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## Translating Osteopathic Understanding into Community Health (TOUCH) Rules and Regulations, April 2025

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### Rules and Regulations

Translating Osteopathic Understanding into Community Health (TOUCH) is a national initiative of the Council of Osteopathic Student Government Presidents (COSGP). This program encourages osteopathic medical students to engage in service throughout their community in order to impact those outside of osteopathic medical students and professionals. The program aims to broaden awareness of osteopathic ideals and principles among those unfamiliar with our profession's values while enhancing the health and overall well-being of the communities we will serve as future osteopathic physicians.

In accordance with the osteopathic philosophy of treating the whole patient, service goes beyond mere health promotion and can include a wide array of involvement that has a strong positive impact on peoples' lives.

Please refer any questions about the TOUCH program to the COSGP National Programs Representative at [COSGPProgRep@aacom.org](mailto:COSGPProgRep@aacom.org). The National Programs Representative will engage the counsel of the National Diversity Representative, National Legislative Affairs Representative, and/or the National Parliamentarian for help with the development, promotion, and oversight of TOUCH objectives pertaining to justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion (JEDI), advocacy, and mentorship as needed.

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### I. TOUCH HOURS

A. TOUCH Hours are any activity that works to improve the health and wellness of a community that incorporates osteopathic tenets, awareness, principles, and practice. (See Section VIII, TOUCH Hours Standards)

1. A "community" encompasses efforts to enhance the well-being of humans, animals, and the environment, provided the service extends beyond the scope of the osteopathic profession.
  - a. Hours dedicated to serving osteopathic students, a COM/SOM, or the osteopathic profession as a whole do not qualify for TOUCH hours.
2. Events through which students earn TOUCH hours may be organized by a COM/SOM, club or interest group, or volunteer organizations at the local, national, or international

level, provided they adhere to the TOUCH hour standards (See Section VIII, TOUCH Hour Standards).

B. Volunteer Hours are any activity that provides service to a community but does not meet TOUCH Hours standards. (See Section VIII, TOUCH Hours Standards)

1. Any service hours that do not meet the TOUCH Hour standard will be recorded as volunteer hours and will therefore be managed at the discretion of each COM/SOM and their respective SGA or Student Affairs office.

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## **II. ROLES**

A. The American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine (AACOM) will maintain and coordinate the administration of the TOUCH program, as well as maintain and support an online database.

B. COSGP will maintain ownership and administration of the TOUCH program.

1. A National Coordinator appointed by the COSGP executive board for a term of one (1) year will:
  - a. Oversee the national program
  - b. Provide an annual training (virtual) to all COM/SOM TOUCH Coordinators
  - c. Delineate policy and protocol
  - d. Conduct periodic audits of the hours logged and approved at each COM/SOM
  - e. Resolve disputes (see Section V)
  - f. Serve as Co-Chair of COSGP Student Services Committee
2. The COSGP Student Services Committee appointed by the National 2nd Vice Chair and comprised of general COSGP council members for a term of one (1) year, will:
  - a. Review and clarify policy and protocol

C. Each Student Government Association (SGA) will appoint a student COM/SOM Coordinator to serve as the primary TOUCH program contact at each college for a term of one (1) year.

1. The Coordinator will verify and approve completed hours and certify each student's completion of the program.

2. If a TOUCH Coordinator inaccurately approves TOUCH hours, they will be notified and provided with re-education. Repeated inaccurate approvals may require the COM/SOM TOUCH Coordinator to complete additional training with the National Programs Representative.
  3. The National Programs Representative, with approval from the Co-Chair of the Student Services Committee, reserves the right to remove a COM/SOM TOUCH Coordinator for repeated failure to comply with national program rules and regulations.
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### **III. RECORDS**

A. Records will be maintained by a system chosen and managed by AACOM.

B. Student records consist of:

1. Student name
2. Student college/school
3. Event name
4. Event date
5. Event city and state
6. Event coordinator, including contact information (email address or phone number)
  - a. If the submitting student serves as the event coordinator, they must list another authoritative person affiliated with the event to verify their hours (e.g., another executive board member, faculty member, or community contact).
7. Hours.
  - a. TOUCH Hours include 100% of qualified event hours (see TOUCH Hours I.A & TOUCH Hour standard VIII.) plus 50% of preparation hours for a qualified event.
  - b. Event Hours:
    - I. Hours spent participating at the actual event.
  - c. Preparation Hours:
    - i. Hours spent in administrative tasks directly related to planning or training for the event for which hours are claimed.

