

Great Expectations: A Faculty Guide to Setting Syllabus Policies

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Overview

- Basic Legal Guidelines for Classroom Policies
- Syllabus Policies – Faculty Handbook and Academic Policy
- Suggested Syllabus Policies
- Suggested Syllabus Notices
- Q&A

Basic Legal Guidelines for Classroom Policies



Basic Legal Guidelines for Classroom Policies

Legal Standard of Review: The Rational Basis Test

- To be enforceable, a classroom policy should be supported by a **rational justification**.
- A classroom policy established by faculty members will likely be upheld in court if it is:
 - reasonable,
 - not arbitrary and capricious,
 - not based on malice, and
 - not based on illegal discrimination.



Basic Legal Guidelines for Classroom Policies

Illegal Discrimination in General

- Faculty members should make sure that their classroom policies do not have the effect—intentional or unintentional—of illegally discriminating on the basis of a **protected status**:
 - race, color, religion, sex (including pregnancy and parenting), sexual orientation, gender identity, age, national origin, physical or mental disability, veteran status, or genetic information
- See [University Policy 501, Nondiscrimination](#)



Basic Legal Guidelines for Classroom Policies

Grading Policies

- Courts generally leave grading policies to the **discretion of faculty**, within the academic standards established by the institution.
- A grading policy will be enforceable if it is based on the **students' performance** and other standards relevant to the educational process.
- A grading policy that is **arbitrary, discriminatory, or malicious** will be unenforceable.
- A grading policy should be applied **consistently**.



Basic Legal Guidelines for Classroom Policies

Disability Accommodation

- The ADA requires the University provide **reasonable accommodations** to those students who identify themselves as having a disability and request such accommodation.
- Students are **not required to disclose** a disability and **faculty should not ask** a student about a disability.
- If a student **self-identifies** a disability and requests an accommodation, faculty should refer the student to the [Office of Disability Services \(DS\)](#).
- See [Faculty Responsibilities](#) on the DS website for process
- See [University Policy 501.1, Nondiscrimination on the Basis of Disability Regulation](#)



Basic Legal Guidelines for Classroom Policies

Religious Accommodation

- [University Policy 409, Religious Accommodation for Students](#), requires faculty and staff to provide a student with a **reasonable accommodation** for a sincerely held religious practice or belief.
- Faculty are required to authorize a **minimum of two excused absences** each academic year for religious observances required by the faith of a student
- Students must be provided the **opportunity to make up tests or missed work** due to an excused absence for a religious observance.
- Excused absences for religious observances may not be counted against any mandatory attendance requirements, but they **do not relieve students from responsibility** for required course work during the absence.



Basic Legal Guidelines for Classroom Policies

Pregnancy and Parenting Accommodation

It is illegal under [Title IX](#) to exclude any student from an education program or activity, including any class or extracurricular activity on the basis of such student's **pregnancy, childbirth, false pregnancy, termination of pregnancy, or recovery therefrom.**

- University officials must treat a student's pregnancy or parenting leave as they treat other medical leave situations.
- Students must be reinstated to the status which they held when the leave began.
- *See guidance on [Pregnant or Parenting Students](#) from the Office of Civil Rights & Title IX*



Basic Legal Guidelines for Classroom Policies

A Note About Class Disruption and Academic Freedom

- Both students and faculty members have some measure of academic freedom in the classroom. Policies or practices addressing **classroom disruption** cannot be used to punish lawful classroom dissent.
- A student's statement or disagreement with the instructor or other students is not in and of itself "disruptive" behavior.
- Behavior may be disruptive when it **in fact interferes with the instructor's ability to conduct and control the class** or **undermines the credibility and authority of the instructor**
- The **disruption must be real**; if no students in the class are disrupted, and the instructor's credibility and authority are not threatened, the student may not be disciplined.



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Basic Legal Guidelines for Classroom Policies

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE!

Syllabus Policies: Faculty Handbook & Academic Policy

Syllabus Policies – Faculty Handbook

Teaching at UNC Charlotte

- Faculty are **required to provide a course syllabus** (paper or electronic) to each student that explains what will be expected of them in the course; this applies to all forms of instruction.
- Syllabus should include at a minimum:
 - expected student **learning outcomes**,
 - number of **credit hours**,
 - **grading** information, and
 - scheduled **meeting times**.
- Some colleges may have a preferred standard syllabus format.



Syllabus Policies – Academic Policy

[Course Attendance and Participation](#) (policy)

[Classroom Policies and Attendance - Student Expectations](#) (handbook)

- Instructors should determine classroom policies (including attendance/participation regulations) for their courses.
- In general, students are expected to
 - **attend punctually** all scheduled course sessions,
 - demonstrate **civil behavior** while in class, and
 - complete all of the **course requirements**.
- Instructors may outline additional and more specific standards in the course syllabus, especially when attendance is part of the grading criteria for the class. (See [Suggested Syllabus Policies](#))



Syllabus Policies – Academic Policy

[Faculty Illness](#) and [Schedule Interruption Guidelines](#) (policy)

[Classroom Policies and Attendance - Faculty Expectations](#) (handbook)

- Faculty members are expected to meet their regularly scheduled classes.
- In the case of illness or emergency, if a faculty member is unable to meet a class, the department chairperson or dean should be notified immediately so that appropriate arrangements to cover the class can be made.
- In the case of anticipated absences, faculty members should make their own appropriate arrangements for their classes and should inform the department chairperson or dean of the arrangements in advance.

