

# 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





# 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 \(DS\)](#)



# Questions and Contacts

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