- ii. Students are responsible for delineating how many hours per submission are preparation hours, including the calculation of such.

- iii. 50% of these hours are counted toward TOUCH Hours.

- d. Volunteer Hours:

- i. Hours not eligible for TOUCH Hours (see TOUCH Hours I.A & TOUCH Hour standard VIII.)

- ii. Planning or training time for non-TOUCH events is not eligible for TOUCH hours.

- iii. Denied TOUCH Hours are to be included in Volunteer Hours.

- 8. Event Description:

- a. The description should be 2-4 sentences and demonstrate how the service meets TOUCH Standards and detail the student's role in the event.

- b. If an event log includes several hours spent engaging in different activities within one service event, the time spent completing each should be denoted.

- i. This includes logging hours for time spent at camps or during service trips, ensuring that travel, sleep, and meals are not counted. Students should also record the start and end times of service, along with any breaks taken.

C. Submission Deadlines: Student TOUCH Hours must be submitted to the online database within one (1) month of the activity or date of service.

- 1. COM/SOM TOUCH Coordinators may make exceptions on a case-by-case basis.

- 2. Any record or event exceeding 50 TOUCH Hours requires additional verification by the National TOUCH Coordinator.

D. Record Access: Any participant, faculty member, or program administrator has the right to review all records associated with the TOUCH program at their respective COM/SOM.

E. Research Use: TOUCH records and the database may be used for research purposes, provided appropriate requests, supporting documentation, and Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval are obtained.

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#### **IV. CYCLE**

A. The TOUCH year will extend from May 1 to April 30 of the next year.

1. This cycle may be adjusted as needed by the National Program Coordinator and AACOM staff with advance notice.

B. Hours completed must be completed following matriculation into medical school.

1. hours completed by first year medical students during the summer before matriculation are not eligible

D. Completed hours may not be carried over from one academic year to the next

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#### **V. DISPUTE**

A. Students may dispute whether or not their activities should be counted as TOUCH hours.

1. The first level of dispute resolution is with the COM/SOM Coordinator and the Student Affairs Representative, who will serve as impartial decision-makers as needed.
  2. All records submitted are subject to formal review by the COSGP Student Services Committee if deemed necessary following initial review by the Co-chairs of the committee.
  3. The final decision will be made by the National TOUCH Coordinator.
  4. Failure to supply records will result in zero credit for the TOUCH Hours gained in dispute
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## **VI. FALSIFYING RECORDS**

A. Students who are found to have falsified a TOUCH record, in a first offense will receive a warning from the National TOUCH Coordinator. Students who are found to have falsified a TOUCH record, in a second or subsequent offense, will receive no credit for previous hours; be deemed ineligible for TOUCH recognition for the remainder of the TOUCH year; and the student's falsification will be reported to the student's college/school by the National TOUCH Coordinator.

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## **VII. TOUCH Threads**

A. Threads" in the context of the TOUCH program refer to specific, co-curricular service learning objectives that are intentionally integrated into the broader framework of the program to enrich participants' experiences and outcomes. These threads serve as thematic guidelines, focusing on key skills, values, and areas of development that complement the service work participants engage in. Each thread provides a structured approach to guide participants in reflecting on their service activities, ensuring that they gain not only practical experience but also a deeper understanding of the broader societal issues they are addressing. Through these co-curricular objectives, the program fosters a holistic learning experience that enhances both personal growth and the impact of the community service undertaken. All service work completed through the theme of a thread, must also meet the TOUCH hour standard to be eligible. Not all TOUCH hours must be completed through the theme of a thread. Additional threads may be added in the future to better facilitate service learning objectives through the TOUCH program.

