to have a balance between their academic studies and other duties that come up outside of course work and clinical practice. Students must have respectability and professionalism with regards to their role as a student of the nursing profession.

17. Students have the right to belong to or refuse membership in any organization.

Interpretative Statement: NSNA recognizes each student's right to partake in or refuse membership in any organization. Students have the right to create organizations in accordance with the policies of their respective colleges of universities.

18. Students have the right to personal privacy in their individual/personal space to the extent that their wellbeing and property are respected.

Interpretative Statement: NSNA recognizes each student's right to privacy, including upholding a certain level of respect in consideration of a student's body and property. Students expect the institution's policies to protect each student's health, safety, and well-being.



19. Adequate safety precautions should be provided by nursing programs and clinical sites to ensure a safe and protected environment emotionally, socially, and physically. For example, adequate street and building lighting, locks, patrols, emergency notifications, and other security measures deemed necessary to ensure a safe and protected environment.

Interpretative Statement: Proper safety measures should be undertaken by nursing programs to provide an environment that is secure and safe and allows students to feel comfortable reporting unsafe conditions to the proper authorities without repercussions in both clinical and campus settings.

20. Dress code, if present in school, should be established with student input in conjunction with the school administration and faculty. This policy ensures that the highest professional standards are maintained, but also takes into consideration points of comfort and practicality for the student.

Interpretative Statement: If an institution has a dress code it should be formed with equal feedback from student, school administration, and faculty. The dress code should incorporate proper professional standards while also taking into consideration practical and accessible means for a student. Established dress codes should be sensitive to the culture and ethnic diversity of the student population. Dress codes must be practical and uphold standards for the environment they take place in, whether in the academic or clinical setting.

21. Grading systems should be carefully reviewed initially and periodically with students and faculty for clarification and better student-faculty understanding.

Interpretative Statement: NSNA recognizes that to facilitate an appropriate environment of professional and academic courtesy there is a need for grading systems to be regularly reviewed between students and faculty to ensure each party is in equal understanding. Grading policies should be implemented to prevent instructor bias from influencing a student's grade. Students should adhere to standards set by accrediting agencies.

22. Students should have a clear mechanism for input into the evaluation of their nursing education and nursing faculty.

Interpretative Statement: Institutions should have clearly defined and published procedures that allow students to respectfully evaluate and provide proper input on the quality of the nursing education that they are receiving and on the nursing faculty that are instrumental in their education.

23. The nursing program should track their graduates' success in finding entry-level employment as registered nurses and make this information available to all who apply and enroll.

Interpretative Statement: It is imperative for nursing programs to conduct the proper research and evaluation on the level of success that graduates of their programs obtain and their success in finding entry-level employment as registered nurses. This information must be readily available to all those who apply, all those who enroll, and all those who are considering applying.

24. The nursing program should provide comprehensive, clear and concise information related to student loans, scholarships and any other student financial aid.

Interpretative Statement: It is the nursing program's obligation to ensure that student information

concerning loans, scholarships, and financial aid be structured in an understandable manner and be made easily accessible. Students also have an obligation to understand the financial disclosures associated with student loans (i.e. interest rates, terms of payment, etc).

25. The nursing program should facilitate various methods to ensure that clinical sites provide an environment that supports the development of diverse, inclusive, and equitable Professional Identity in Nursing. This may be accomplished through assessment of clinical sites including, but not limited to, ongoing feedback from students, faculty, and facility staff; implementation of methods and plans for improvements based on clinical site evaluations. Clinical sites should be suitable for students to demonstrate attainment of required clinical competencies.

Interpretive Statement: To be determined by the NSNA Board of Directors.

*Adopted in April 2020 by the 2019-20 NSNA Board of Directors*

*The NSNA Student Bill of Rights and Responsibilities was initially adopted in 1975. The document was updated by the NSNA House of Delegates in San Antonio, Texas (1991); and item #4 was revised by the NSNA House of Delegates in Baltimore, Maryland (2006). Further amendments were adopted by the House of Delegates at the NSNA Annual Convention on April 7, 2017 in Dallas, TX. Adopted in April 2020 by the 2019-20 NSNA Board of Directors. Further amendments were adopted by the House of Delegates at the NSNA Annual Convention on April 8, 2022, in Salt Lake City, Utah.*

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## SECTION 5

### GRIEVANCE PROCEDURE GUIDELINES

#### **What steps can be taken if a student believes that his or her rights have been violated?**

It is wise to first review the school's policies and procedures related to violation of rights, clinical, academic and non-academic disputes. Efforts should be made to first resolve the issue between the individuals in question. After thorough examination of the facts and circumstances of the violation and discussion with the parties involved, if resolution is not reached, the next step is to review the policies and procedures related to filing a grievance where there is a violation of academic, clinical, and non-academic rights and responsibilities. In the unlikely event that the college/university does not have such a procedure, the following "[Grievance Procedure Guidelines](#)" offer some guidance.

