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Classroom Management and Disruptive Student Behavior




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Topics Covered

- Basic Legal Guidelines
- Civility in the Classroom
- Suggested Syllabus Policies
- Additional Resources




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Basic Legal Guidelines

A classroom policy will likely be upheld in court if it is:

- reasonable,
- not arbitrary and capricious,
- not based on malice, and
- not based on illegal discrimination.




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Basic Legal Guidelines

To be enforceable, a classroom policy should be supported by a rational justification.

- As an example, if a certain classroom behavior would be disruptive to the teaching or educational process, a limitation or prohibition on such behavior will likely pass the rational basis test.
 - Cell phones
 - Text messaging
 - Use of laptop computers/tablets




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Basic Legal Guidelines

Other examples of enforceable classroom policies include limitations on:

- Use of recording devices
- Food and drink
- Noise/conversations
- Late arrivals/early departures




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Illegal Discrimination

Faculty members should make sure that classroom policies do not have the purpose or effect of illegally discriminating on the basis of a protected status (e.g., race, gender, religion, disability, national origin, sexual orientation, gender identity/expression).





Students with Disabilities

- The ADA requires the University to provide reasonable accommodations to those students who identify themselves as having a disability and who request such accommodations.
- Students are not required to disclose a disability and faculty should not ask a student about a disability.




Students with Disabilities

- Classroom policies should be flexible enough to accommodate students with disabilities. Examples of policies and practices that might involve ADA protections are:
 - Attendance, absence, or tardiness policies
 - Classroom participation expectations
 - Tests/exams, papers, and projects
- When a student self-identifies as having a disability and requests an accommodation, faculty should refer the student to the Office of Disability Services (ODS). ODS can also assist faculty members with evaluating any classroom policies to ensure they are flexible enough to accommodate students with disabilities.




Religious Accommodations

- University Policy 409 requires that students be provided reasonable accommodations for a sincerely held religious belief.
- Faculty must make a good faith effort to accommodate a student's religious practice or belief, unless it would create an "undue hardship."
- Showing "undue hardship" requires the University to show that a proposed accommodation in a particular case poses a "more than de minimis" cost or burden.
- The Office of Legal Affairs should be consulted if a faculty member believes that a particular accommodation would result in "undue hardship."




Religious Accommodations

- Faculty are required to authorize a minimum of two excused absences each academic year for religious observances required by a student's sincerely held religious belief.
- Students must be provided the opportunity to make up tests or missed coursework due to an excused absence for a religious observance.




Civility in the Classroom

- Faculty are responsible for management of the classroom environment.
- Faculty should set the stage for civility in the classroom by:
 - Providing clear and reasonable expectations in advance
 - Defining standards of behavior in the syllabus
 - Modeling expected behavior, including demonstrating respect for dissenting or opposing points of view
 - Maintaining a professional and friendly relationship with students




Disruptive Behaviors

- Faculty also have the primary responsibility for controlling disruptive classroom behavior.
- Disruptive behaviors can include:
 - Harassment of students or faculty
 - Repeated outbursts that disrupt the flow of instruction or prevent concentration on the subject taught
 - Failure to cooperate in maintaining classroom decorum
 - Repeated or severe violations of classroom or University policy





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Disruptive Behaviors

Disruptive behaviors should be addressed as they occur:

- Consider first cautioning the entire class rather than warning a particular student.
- If the behavior is irritating, but not disruptive, try speaking with the student after class.
- In rare circumstances when necessary to speak to a student during class, do so in a firm, friendly manner, and say that further discussion can occur after class.
- If necessary, remind the student that continued disruption may result in removal from the class.




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Disruptive Behaviors

A student who persists in disrupting a class may be asked to leave the classroom for the remainder of the class period.

- Tell the student the reason(s) for such action;
- Give the student an opportunity to discuss the matter ASAP;
- Document the incident and promptly consult with the department chair;
- Suspension for more than one class period requires appropriate disciplinary action through the DOS office (incidentreport.uncc.edu).
- Contact Police and Public Safety if the student does not leave the class promptly or there is a safety issue involved.
 - If necessary, dismiss the entire class.




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Suggested Syllabus Policies

- By including clear policies in the syllabus:
 - Faculty can clearly set forth expectations for classroom behavior, and
 - Students will be duly notified of these expectations at the outset of the course.
- A syllabus should be in writing, either on paper or through a class/faculty website.




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Syllabus Policy Examples

- Academic and behavioral expectations
- Allowance for revision of the syllabus during the semester
- Policy on instructor's absence or tardiness
- Policy on student absenteeism or tardiness
- Notify students of rights and responsibilities to obtain accommodations
- Prohibitions or limitations on use of technology
- Prohibitions on sexual harassment in web-based or web-assisted courses
- Notification if you plan to use Turnitin.com (or another plagiarism detection program)




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Additional Resources

- legal.uncc.edu → Legal Topics → Classroom Policies and Practices
 - Legal guidance
 - Practical advice
 - Syllabus topics and sample language
- Office of Legal Affairs: x75732
- Dean of Students Office: x70345

