

Faculty Resources: In the Online Classroom

The number of students enrolling in the online classroom has increased over time and, while many students have reported high satisfaction with their experience, when disruptions in the online classroom occur, they can be of great impact. It can, at times, be easier for students to be disruptive or display inappropriate behavior online than it would be in person. These disruptions can be stressful for faculty to manage and can impair the online educational environment of a class. We recommend that faculty be prepared with a plan for how to deal with such issues. It is important for faculty to be clear about the expectations set, be consistent with how the expectations are enforced and follow through on all directives.

First, we recommend that the **syllabus present clear expectations about appropriate online behavior**. Such expectations may include one or more of the following: all electronic interactions are an extension of the classroom and should be treated as such, students should not enter discussion board postings or participate in online class discussions under an alias, false name, or as anonymous and while disagreement can be part of the discourse, online communication should remain respectful and appropriate rather than demeaning and/or unprofessional (using all CAPS, personal attacks, etc.).

On the first day of class, we recommend faculty **inform students how they want to be addressed**, (i.e. Dr., Professor, first name). Faculty may feel disrespected if a student addresses them informally through course communications. However, students have experiences with different faculty who prefer formal and informal communications. A clearly defined expectation at the outset of the course helps alleviate this issue.

In the event there is an **online classroom disturbance**, we recommend addressing the behavior immediately, recognizing that response time may be delayed given the online nature of the course.

- * Initially, this response to behavior will involve online communication giving the student clear instructions to cease the behavior and state how the student can contribute appropriately.
- * If the behavior reoccurs, instruct the student to stop and require the student to meet with the faculty via a telephone call or an interactive web communication system (e.g. Skype).
- * If the behavior occurs a third time, inform the student that the Dean of Students Office will be contacted to assist. They will work with the faculty to initiate next steps including a meeting with the student.

Online student behavior will manifest through written assignments, emails, discussion board postings, real-time communication chats or in a variety of other ways. Students should be reminded about syllabus expectations as noted above.

There are some behaviors and communications **severe enough that Public Safety and/or the Dean of Students Office should be contacted immediately**. Trust your intuition should there be any concern for safety of students, staff or faculty.

If a student **turns in a project (e.g. written essay, artistic rendering) that you deem to be distressing**, please contact the Dean of Students Office. We can discuss the specifics of the situation and create an action plan together. Sometimes, such instances are a student's attempt to ask for help. If any project contains a threat to harm self or others, please call Public Safety immediately.

Sometimes faculty will **notice sudden or significant changes in behavior** for a student. Such sudden or significant changes can be due to serious life stressors. In such instances, please contact the Dean of Students Office to discuss available options. Examples of distress signs are as follows:

- * Disengaged
- * Falling grades and/or incomplete assignments
- * Incoherent statements on discussion board posts

We recognize how complicated online classroom issues can be. These tips, while providing a helpful framework, may not fit your particular circumstance. Please feel free to contact the Dean of Students Office at any point to discuss specific issues. Also, your academic college may have unique policies and procedures. Please consult with your Chair or Associate Dean for further clarification.

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