#### **GRIEVANCE PROCEDURE GUIDELINES**

1. Before a set of grievance procedures can be discussed, a Student Bill of Rights and Responsibilities must be adopted. It is suggested that students use the guidelines developed by NSNA for this. The Bill should be a written statement mutually agreed upon by both faculty and students.

**Rationale:** The Student Bill of Rights and Responsibilities is the guideline on which the grievance committee can depend or to help in making a decision on the issue at hand.

2. The procedure for handling grievances should be a well-defined, written statement consistent with the principles of due process. Both faculty and students should have equal representation in the development of such a procedure.

**Rationale:** It is necessary to have a procedure that both students and faculty will support.

3. Once grievance procedures are developed, students should be made aware of the existence of these procedures at orientation.

**Rationale:** Students should know what steps they can take if a situation should develop where their rights are infringed upon.

4. The grievance committee should be composed of an equal representation of students and faculty, with a minimum ratio of four to four.

**Rationale:** Equal representation with at least eight on the committee provides for broader range, more objective opinions.

a. Student members on the committee should be composed of at least one representative from each class. These members should be elected by the student body.

**Rationale:** Students from different classes often have differing outlooks and viewpoints on a situation. Election insures that student members have the support of and are representative of the student body.

b. Faculty members on the committee should be chosen by the faculty, except in the situation as described in item 12.

**Rationale:** Committee members should be representative of their group.

5. There should be a written statement, drawn up by student and faculty representatives, which indicates the actions that may be taken by the grievance committee, and the types of situations that fall under the committee's jurisdiction.

**Rationale:** Defining this will help to support the decisions made by the committee.

#### **Some suggestions:**

- Enforcement of the Student Bill of Rights and Responsibilities can be encouraged by including the following statement: "The Student Bill of Rights and Responsibilities shall be recognized by administration, faculty and students, and any violations of such bill shall be brought to the attention of the Grievance Committee for action."
- Review student evaluations of courses and faculty, and make recommendations to the appropriate people.
- Review curriculum and grading system on a yearly basis, and initiate change as necessary.
- Review dress code, if any, every 5 years.
- Review other grievances not necessarily included in Student Bill of Rights.

6. The committee should meet regularly—at least every other month, and all students should be informed as to the date, time, and place of these meetings.

**Rationale:** To give students an opportunity to voice comments and suggestions on a continuing basis.

7. Accurate records, including complete minutes, and in individual cases, a verbatim record, shall be kept on file for all meetings of the committee. Even when tape recordings are used, written minutes to officially

document proceedings must be prepared. These minutes should be signed by the two recording secretaries, who shall be one faculty member and one student on the committee.

**Rationale:** To serve as evidence of the committee's action, and as a precedent for future committee action.

8. Any student shall have the right to ask for an "emergency meeting" of the grievance committee on matters that are crucial and cannot wait until the regularly scheduled meeting. The grievance committee shall define whether a matter is crucial and may postpone consideration of the matter if a majority of the members considers the matter appropriate for a regularly scheduled meeting.

**Rationale:** To provide a means of handling grievances in a "crisis" situation.

9. State and local constituents of the National Student Nurses' Association may request their board members be available for advice and support for any student initiating a grievance.

**Rationale:** Students filing complaints need positive reinforcement in their efforts. Also, nursing students need to know that their Student Nurses' Association is truly interested in and representing them and their concerns.

10. As a preliminary step, the student's case will be heard by a subcommittee of the regular grievance committee. This subcommittee will consist of two faculty members and two students. If the subcommittee cannot satisfactorily solve the grievance, they will report to the main grievance committee, which will then hear the case and take action as necessary.

**Rationale:** Often grievance cases can be adequately handled by persons who are impartial. A subcommittee can conserve the workload of the entire committee and narrow the issues in the cases that are presented to them.

11. The student appearing before the grievance committee should have the right to have a representative or advisor of his/her choice with him/her at the meeting.

**Rationale:** To allow the student to have the necessary resources he/she needs in order to adequately present his/her case. Also, sometimes students who are emotionally involved with a case are not able to present it in the way they would like.

12. If the grievance is against a member of the committee, the student should have a right to ask the member to abstain from participation in the committee while his/her grievance is being considered. The committee should then appoint someone to take that member's place.