### **1. Justice, Equity, Diversity, Inclusion (JEDI)**

- a. The Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusivity (JEDI) thread aims to guide participants in understanding and actively addressing systemic inequalities while fostering an inclusive and equitable environment in their community service work. This thread encourages participants to reflect on their role in promoting justice by engaging with diverse populations and considering the historical and current social structures that impact marginalized communities. Service activities should be approached with a commitment to inclusivity, ensuring that all voices are heard and valued, particularly those that have been traditionally

underrepresented or oppressed. Participants are encouraged to examine their own biases, learn from diverse perspectives, and contribute to creating environments where equity is prioritized and every individual has the opportunity to thrive. Through this thread, participants will deepen their understanding of the intersectionality of issues, develop the skills to advocate for change, and actively contribute to dismantling barriers to equity and inclusion. Additionally, participants will explore the social determinants of health—such as income, education, housing, and access to healthcare—which significantly influence the well-being of individuals and communities, and use this knowledge to inform their service practices and advocacy efforts in addressing health disparities and promoting holistic well-being. COM/SOM diversity liaisons are encouraged to work alongside their SGA, students, faculty, staff, and community to aid the campus TOUCH coordinators in facilitating these outcomes through the TOUCH program.

## 2. Advocacy

- a. The Advocacy thread focuses on empowering participants to engage in social, political, and healthcare-related advocacy that addresses the needs of underserved communities and promotes systemic change, without directly benefiting medical students, physicians, or the osteopathic community. This thread encourages participants to champion issues such as healthcare access, health equity, environmental justice, and the rights of marginalized groups, ensuring that their advocacy work prioritizes the well-being of the broader public. By focusing on advocacy that does not serve the interests of the healthcare profession itself, participants will engage in meaningful efforts to dismantle barriers to healthcare, support public health initiatives, and amplify the voices of those who are often left out of the conversation. This approach underscores the importance of advocacy that seeks to advance social good and societal health without any personal or professional gain for those within the medical field. COM/SOM legislative affairs liaisons are encouraged to work alongside their SGA, students, faculty, staff, and community to aid the campus TOUCH coordinators in facilitating these outcomes through the TOUCH program.

### 3. Mentorship

- a. The Mentorship thread focuses on fostering supportive, growth-oriented relationships between participants and children, younger students, and pre-medical students, with an emphasis on providing guidance, encouragement, and academic support. Participants in this thread will engage in hands-on mentorship, helping to build the confidence, skills, and knowledge of those they mentor by offering advice on educational and career paths, especially in the medical field. Through structured activities, participants will help mentees navigate challenges in their academic journeys, cultivate critical thinking skills, and foster a passion for learning. This mentorship experience not only contributes to the personal growth of the mentees but also allows participants to develop valuable leadership, communication, and empathy skills. By sharing their own experiences, offering guidance on the pathways to careers in healthcare, and encouraging the exploration of academic and professional opportunities, participants will help shape the next generation of students and professionals, particularly those who may not have had access to such mentorship before. COM/SOM medical and clinical education liaisons are encouraged to work alongside their SGA, students, faculty, staff, and community to aid the campus TOUCH coordinators in facilitating these outcomes through the TOUCH program.
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## **VIII. TOUCH HOURS STANDARDS**

A. TOUCH Hours are awarded for any activity that works to improve the health and wellness of a community. The event must provide a service to the community, as defined by Section 1.A.1., to be eligible for TOUCH hours.

1. COM/SOM TOUCH coordinators shall use their best judgement based on this document and the annual training they receive from the National Program Coordinator to assess if logged hours meet the TOUCH hour standard. If they are unsure of any logged hour, they should notify the National Program Coordinator for review and decision.

B. Denied TOUCH Hours may count toward Volunteer Hours based on the COM/SOM's volunteer hour standards.



C. The following will outline some specific examples of TOUCH hours that require added consideration. This is not an exhaustive list.

1. Item donation drive participation (NOT fundraising drives) for a MAX total of 10 TOUCH hours for any given cycle.

a. No more than 2 hours may be claimed per donation drive per student, regardless of contribution amount.

b. The minimum donation requirements to earn one hour will be set by the COM TOUCH Coordinator but must be set at no more than \$10 in donation value.