Suggested Syllabus Policies & Notices

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Suggested Syllabus Policies

- Purpose
- General/Foundational
- Academic Integrity
- Online or Hybrid Courses



Suggested Syllabus Policies - Purpose

Suggested syllabus policies help faculty:

- highlight potential **classroom issues** and
- develop the **classroom environment** they wish to achieve
- By including clear policies in the syllabus:
 - faculty can **clearly set forth expectations** for classroom behavior, and
 - students will be **duly notified** of those expectations at the outset of the course.

Suggested syllabus notices inform students about **resources** available to them

*Syllabus should be **in writing**, either on paper and/or electronic in online course materials (e.g., Canvas)*



Suggested Syllabus Policies – General

- Clearly notify students of **classroom expectations** (academic and behavioral)
 - Clearly **state syllabus purpose** -- to set out policies and expectations you have for the course
 - Encourage students to **read entire syllabus** carefully before continuing in the course.
 - Explain that syllabus policies and expectations are intended to create a **productive learning atmosphere** for all students.
 - Notify students that unless they are prepared to abide by these policies and expectations, they **risk losing the opportunity** to participate in the course.



Suggested Syllabus Policies – General

- Permit **changes to the syllabus** during the semester
 - Notify students that the standards, expectations, and requirements in the syllabus may be **modified** at any time
 - Explain that you will **notify students of any changes** to the syllabus in class, by written or email notice, and/or in the online course materials (e.g., Canvas)



Suggested Syllabus Policies – General

Encourage **orderly and productive** classroom conduct:

- Encourage **active participation**
- Recognize **differing opinions** and conflict of ideas with civility
- Encourage **orderly questioning** of the ideas of others
- Notify that you will exercise your responsibility to **manage discussions** in an orderly fashion
- Notify that if conduct during class discussions **seriously disrupts the atmosphere of mutual respect**, you may prevent students from further participation



Suggested Syllabus Policies – General

- Explain requirements for **student attendance and absences**
 - Address attendance and absences generally
 - Address religious observances and emergencies
 - Address pregnancy and parenting
- Clearly state a policy on **instructor's absence or tardiness**
 - “If I am late in arriving to class, you must wait a full 20 minutes after the start of class before you may leave without being counted absent, or you must follow any written instructions I may give you about my anticipated tardiness.”
- See [UNC Charlotte Academic Policy: Classroom Attendance](#) for *obligations and responsibilities*



Suggested Syllabus Policies – General

- Clearly describe **learning objectives, grading policies, evaluation methods, and performance expectations**
- Clearly state a policy on **credit hours and student course work and/or lab work**
- Notify students of rights and responsibilities in obtaining **disability accommodations**
- Notify students about **non-discrimination** in the classroom
- Notify students of reporting obligations for incidents of **discrimination, discriminatory harassment, or sexual and interpersonal misconduct**
- Notify students about use of **preferred gender pronouns**



Suggested Syllabus Policies – General

- Explain university policies on **withdrawals**
- Notify students about the record of their **last date of attendance** (for financial aid purposes) when a student fails to earn a passing grade
- Notify students of **copyright ownership in your course materials**
- Prevent use of **cell phones** in classroom
- Regulate **computer use** in classroom



Suggested Syllabus Policies – Academic Integrity

- Address **academic integrity violations**, including plagiarism
- Prohibit use of **unauthorized materials** (e.g., generative AI tools; Chegg or other online course material suppliers)
- If you plan to use a **plagiarism detection service** like Turnitin (*policy required*)
 1. You must provide **advance notice** (via syllabus) to your students that you are using such services, and
 2. You must obtain a **signed consent form** from each student (copyright and FERPA implications)
- **Distinguish violations of syllabus policies** from academic integrity violations (no academic advantage)



Suggested Syllabus Policies – Online or Hybrid Courses/Exercises

- Notify students if you will be **recording classes**
- **Prohibit student** recording in classroom
- Notify students you will **require webcam use**
- Require remote students to use **neutral backgrounds**
- Notify students if you will **monitor analytics** on Canvas
(*policy required*)
- Notify students if you will use **Respondus Lockdown Browser** or **Respondus Monitor** (*policy required*)
- Prevent **sexual harassment** in web-based courses



Suggested Syllabus Notices

- **Disability Accommodation**
 - Send Accommodation Letter to faculty through the DS Portal
- **Promote help-seeking behaviors**
 - Supports both the mental health of students and University suicide prevention efforts
- **Basic needs statement**
 - Food security, housing security, transportation, health and wellbeing, technology, and child care
 - Refer students to [Student Assistance and Support Services \(SASS\) Office](#) and [Niner Needs website](#)
- **Wellbeing Resources ([Center for Integrated Care](#))**
- **FERPA notification**



Resources

- [Classroom Policies and Practices](#)
 - [Suggested Syllabus Policies and Notices](#)
 - [Classroom Recordings & FERPA: FAQs](#)
 - [Recommendations for Webcam and Respondus Monitor Use in the Classroom](#) *(from Center for Teaching & Learning)*
 - [Basic Legal Guidelines for Setting Classroom Policies](#)
 - [Guidance on the Enforceability of Classroom Policies and Practices](#)
 - [Civility in the Classroom: Practical Advice for Faculty Members](#)
- [Faculty Handbooks](#)
- [Academic Policies and Procedures](#)
- [Student Accountability and Conflict Resolution \(Code of AI\)](#)
- [Center for Teaching and Learning](#)
- [Office of Disability Services \(DS\)](#)



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