**Rationale:** To protect the student from a biased decision by the committee, and to allow the student more freedom to express his/her opinion.

13. A mediator should be allowed to sit on the committee. This should be someone who is neither a faculty member nor a student but is closely associated with nursing. The mediator should be without vote. The purpose of the mediator is to make sure that each member on the committee has an equal opportunity to speak and that full and fair review of the facts takes place.

**Rationale:** To prevent an individual or group on the committee from becoming too powerful and domineering.

14. Reasonable evidence, names of prospective witnesses, and background material concerning the case should be submitted to the committee at least three days prior to the date when the case is to be discussed. The evidence should be relevant to the issues and not discussed by committee members prior to the formal meeting.

**Rationale:** To allow the committee adequate time to examine documentary evidence.

15. Any charges against the student or faculty member should be in writing and be made available to both the committee and the student or faculty member at least seven days before his/her scheduled appearance.

**Rationale:** To give the student or faculty member adequate time to prepare a defense against charges.

16. The student should be given full opportunity to present evidence and witnesses that are relevant to the issue at hand. He/she should also be given the opportunity to question any witnesses against him/her and also be informed of any evidence against him/her and its source.

**Rationale:** To make sure that the facts are being presented fully and fairly.

17. The student should be allowed to continue class as usual until the committee has reached a decision. However, if the student is considered to present immediate danger to patient welfare, he/she should be removed from clinical practice areas.

**Rationale:** To avoid the possibility of falling behind in school while the case is being considered and avoid any delaying tactics that may be employed to prevent the student from returning to class.

18. Group grievances should be presented to the committee by one representative of that group. That representative may then appoint a consultant to appear with him.

**Rationale:** To provide an organized systematic way of dealing with group grievances.

19. The decision of the committee should be made in writing to the student within two weeks of hearing the case.

**Rationale:** To assure a fair and timely review and conclusion of the student's case.

20. Decisions made by the committee are final, that is, immediately enforced by both faculty and students, except in cases with legal implications (example, discrimination, in which the student plans to take the case to court).

**Rationale:** To avoid delay in enforcing the decision.

21. Provision should be made for a "right of appeal," in which the student can take his case to the Dean or a governing board of the school. However, until the "appeals board" reaches a decision, the student is still bound by the "grievance committee's" decision.

**Rationale:** To allow the student a solution to take if he feels that his case has been unfairly handled by the committee.

*The Grievance Procedure Guidelines were developed by the NSNA Board of Directors in January 1975 and updated by the Board of Directors in April 1991.*

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## NOTES ON REVISIONS/AMENDMENTS

Starting with the National Student Nurses' Association (NSNA) Bill of Rights and Responsibilities in the 1970s until the release of the NSNA Core Values by the Board of Directors in 2015, NSNA members have been in the forefront of inspiring moral courage and demonstrating exemplary ethical conduct for almost five decades. The NSNA Student Bill of Rights and Responsibilities was initially adopted in 1975. The

document was updated by the NSNA House of Delegates in San Antonio, Texas (1991); and item #4 was revised by the NSNA House of Delegates in Baltimore, Maryland (2006).

The 2015-16 NSNA Board of Directors took on the challenge of reviewing NSNA's primary documents related to ethics and found that they all need a general review by the membership to ensure continued relevance today and in the future.

The NSNA Code of Ethics will combine the current 3 documents into one NSNA Code of Ethics with three distinct parts. The three documents include: The Code of Professional Conduct; the Code of Clinical and Academic Conduct; and the Nursing Student Bill of Rights and Responsibilities.

NSNA members discussed the Code at the MidYear Conference in Kansas City, Missouri on November 10, 2016. Over 100 members and faculty participated. At the 65<sup>th</sup> Annual NSNA Convention, delegates discussed the Code at the Forum on the Code of Ethics and voted on revisions and amendments to the Code of Ethics on April 7, 2017. The anti-discrimination description received the most comments and was amended on the floor of the House of Delegates. Many thanks to the 2016-17 NSNA Board of Directors and to the members and 2017 delegates who were engaged in this work.

NSNA members discussed the Code at the 2021 NSNA Virtual 39th MidYear Conference, November 11-13, 2021. NSNA members and faculty participated. At the 70<sup>th</sup> Annual NSNA Convention, delegates discussed the Code at the Forum on the Code of Ethics and voted on revisions and amendments to the Code of Ethics on April 8, 2022. Many thanks to the 2021-22 NSNA Board of Directors and to the members and 2022 delegates who were engaged in this work.