2. TOUCH-eligible activities performed while at a conference (but not hours spent at the conference itself- see Section VIII.D.3)

3. TOUCH-eligible activities performed with a religious organization so long as the service is not preaching or proselytizing alone, and would be the same if organized by a nonreligious organization

a. Example: volunteering at a soup kitchen run by a Synagogue

b. The service would be the same regardless of the organizing body and goes beyond preaching/proselytizing

c. An example that would NOT count: volunteering to lead a youth bible study

i. This service is preaching/proselytizing alone

4. Volunteering physical labor at a fundraising event

a. Example: registering participants, outlining the course, handing out water, providing medical care, etc. for a fundraising run

b. Fundraising through direct ask or “grassroots”/door-knocking/calling will not count. Similarly, fundraising via participating in time or distance sponsored events will not count. E.g: charity miles or fun runs

5. TOUCH-eligible activities relating to blood drives

- a. A student may log 1 TOUCH hour per blood donation.
- b. Hours spent organizing a blood drive will count as planning and thus shall be logged as ½ time.
- c. Hours spent volunteering at a blood drive assisting with check in, snacks, vitals, etc. shall be TOUCH eligible.

#### 6. TOUCH-eligible activities relating to fostering animals

- a. A maximum of 2 hours per day can be counted as TOUCH-eligible when the foster animal is in the care of the student. Only time spent actively engaged with the animal should count. ie: feeding, walking, playing, etc.
- b. No additional time may be counted for “donating items” as representative of costs accrued due to supply needs of caring for the animal.
- c. No hours can be claimed following the adoption and assumption of ownership of any foster animal.

#### 7. TOUCH-eligible activities relating to advocacy

- a. Hours spent directly advocating for matters that will solely and/or directly benefit COM/SOMs, medical students, or the profession as a whole will not be TOUCH eligible.
- b. Hours spent advocating through volunteer advocacy groups (ie: Court Appointed Special Advocates for Children [CASA/GAL]) will be TOUCH eligible.
- c. Hours will not be approved based on the event attended but rather based on the time spent on specific issues. Hour logs should reflect each issue the advocacy work was focused on and the time spent on those matters. ie: if the DO Day on the Hill event plans to have 4 main advocacy points that are TOUCH eligible, these 4 matters should be listed in the log with the time spent advocating for each issue clearly denoted.
- d. Advocacy planning meetings, trainings, and other preparation time will not be TOUCH eligible.

D. Ineligible activities: The following activities are not eligible for TOUCH hours

1. Any service activity for which you are being graded or is included in your grade
2. Physician shadowing or clinical rotations
3. Conference attendance including but not limited to: AOA House of Delegates, AMA House of Delegates, SOMA House of Delegates, OMED, Educating Leaders, SOMA National Convention, National Osteopathic Student Caucus (NOSC), COSGP Business Meetings, specialty conferences, research symposiums, AMA-MSS, state society conferences, CME conferences, etc.
4. Administrative tasks that do not involve planning hours and that do not take place at the event.
5. Travel time, sleep, or other time spent not in service for overnight service events
6. Sponsored or completion-equivalent funds raised for philanthropic causes including:
  - a. Pledging or collecting pledges (ex. Charity Miles)
  - b. Participation in athletic events (ex. Fun Runs)
7. COSGP Silent Auction activities, including acquiring auction items or staffing the auction.
8. Funds raised directly to benefit school-associated clubs or organizations
9. Leadership responsibilities in a College Student Organization
10. SIM labs, staying after rotation/clerkships, small group leadership, normal student organization activities (ex. meetings, bringing in speakers, etc.)
11. Research activities
12. Political advocacy to benefit medical students, physicians, or the Osteopathic profession as a whole.

13. Tutoring other medical students

14. On-call hours for service activities

a. For example: Being on-call for a suicide hotline will not count, active time texting or calling in this role will be TOUCH eligible

b. For example: Being on call for emergency services will not count, active time spent preparing for or responding to calls will be TOUCH eligible

## **IX. Awards**

- A. Final hours are tallied by AACOM staff and the National TOUCH Coordinator.
- B. Electronic certificates will be made available by AACOM Staff and the National TOUCH Coordinator to the COM/SOM Coordinator for completion and distribution.
- C. Awards:
  - 1. Participation recognition
    - a. Students who complete less than 50 approved TOUCH Hours
  - 2. Silver-level recognition
    - a. Students who complete 50 but less than 100 approved TOUCH Hours
  - 3. Gold-level recognition
    - a. Students who complete 100 or more approved TOUCH Hours
  - 4. Platinum-level recognition
    - a. Awarded to the student at each COM with the highest number of approved TOUCH Hours
- D. AACOM and the National TOUCH Coordinator shall make available to all COM/SOM deans a reference guide on the best practices for including TOUCH service and accomplishments in the student's MSPE.