Academic Support policy

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1. POLICY STATEMENT

MANCOSA is committed to providing proactive academic and pastoral support to undergraduate and postgraduate students enrolled in its online distance education programmes.

This policy provides guidance to academic and support staff regarding their responsibilities in ensuring that appropriate academic and personal support mechanisms are available to all students. It outlines the processes for identifying students who may require additional assistance and describes the interventions that should be implemented to help students reach their full academic potential and successfully complete their studies.

2. POLICY BACKGROUND

As an online supported distance higher education institution, MANCOSA is committed to providing a personalised and innovative teaching and learning environment in which students receive a high-quality educational experience that prepares them for personal, professional, and social success. This commitment is grounded in a collaborative partnership model, where students take responsibility for their learning while being proactively supported by the institution's designed student support mechanisms. The goal of this partnership is to foster student independence and to enable the early identification of individual academic and pastoral needs.

MANCOSA strives to assist students in realising their full potential through timely recognition of, and response to, factors that may adversely affect their academic progress or overall wellbeing. This policy therefore seeks to institutionalise a structured, student-centred approach to academic and pastoral support that aligns with regulatory requirements, reflects the institution's core values, and is informed by international best practice.

3. DEFINITION

- Academic Support: Targeted strategies to enhance student learning and academic outcomes.

- Pastoral Support: Assistance with emotional, psychological, or social well-being.
- At-Risk Student: A student at risk of academic failure or withdrawal due to academic or personal challenges.
- POPIA: The Protection of Personal Information Act 4 of 2013.

4. POLICY CONTENT

This policy is intended to provide staff with information regarding their responsibilities to ensure that adequate support is provided to meet the needs of students. This policy also aims to assist in the identification of students who require additional personal or academic support and to ensure appropriate interventions are implemented to enable a student to realise his/her full academic potential and to successfully complete their studies. The scope of the policy includes students who are enrolled in undergraduate and postgraduate programmes.

This policy should be read in conjunction with the following documentation:
- Programme Handbook
- A student's guide to assignment writing, referencing and library services.
- MANCOSA's Institutional policies where relevant
- Academic Support Standard Operating Procedure
- MANCOSA Student Code of Conduct and Institutional Rules
- Relevant statutory and regulatory frameworks and legislation governing higher education i

5. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

MANCOSA will endeavour to identify students in need of additional support and is committed to ensuring that all interventions are respectful towards the student, timely, equitable, consistent, and procedurally fair.

MANCOSA, as a supported distance higher education institution and in accordance with the Academic Support Standard Operating Procedures, will, where reasonable, identify students who require additional support to increase student academic success and:

- Promote positive mental health and well-being of students through a range of educational and support initiatives
- Communicate clear information about support services to MANCOSA staff and students.
- Encourage students with academic or personal support needs to access support from relevant internal and external support services.
- Assist staff to develop informed views, behaviours, and attitudes in relation to students requiring additional academic or individual support, as reasonable.
  Provide support and assistance to students who contact MANCOSA with academic-related queries or complaints.
- Have in place effective procedures for dealing with instances such as harassment of a student, unfair treatment, complaints, or grievances.

MANCOSA is committed to providing a supportive academic and pastoral environment; however, the provision of such support is subject to reasonable limits. Students can reasonably expect to receive guidance, resources, and interventions aimed at enhancing their academic success and overall wellbeing. Support services are intended to assist students in achieving their potential, but they do not replace services that may be available externally. All students remain responsible for their own learning, personal development, and for complying with MANCOSA's policies and procedures, which uphold academic standards and ensure good conduct.

6. Pastoral Support

• Identification of Students Requiring Pastoral Support

MANCOSA will endeavour to identify students requiring additional personal support, ensuring that early intervention is provided in a timely, equitable and consistent manner.
Staff are encouraged to be alert to the possibility of individual psychological difficulties experienced by MANCOSA students. In these instances, students could be referred to the MANCOSA registered Counsellor.

For the purposes of this policy, a student may be identified as warranting respectful personal support and interventions should their psychological or medical welfare be considered to warrant some form of intervention by appropriate MANCOSA staff.

MANCOSA will seek medical confirmation of impairment where a request for the provision of accommodation warrants this. In such cases, supporting documentation should be provided by the student to the respective authorities from a registered medical doctor in the case of physical and sensory impairments, and from a clinical or educational psychologist or psychiatrist in the case of cognitive and psychological impairments. In the case of scarce facilities and resources, MANCOSA will have the right to request a second opinion regarding the need for an accommodation at its own cost.

A student may require additional personal support due to several factors. Examples include, but are not limited to:

- A medical condition or disability
- A psychological predisposition or condition or disability Aversive childhood conditions or personal life events
- Social isolation, social anxiety, or loneliness
- Being a victim of bullying
- Emotional instability following a physical or psychological trauma or event.
- Difficulty sustaining academic workload and multiple competing tasks.
- Poor resilience or maladaptive coping mechanisms
- Substance abuse or addiction
- Financial debt and or enduring financial hardship.

A student may demonstrate the need for pastoral intervention in several ways. Any psychological interventions must be conducted by a qualified health professional. Academic or professional staff must refer such a student to the relevant registered professional for assistance. Symptoms may include but are not limited to (it must be noted that a number of symptoms may manifest the need for intervention, rather one particular one):

- Marked change in academic performance or attendance.
- Alarming material presented in a student's written work or class presentation.
- Persistently not attending webinars or late in submitting assessments and being highly disorganised.

