**Intended Audience**

***This facilitation guide is designed for use by:***

* *Senior staff in paraprofessional staff meetings*
* *Hall Council advisors in executive board meetings*
* *ILO advisors in executive board meetings*
* *Student leaders as part of a hall program*

**Learning Outcomes**

***Through participation in this training session, students will be able to:***

* *Critically reflect on professionalism*
* *Describe how professionalism impacts their work*
* *Develop their understanding of professionalism and how to create more inclusive practices related to what is viewed as professional.*

**Sharing Content**

*Facilitate a group conversation about professionalism. Consider using images to help participants reflect on professional norms around dress, appearance, and behavior.*

**Exercises and Activities**

* ***Activity:****Brainstorming about professional skills*
* *dry erase board, chalk board, or easel-sized sticky notes, (dry-erase) markers, and chalk*
* ***Activity****: The Professional Look*
* *Power point to share information from Disney Look Book or printed slides*
* ***Worksheet:*** *Professionalism Notes and Reflection*

*Pass out the Notes and Reflection worksheet at the beginning of the session.*

***Section 1: Setting Group Expectations and Ground Rules                    (Time: 5 Minutes)***

**Note to Facilitator:***This dialogue asks students to consider how professional standards of dress are often rooted in and perpetuate racist, sexist, homophobic, transphobic, and classist systems. This subject may be challenging for students who have not discussed this content; students who have experienced discussed examples in real life may be triggered by the discussion. Consider asking the group to set group expectations and ground rules for discussion.*

Using a chalkboard, dry erase board, or large pad of paper and markers, ask the group to set expectations and ground rules with each other. Suggested ground rules include:

* Speak from personal experiences and avoid generalizations about groups of people.
* Respect Confidentiality.
* Share Airtime.
* Listen respectfully to different perspectives.
* Controversy with civility.
* Own your intentions and your impact.
* We share responsibility for making the conversation productive.

***Section 2: What is Professionalism?                                                        (Time: 10 Minutes)***

In small group conversation, ask students to think about professionalism. What does it mean? What are characteristics of professionalism (norms, behaviors, dress)?

* After brainstorming, ask students to create a definition of professionalism based on those characteristics
* Guiding questions: Who do you picture when you think of a professional? What do they look like? Where do they work? What do they do when they work? What skills or abilities are necessary for them to complete their work? Does professionalism look the same in every workplace?

Students may have a hard time creating a definition of professionalism. If this is the case, that's okay! Remind students that:

* Professionalism can be hard to define because it is job and industry specific.
* Codes of professional etiquette are often unwritten.

***Section 3: Critical Reflection: The Professional Look                      (Time: 20 Minutes)***

This section will ask students to consider how professionalism might affect people differently based on their gender, cultural or ethnic identity, social-economic status, etc.

This section utilizes the Disney Look Book as an example of a professional dress code. You could also use a school dress code or similar document, or search for examples of professional dress online. If using the Disney Look Book, remind students that similar resources are not provided in most industries.

Introduce the dress code to students who may not be familiar with it. When possible, include visual examples of acceptable dress according to the code.

Ask students to reflect on who/what is missing from professional dress codes. Does the dress code ask more of some people than others? What might make it harder for someone to achieve the "professional" look?

**EXAMPLES:**

**Gender**: Women often have more dress code restrictions than men (clothing length). It can be hard for some women to find clothing that meets those dress codes (example: taller women may struggle to find long-enough skirts/shorts).

People who are gender-non-conforming, trans, or non-binary are not reflected in these dress codes. What happens if someone who was assigned male at birth prefers to wear skirts?

**Socio-Economic Status**: Think about acceptable fabric types. Wool/leather/microfiber are often more expensive than other kinds of fabrics. People may not be able to afford to have clothes professional cleaned. People might have to spend more on hair products to achieve the Disney Look.

**Race/Ethnicity**: Natural hair is notpermitted. Restrictions on patterns/fabrics may restrict some kinds of traditional dress. Non-Western dress is not permitted.

**Religion/Faith**: Many faiths require hair covering or certain kinds of personal styling. Examples: Islam, Orthodox Judaism, some Orthodox Christian traditions, Sikhs.

Share with students that this is one kind of criticism to one aspect of professionalism (professional dress/how professionals present themselves). We could criticize different aspects of professionalism in a similar way.

