

Student Promotions And Evaluation Committee (SPEC)

The Student Promotions and Evaluation Committee (SPEC) of the University of South Alabama College of Medicine (COM) is charged with the responsibility for ensuring that each student in the COM meets the requirements for promotion and graduation with the degree of Doctor of Medicine. The SPEC is also entrusted with the duty of rendering decisions regarding probation and potential dismissal of COM students. The USA COM gives every qualified student the opportunity to successfully complete the curriculum and graduate; however, the COM reserves the right through the workings of the SPEC to make judgments about who has or has not demonstrated the necessary qualifications to earn a degree and to practice medicine competently.

I. Name And Mission

This committee composed of Basic Science faculty, Clinical faculty and students will be known as the Student Promotions and Evaluation Committee (SPEC). In addition, to meeting regularly twice each academic year, this committee will meet as necessary to evaluate academic and/or professionalism issues as they relate to specific COM students. The SPEC is charged with recommending promotion, remediation, probation or dismissal on the basis of scholastic performance, professional behavior, and adherence to the Honor Code. After reviewing the academic records of the senior COM students and certifying that those eligible have met the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Medicine, the SPEC is charged with making the appropriate recommendations to the Executive Council for graduation. This certification serves as the validation presented by the Dean of the College of Medicine to the University President and the Chairman of the Board of Trustees during the Commencement Ceremony.

II. Composition

Voting members of the SPEC consist of faculty members from basic science departments, clinical departments, and students appointed from the COM M2, M3 and M4 classes. Non- voting members include the following: Associate Dean of Medical Education, Associate Dean of Student Affairs, Associate Dean for Diversity and Inclusion, Assistant Dean of Assessment and Evaluation, Assistant Registrar of the COM, Director of Student Records and Engagement and the Senior Associate Director of Financial Aid of the COM. Several ad hoc members are appointed from the faculty at large and are called upon emergently if necessary for quorum. In the event a voting member of the SPEC leaves the university, resigns from SPEC, or fails to carry out his/her responsibilities by being absent from meeting, the Chair can request another voting member be appointed.

III. General Policies

1. Quorum is defined as one half of the voting members plus one. If quorum cannot be achieved, the Chair of SPEC has the right to defer the meeting date until quorum can be achieved.
2. The Chair of SPEC is appointed through the Dean of the College of Medicine's office and has served previously as a sitting member of the Committee.
3. The materials presented for the meetings are prepared by the Director of Student Records and Engagement as such materials are FERPA protected, members are reminded of the confidentiality of said materials.
4. The Director of Student Records and Engagement, or designee is responsible for taking minutes during the meeting which are therefore transcribed after the meeting and retained by said party.
5. If the SPEC is meeting to review a specific academic or professionalism issue as it relates to a specific student, the student is notified in writing (via JagMail) and verbally when possible by the Associate Dean of Student Affairs of the date, time, and place of the meeting as well as the matter to be discussed.
6. Prior to the meeting, the notified student will have the opportunity to meet with the Associate Dean of Student Affairs, the Associate Dean of Medical Education, and/or the Chair of SPEC to discuss the matter being called into question in an effort to prepare the student for potential questions. At this meeting, if specifically asked, the student can be informed of the potential outcomes of the SPEC deliberations.

7. The student is invited as well as encouraged to attend the SPEC meeting although either the Associate Dean of Student Affairs or Medical Education will be present at the meeting to present the matter to be discussed in regards to the student.
8. Regarding the meeting proceedings, the student may submit a written statement prepared in advance to the Chair of the SPEC, may be present to read the statement, may present statements from others on his/her behalf, may appear in person to answer questions from committee members as well as address the committee with an oral statement.
9. With prior consent of the Chair of SPEC or one of the Associate Deans, the student may bring an advocate to the meeting who may appear with the student for support. The advocate must be approved by either the Chair or the Associate Dean at least one business day in advance of the meeting. The advocate may answer questions from the committee in the presence of the student if the student agrees. The advocate may not present written or oral statements on his/her own volition. Since these proceedings are those of an official COM committee and not formal legal proceedings, no counsel representing the student is allowed.
10. The student whose record is being officially discussed is excused prior to the deliberations of the committee.
11. Once the committee has rendered the decision, the decision is entered into the minutes. The formal decisions of the SPEC are communicated with the student in a timely fashion and if possible verbally by the Chair and at least one of the Associate Deans usually on the same day as the meeting if time permits. Additionally, within two business days of the meeting, written notification of the SPEC decision and recommendations will be prepared by the Associate Dean of Student Affairs and forwarded to the student's last physical address in Banner and scanned and emailed to his/her university issued JagMail account.
12. Guidelines and policies written in advance cannot possibly cover all scenarios which could be presented to SPEC. In their deliberations, however, SPEC members should be guided by the following principles: fairness to the student, balancing the best interest of the student with obligations to the COM faculty, USA Health patients and society at large, and confidentiality of proceedings.
13. Administrative support to the Chair and the SPEC is provided by the Director of Student Records and Engagement, in preparing the materials for the agenda and the staff of the Office of Student Affairs in sending meeting reminders.
14. Copies of correspondence to the student(s) regarding SPEC deliberations and recommendations are maintained the student's official academic record housed in the Office of the Student Records, Assistant Registrar.

IV. SPEC Appeals Process

1. A COM student has the right to appeal a decision of the SPEC.
2. All appeals must be submitted to the Chair of the SPEC in writing and within seven (7) business days of the initial notification. The SPEC Chair will provide instruction and guidance to the student.
3. The basis of the written appeal can only be based on one of the following criteria:
 - a. Occurrence of a substantial mistake of fact.
 - b. Evidence of a fundamental misinterpretation of official policy.
 - c. Occurrence of a significant procedural defect.
4. The student's written appeal will be considered by an ad hoc appeals committee comprised of three (3) members appointed by the Dean of the College of Medicine from the voting members of the College of Medicine Executive Council. No member appointed will have been involved in the SPEC review nor will be in a current evaluative role regarding the student.
5. The appeals committee will convene within seven (7) business days of being appointed to consider the written document prepared by the student. The student will be notified of the meeting. The student will be invited to attend the meeting and provide a statement or answer questions for clarification but cannot present new evidence. The Chair of SPEC will be invited to address any questions related to policy or process. The appeals committee may either accept or deny the appeal.
6. If the appeals committee denies the appeal, SPEC's recommendation is forwarded to the Dean of the College of Medicine. The decision of the Dean is final and there is no appeal.
7. If the appeals committee accepts the appeal, the decision is returned to SPEC who will reconvene to consider that there had been a factual error, misinterpretation of policy, or procedural error in arriving at their original decision. After reconvening and arriving at a final decision, SPEC will forward their final recommendation to the Dean of the College of Medicine. The decision of the Dean is final and there will be no further appeal.

V. Cases For Referral To SPEC

1. Marginal or unsatisfactory academic performance which falls below thresholds set for the given academic year (as set forth in rules for a given academic year which may encompass USMLE Board Examinations and OSCE or Clinical skills deficiencies).
2. Lapses in professionalism or breaches of conduct which may be reported through the Physicianship Early Concern (PEC) Notes, or any other egregious behavior deemed by the Associate Deans of Student Affairs or Medical Education to warrant SPEC review.
3. Violations which are referred by the Honor Council.