

Impact is the semimonthly newsletter of the University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston (UTMB). Published by the Office of University Advancement, it is distributed free of charge in support of UTMB's education, patient care and biomedical research objectives.

**Vice President for
University Advancement**
Susan H. Coulter

**Executive Director
of Public Affairs**
Chris Comer

Director of Publications
Mary Havard

Editor
Dave Mathews

Contributing Editors
Tom Curtis, Christian Messa,
Cathy Nall, John Tyler, Alicia Simmons
and Doris White

Art Director
Mark Navarro

Contact us

E-mail: impact.oua@utmb.edu
Phone: Dave Mathews
ext. 28710 (editor)
(409) 772-2618 (Public Affairs)
Campus mail route: 0144
U.S. Postal address:
UTMB
Office of University Advancement
301 University Boulevard
Galveston, Texas 77555-0144

Submissions

The deadlines for submissions to be considered for the Calendar, People and Briefs sections of the **Jan. 16** *Impact* is **Jan. 5**. Submissions should not be more than 100 words for Briefs or 75 words for People items.

Inclusion of all other articles is determined by the Public Affairs staff. Content is generally scheduled two to four editions in advance.

Items submitted for consideration are subject to editing for style and length.

Professionalism 101: Defining the components

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One of the most difficult aspects of communicating the need for professionalism in the clinic or classroom is that many people struggle to understand exactly what "professionalism" means.

As you probably saw in the last edition of *Impact*, the School of Allied Health Sciences' Occupational Therapy Department has wholeheartedly embraced the idea that professionalism in an academic health care environment is critical to the success or failure of its students. We found it particularly interesting—but not surprising—that in nearly every case in which a student was not successful, the shortcoming was tied directly to issues of professionalism instead of a lack of clinical skills. That speaks volumes about the importance of our goals here.

However, education is just one part of our mission. While it's extremely important that our students leave UTMB understanding exactly what professionalism is and why it's expected of them, we have thousands of staff members who come to work each day to fulfill the research and patient care components of the institution's three-part mission. We all need to know—and we're confident most of us do—what is expected of us daily when it comes to dealing with others in a professional manner.

One of the most difficult aspects of communicating the need for professionalism in the clinic or classroom is that many people struggle to understand exactly what "professionalism" means. If you fall into this category, you're not alone. This board itself is struggling to pin down exactly what we mean when we say we require a high level of "professionalism" at UTMB. We have defined it loosely as placing the needs of those we serve first. We also believe that it includes a commitment to personal responsibility, adherence to ethical principles and sensitivity to serving diverse populations. We welcome any feedback from you on how we might more thoroughly define professionalism at UTMB.

Within our draft definition, we have come up with several components. Those components include, but are not limited to: accountability, effective communication, compassion, confidentiality, pursuit of excellence,

integrity and respect. Professionalism at UTMB is a blend of interpersonal and work-related behaviors expected of all members of the UTMB community.

At UTMB, we manifest professionalism on a daily basis when our faculty, students and residents demonstrate their commitment to personal responsibility. We all can expect to receive constructive feedback, through clearly established and responsible mechanisms, on the extent to which professionalism characterizes our performance at the university.

The first principle is accountability. We all need to be held accountable for our actions, whether good or bad. We can make UTMB a better place by recognizing people who, by their actions, make life easier for those who work, learn or receive health care here. We also need to hold each other accountable when we see behaviors or attitudes that could discredit the institution, or compromise the right of visitors, staff or students to have a pleasant experience every time they're here.

The ability to communicate effectively involves engaging in timely, clear and direct communication with others. Cutting out gossip or conversation that tears down rather than builds up, we should always work to keep our communication at UTMB straight to the point and directed at those who need to hear it.

Compassion is at the heart of what we do as health care professionals. We should seek daily to see each of our patients through their own eyes. Try to understand what they frequently bring here—hurt, uncertainty, fear...possibly even hopelessness. This need for an empathetic attitude can also be applied to those who do not work in patient care. No matter what your role at UTMB, just ask yourself: How would you like to be treated?

Confidentiality means keeping personal information personal. We are entrusted by our patients to maintain the highest regard for their confiden-

tiality, and they deserve us going above and beyond in this area. At all costs and in all circumstances, we should protect private information as if it were information about ourselves or our own family members.

The pursuit of excellence keeps us working each day to do our best. Thomas Watson, the founder of IBM, once said: "Whenever an individual or business decides that success is obtained, progress stops." We should always ask ourselves how we can do better tomorrow than we did today, no matter what our role is at UTMB.

Integrity means we remain upright, honest and sincere in all we do here at UTMB. By maintaining purity in our motives and being forthright in our intentions, we stay firmly rooted in principle, no matter what the consequence, and we give the needs and concerns of others top priority. Being a person of integrity can include many different characteristics, and by maintaining integrity, you actually can't help but act professionally.

Respect keeps us looking outside ourselves, because it requires that every professional show consideration for the needs and concerns of others. Like integrity, respect for others can manifest itself in a myriad of ways. Simply put, if we hold each visitor, fellow student or co-worker in high regard and place their concerns above our own, we show respect. It's a target we should all aim for.

We're happy to see these principles and ideas implemented in many ways institutionwide. Please keep your eyes on *Impact*. Work areas and departments on campus who have shown a commitment to professionalism, such as the SAHS's Department of Occupational Therapy, will be featured and thanked for their dedication.

We thank you for taking the time to read about the strides we are making as a university. And we thank you especially, for your participation in a community that is striving to honor its commitment to professionalism.