

Classroom Disruptions FAQs: Policy and Advice, Sample Responses

The UO Student Conduct Code seeks balance between freedom of expression and upholding academic standards and respectful engagement:

Founded upon the principle of freedom of thought and expression, an environment conducive to learning is one that preserves the freedom to learn—where academic standards are strictly upheld and where the rights, safety, dignity and worth of every individual are respected.

How does the balance between free expression, on the one hand, and academic standards and respectfulness, on the other, inform an instructor’s agency in the classroom?

I. What if someone is behaving in a way that makes it impossible to teach and learn (a “disruption”)?

UO classrooms are spaces of teaching and learning for our faculty and students. **Members of the local community and students who aren’t enrolled have no right to be there unless invited by the instructor. Enrolled students are prohibited by the conduct code from “obstruct[ing] or impair[ing] educational or other institutional activities.”**

If you should experience a disruption in class, you can inform the disruptor that **a particular behavior (as opposed to point of view)** they are exhibiting—for example, speaking over the students or instructor—is interfering with the class plan for the day. Calmly ask them to stop and re-invite them into the work of the class. If the class has a policy statement or has established an agreement for the respectful conduct of class, cite it. You can ask disruptors to leave the classroom, even if they are enrolled students.

For example,

I see that this is important to you, but I need to ask you to stop speaking over me—our class plan for today is to discuss the assigned reading and we have agreed as part of our class guidelines that we won’t interrupt one another and that we’ll “step up and back” to allow for many people to contribute. Can we address your concerns after class and return to the work of the day? [Behavior persists.] I need to ask you to leave and I’ll be in touch before the next class meeting.

The chief of UOPD advised us that **disruptors may seek to draw out our own powerful reactions or to create a spectacle.** You can call UOPD at 6-2919 to ask for help enforcing that a disruptor leave class: officers’ first response will be to try to deescalate the situation. You can also make the choice to calmly take a break or to dismiss class. You may also refer the student to the Office of Student Conduct and Community Standards, or the Office of the Dean of Students, which can quickly mobilize to speak with students. ([Reporting forms are here.](#)) NOTE: Only in extreme cases, such as credible threats of physical violence, can a student be permanently

expelled from a class.

II. What if an enrolled student is expressing on-topic viewpoints that are hurtful and offensive to others in the classroom?

Syllabus statements and collaboratively agreed upon **guidelines around how class will be conducted** (guidelines that, for example, foreground practices like supporting statements with evidence or paraphrasing the ideas of previous speakers before contributing) can be powerful tools, and as can devoting class time to **community building among students**. Establishing **common ground** for a class discussion also can be helpful (for example, articulating a specific goal: “the purpose of this discussion is to test this theoretical construct against a series of examples that I’ve provided”; or providing specific artifacts and data for the group to draw on). Role-play or debating exercises (in which students are expected to articulate a wide range of views on a topic to test their strengths and weaknesses rather than being asked to speak from personal perspectives) and creating and valuing more private modes of expression—say, completion grades on journaling exercises or offering choice in paper topics so students can pursue their own interests—can be helpful channels to redirect, rather than block, certain kinds of dissonance or resistance. The [Teaching Engagement Program \(TEP\)](#) offers scripts for how to handle these utterances in the moment.

III. What if my field has professional/disciplinary standards that make the expression of particular points of view antithetical to our intellectual work?

It may make sense to foreground from day one a core learning objective around developing the capacity to listen, write, and speak as a [practitioner, social scientist, counselor, teacher, etc.] and to **link assessments and grading to these skills**. This will mean being explicit about the moves that matter in expert communication (say, attention to inclusive word choice, protocols around mindful listening, standards for use of evidence to back of claims). Expert conventions can be hard to learn and harder still to intuit if they aren’t named. Low-stakes metacognitive exercises that help students reflect on their own learning or the dissonances of shifting in and out of different discourses might be powerful activities as students work toward these goals. In addition, some instructors bring in, rather than waiting for individual students to voice, readily available public arguments on a key topic—including misconceptions—and then demonstrate how disciplinary skills and methods can complicate or show the limitations of these arguments.

IV. What if I am being undermined in my classroom by students who don’t respect my expertise or the work of the class?

This is difficult, and research indicates that women and faculty of color are more likely to experience “incivilities” in the classroom and underestimation of their expertise. There is some evidence that pedagogies that decrease student anonymity and [increase instructor immediacy](#) have a positive role to play—the [Teaching Engagement Program \(TEP\)](#) would be very interested to strategize with you about this and can help you think about how to conduct a conversation with the student during office hours. We also can be present in class as a supportive observer or even class participant. The Office of Student Conduct and Community Standards can ask students to come in to talk about their classroom behavior even in the absence of an explicit conduct violation—they may be able to help uncover distress at the root of these student behaviors or be a third party that can help the student think about the impact of their actions.

V. What if a student in my classroom uses a recording device without my permission?

No student has a right to record what happens in your classroom without your permission. Do note, however, that students may have good reasons for wanting to record parts of class (learning differences, working in a nonnative language). You might want to establish a syllabus policy statement on this matter.

One example:

The use of technologies for audio and video recording of lectures and other classroom activities is prohibited without explicit permission by the instructor and other students. Please contact me immediately if there is an important rationale for your personal use (for studying and the completion of class assignments) of recorded material.

VI. What if I am seriously concerned about a student for reasons other than those mentioned above?

If you are concerned about a student and this is a non-emergency, the Office of the Dean of Students (DoS) encourages you to complete a report. There are a number of reasons why students might need help that you can communicate through this online form. Concerns may include, but are not limited to: concerns related to a student's physical and mental well-being, concerns about classroom behaviors, or concerns that a student may be missing. Issues of bias also can be reported here. The DoS reporting forms are here:

<https://dos.uoregon.edu/concern>

Please include detailed information about the situation/incident in the online form. DoS monitors any submissions that come through on these forms and then forwards them, as appropriate, to other offices such as the Office of Affirmative Action and Equal Opportunity (AAEO).

20 April 2018, by Lee Rumbarger