**Disability/Illness**: Some forms of professional dress might be more challenging for people with disabilities or certain illnesses. For example, someone with arthritis in their hands may have a hard time with clothing that uses buttons, zippers, or snaps.

**Body Type**: People of varying size and people with different body shapes may have a hard time finding affordable business clothes in their size. Clothing may need to be ordered online, purchased in specialty shops, or tailored to fit. When purchased online, clothing will probably not be modeled by a person of their size or shape (making it harder to know how clothes will fit their shape).

**Why does this matter? Unexamined ideas about professionalism can make us think that we need to "be a certain way, look a certain way, and perform [our identities] in a certain way" (Baptista, 2015) to be successful.**

* Some professional norms, including dress, behavior, and speech, were not designed with everyone in mind
* They ask people to conform to a standard that doesn't fit everyone and that might not impact actual work done or skills necessary to do that work

***Section 4: Reconstructing Professionalism                                                 (Time: 5 minutes)***

We can't end things there! What are some examples of inclusive practices related to professionalism?

Depending on time limits, you can ask students to brainstorm or use the below example.

**Professionalism revisited:**

* A demonstrable set of skills, competencies, and attitudes
* Personal and professional ethics
* Alignment with organization's mission and goals (Ho, 2018).

***Section 5: How does professionalism apply to your role?                       (Time: 5 minutes)***

**What does it mean to act professionally?**

* Be productive: focus on your job responsibilities and use time productively
* Maintain effective work habits: manage your time efficiently, be on time to meetings and appointments, respond to emails/texts/phone calls in a timely manner, etc.
* Take the initiative
* Demonstrate integrity: treat everyone with dignity and respect, do not speak poorly of others, communicate truthfully, do not engage in unethical or disruptive behavior, follow organizational policies, and do not share confidential information
* Be a problem-solver
* Be resilient: Manage setbacks and challenges with a positive and constructive attitude
* Be an active learner: work to develop skills that will help you grow in your role
* Develop a professional image: maintain a clean and neat appearance
* Build Relationships: respect and collaborate with other members within and outside of the department or organization
* Do not insult, threaten, or inappropriately touch others

**Why is it important?**

* You represent your organization, and your actions are associated with it
* You act as a role model: your actions will be used as a guide by others when they make decisions or try to understand professional behavior
* Your behavior impacts how others perceive you: you are creating a reputation that will follow you in your field
* Professionalism helps you accomplish goals and succeed in an organization
* Professionalism helps your organization succeed

***Section 6: Questions/Comments/Reflection                                                (Time: 5 minutes)***

Offer students an opportunity for questions, comments, or reflection.

**Reflection Questions**

1. What have you previously learned about professionalism?
2. This dialogue may have presented a view of professionalism that is new to you. Was anything presented in this dialogue new to you? Did you disagree with anything you heard in this dialogue? Why or why not?
3. It can be hard to challenge existing practices as a person who is new to a position, workplace, or professional fields. However, we all have spheres of influence where we can share our ideas. How might you work to create inclusive practices related to professionalism in your sphere of influence?
4. This dialogue asks us to think about how your identities and professionalism can interact. Are there other ways that your identity can impact us in the workplace?

**Resources**

Baptista, R. (2015). Critical reflections on the rules of "Professionalism" [blog post]. Retrieved from <http://www.myacpa.org/entity/standing-committee-women/blog/critical-reflections-rules-professionalism>

Disney Careers. (n.d). "Disney Look Book." <http://cdn.disneycareers.com/managed/DisneyLookBook3_7_FINAL.pdf>

Ho, J. (2018). *Let's take the –ism out of professionalism*. Presentation during the meeting of the National Association of Colleges and Employers, New Orleans, LA. Retrieved from <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1-OI8Hx3B3mCTvebD-YVyejG30aocq3Os/view>

Rios, C. (2015). You call it professionalism; I call it oppression in a three-piece suit [blog post]. Retrieved from <https://everydayfeminism.com/2015/02/professionalism-and-oppression/>

Tobia, J. (2014). Why I'm genderqueer, professional, and unafraid [blog post]. Retrieved from <https://www.huffingtonpost.com/jacob-tobia/genderqueer-professional-_b_5476239.html>

Virginia Tech Office of Career and Professional Development. (n.d). "Professionalism." Retrieved from <https://career.vt.edu/develop/professionalism.html>

**Notes Section**

Please use this space for note-taking during the dialogue.