In addition, the following support touchpoints may be offered to students:

- LMS Induction and Orientation completion
- Orientation sessions
- Lunch Hour support sessions
- Formative Assessment Reminders
- Resubmission Reminders
- ASC One-on-one Consultations
- Focus Group Sessions
- Academic/APL Consultations
- OSA Toolkit Email

7. Pastoral Support Identification Systems

Below is a structured list of possible Academic Support and Pastoral Support Identification Systems used at MANCOSA.

Student-Initiated Requests

Self-Referral**-** Students who are aware that they are personally struggling and require additional support request additional support. They can also request professional counselling support by MANCOSA's resident student counsellor at their earliest convenience, where a known physical or psychological impediment is likely to impact on their ability to successfully complete their academic success.

Deferral Request - signals potential academic challenges.

Helpdesk Queries that reveal recurring academic skill gaps (e.g., referencing, writing, time management).

- **Administrative Monitoring**

Failor or poor performance in the Formative assessments highlight students being off-track for timely completion.

Academic and support Staff - MANCOSA staff have a responsibility to report indications of students possibly at risk and must not be subjected to any acts of retaliation for reporting concerns.

8. Management of Students who are Identified as Requiring Additional Personal Support

Staff may encounter students who are experiencing excessive stress as they try to balance the demands of study with other commitments and responsibilities such as relationships, family, work, health, social or financial matters. MANCOSA offers a range of personal support services to students ranging from pastoral care to individual counselling sessions with a registered counsellor.

9. Academic Support

- **Identification of Students Requiring Academic Support**

A student may be identified as requiring additional academic support if they are not progressing in their studies, are potentially at risk of exclusion, or where their emotional or medical welfare is reasonably considered to warrant some form of intervention.

A student may require additional academic support due to several factors. These may include, but are not limited to:

- ✓ A medical illness, injury, health or psychological condition or disability
- ✓ A significant life stressor

- **Behaviour Considered as Academic Misconduct**

Behaviour that is consistently disruptive, volatile, or otherwise in breach of the MANCOSA Student Code of Conduct may constitute academic misconduct.

Indicators of questionable academic behaviour, capacity, or achievement may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- ✓ Failure to successfully complete at least 50% of the modules attempted in the preceding semester.
- ✓ Failure to attend webinars and/or submit required assessment components for a module.
- ✓ Repeated failure in the same module on two occasions.

- ✓ Insufficient participation in webinars, where applicable.
- ✓ Inability to complete the programme within a reasonable or prescribed
- ✓ timeframe.

10. Academic Monitoring and Support Identification Systems

Students who may require additional academic support can be identified through the following indicators:

- **Student Reports**

Students with disabilities who may benefit from reasonable adjustments or specialised academic assistance.

At-risk students, defined as individuals whose academic or non-academic circumstances suggest a likelihood of poor academic performance.

- **Informal Indicators**

Notifications from academic staff, including concerns arising from attendance reports.
Requests for assessment extensions or other forms of academic consideration.
Evidence of declining grades or inconsistent academic performance.

- **Student Self-Reporting**

Students who recognise that they require additional academic support are expected to seek assistance proactively and at their earliest opportunity.

11. Management of Students who are Identified as Requiring Additional Academic Support

- **Referral to Academic Support**

MANCOSA provides services to assist students who are struggling with the demands of studying. Academic assistance includes assistance in the following areas:

Student Learning Journey
Study Tips

Library Services
Referencing and Plagiarism
Time management
Students may be referred by a staff member or self-referral.

12. Academic Monitoring

Once a student has been identified as requiring personal or academic support through the above-mentioned identification systems, the Academic Support department will contact the student.

It is important that student(s) access academic support as promptly as possible once a need has been identified or the Academic Support department has made contact, so that appropriate strategies can be implemented before the student is at risk of academic underperformance.

13. COMPLIANCE AND ENFORCEMENT

All academic and support staff are required to comply with this policy. Noncompliance may result in performance review action. All interventions must adhere to POPIA and institutional safeguarding protocols.

In line with the Protection of Personal Information Act 4 of 2013 (POPI), the Academic Support department will endeavour:

- To promote the protection of personal information processed by public and private bodies.
- To introduce certain conditions to establish minimum requirements for the processing of personal information.
- To provide for the rights of persons regarding unsolicited electronic communications and automated decision making; and
- To regulate the flow of personal information across the borders of the Republic of South Africa

14. POLICY REVIEW AND REVISION

This policy will be reviewed annually by all members of the Academic Directorate or sooner if required by legislation or institutional change. Recommendations for revision must be approved by the Academic Executive Committee.

15. COMMUNITY AND TRAINING

Training on this policy will be provided to all new staff during onboarding and refresher workshops will be conducted bi-annually. Student awareness campaigns will be implemented each semester.

16. IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE

Phase 1 – Awareness and Training (Month 1-2)
Phase 2 – System Integration and Referral Alignment (Month 3-5)
Phase 3 – Full Policy Rollout and Monitoring (Month 6 onwards)

17. APPROVAL AND AUTHORISATION

This policy is approved by the Teaching and Learning Committee and ratified by the Academic Executive Committee of MANCOSA.

18. APPENDICES

Appendix A – Academic Support SOP
Appendix B – Referral Forms
Appendix C – POPIA Compliance Checklist

19. GOVERNANCE ACTIVITIES

Monitoring reports to Senate via Academic Support Committee. Quarterly feedback and analytics from LMS and CRM systems/IQMS/Hubspot/other dashboards.
Annual audit of intervention effectiveness and student satisfaction.

20. POLICY FORMATTING AND PRESENTATION

This policy is formatted in compliance with MANCOSA's Policy Development Guidelines and will be published on the institutional intranet, academic handbook, and distributed through internal training portals.