



Policy Title:

Medical Student Dress Code Policy

Policy Identifier:

USCSOMC – UME – 1.26

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Category: Undergraduate Medical Education	

LCME Standards

3.5 – Learning Environment/Professionalism

9.9 – Student Advancement and Appeal Process

Scope

University of South Carolina (USC) School of Medicine Columbia MD students. This policy applies to all medical students (M-I through M-IV) enrolled in the MD program, across all learning settings, including classrooms, laboratories, simulation centers, and clinical environments

Policy Statement

Students are expected to dress in a manner that is neat, clean, professional, and appropriate for the educational setting. This policy supports compliance with LCME Standards 3.5 (Learning Environment/Professionalism) and 9.9 (Student Advancement and Appeal Process) by promoting a professional learning environment and defining expectations for student conduct and appearance.

Reason for Policy

The professional appearance and respectful behavior of medical students is a key element of patient trust, public perception, and the learning environment. This policy outlines expectations for appropriate attire and conduct during all educational activities, promotes safety and hygiene, and supports a professional atmosphere consistent with the values of the USC School of Medicine Columbia (USCSOMC). Students must uphold a professional image that reflects the trust placed in healthcare providers by patients, families, and the public.

Definitions

To ensure clarity and consistency, the following categories of attire are defined:

Smart Casual Attire: Smart casual, also known as professional relaxed, is neat, professional, and slightly more relaxed than business casual.

Examples include:

- Dress slacks or khakis, denim with no rips or frays



- Blouses, polo shirts, sweaters, cardigans
- Shorts of appropriate length and fabric may be worn if similar in style to khakis or dress slacks

Business Casual Attire: Business casual attire is professional and appropriate for academic settings and may be described as the attire appropriate for caring for patients in certain outpatient settings, but less formal than traditional business wear.

Examples include:

- Collared shirts, blouses
- Sheath, wrap, or sweater dresses
- Slacks, khakis, skirts
- Optional: blazers, ties, or scarves

Business Professional Attire: Business professional attire is expected for formal events, clinical settings, and patient-facing activities.

Examples include:

- Suits (matching jacket and pants/skirt), dress shirts with ties
- Professional dresses
- Professional slacks or skirts with blouses and jackets

Inappropriate or Unacceptable Attire: Regardless of setting, clothing should provide adequate coverage when sitting, standing, and reaching; trunk, chest, and undergarments must not be visible. Leggings may be worn when paired with tops that provide appropriate coverage.

The following are considered inappropriate in academic or clinical settings:

- Clothing that is visibly soiled, ripped, frayed, dirty, torn, excessively tight, overly short, or sheer
- Pajamas
- Hats, except when worn for religious, cultural, or medical reasons
- Clothing should never be distracting or offensive. Clothing with logos, slogans, overt political messages, or offensive language should be avoided as professionalism and respect for all community members are expected
- T-shirts, athletic logo t-shirts, sweatshirts, or hoodies unless specifically approved for wellness or school-sanctioned events
- Workout clothing and athletic wear, including yoga pants, biker shorts, and similar apparel, except during designated wellness activities or school-sanctioned events.
- Denim (jean) shorts
- Flip-flops, athletic slides, or open-toed sandals in clinical or lab settings.
- Strong or excessive fragrances, for example, colognes, body sprays, or other scented products, as they may interfere with patient care, compromise safety, or affect vulnerable populations.

Procedures

General Guidelines: General guidelines apply throughout the MD curriculum, but more specific guidelines may be provided by individual course, block, or clerkship directors. It is the responsibility of each student to review and adhere to dress expectations in each syllabus.



- Clothing must be clean, appropriately sized, in good repair, and wrinkle-free. Fabric should not be see-through or otherwise inappropriate for an academic or clinical environment. Similarly, footwear must be clean, neat, and in good repair.
- Students must maintain a clean, neat, and professional appearance at all times.
- Students must be well-groomed. Hair should be clean and tied back, as appropriate, such as in clinical and laboratory settings.
- Students must wear their USC ID badge visibly during all academic and clinical activities.
- Tattoos and piercings must comply with site-specific policies. Visible tattoos may be required to be covered in certain clinical settings, particularly if they contain profanity, imagery that may be perceived as offensive, or content not aligned with a professional environment. Requests to cover tattoos or remove piercings will be made in accordance with clinical site guidelines and must not target cultural, religious, or personal identity expressions. In specific environments, such as pediatrics, perioperative services, or other sensitive care areas, students may be asked to cover tattoos or remove visible body piercings based on safety, infection control, or patient comfort considerations.
- Students may choose to wear business casual or smart casual attire for classroom and written exams.
- Business professional attire (white coat preferred) is required for standardized patient encounters, OSCEs, and clinical correlation sessions.
- Hats or head coverings are permitted when worn for religious, cultural, or medical reasons.
- If unsure about attire, consult the course, block, or clerkship director.
- This policy applies to all required educational settings. It does not apply to studying in study rooms or libraries. However, students should use discretion in how they present themselves while on campus or in clinical settings for study purposes, open labs, or independent learning.

Additional Institutional Notes: Students must comply with the dress code and professionalism policies of assigned clinical sites.

- Prisma Health prohibits denim and requires professional appearance in clinical settings. Students assigned to Prisma must follow these expectations.
- McLeod Health prohibits denim and requires a clean, professional appearance. Students assigned to McLeod must follow their policies, which emphasize safety and patient comfort.
- Students assigned to Lexington Medical Center must follow the dress code policies established by that institution, which emphasize a professional appearance appropriate for clinical learning environments.
- Students visiting, observing or rotating at other clinical entities must follow the dress code of that institution and always represent USCSOMC professionally.

Enforcement and Reporting Expectations:

All members of the educational environment, including faculty, staff, students, and Student Affairs professionals, share responsibility for upholding dress code expectations.

Course, block and clerkship directors, faculty, clinicians, lab supervisors, and simulation staff are responsible for addressing inappropriate attire in their respective environments.



For first-time or isolated concerns, the individual is encouraged to speak directly with the student.

If a pattern of noncompliance develops or the concern requires further review, the issue should be reported directly to:

The Associate Dean for Student Affairs and

The appropriate Assistant Dean:

Assistant Dean for Pre-Clerkship Curriculum (M-I/M-II settings)

Assistant Dean for Clinical Curriculum and Assessment (M-III/M-IV settings)

These deans report directly to the Associate Dean for Undergraduate Medical Education, who maintains oversight of the curriculum across all four years.

Students may report dress code violations or perceived inequities confidentially to the Office of Student Affairs using this confidential reporting form – [Professionalism Concern Form](#).

Inappropriate attire may result in being asked to leave the learning environment to change, which may affect attendance or participation.

Repeat or serious violations may result in documentation in the student’s professionalism file and/or referral to the Student Honor Committee.

Students must also follow dress code policies of assigned clinical sites. Violations may be reported back to the USCSOMC and Office of Undergraduate Medical Education and result in professionalism review.

Contacts

Office of Undergraduate Medical Education

Office of Student Affairs

History

Date of Change	Change
6/24/2025	Policy created.