Faculty and Staff

Frequently Asked Questions

Below are many of the questions we receive from Faculty and Staff across campus. If you do not find the answer you need, please feel free to contact the Dean of Students office, or make a CARE Team Referral.

What behaviors would make someone a student of concern?

A student of concern may or may not be disruptive to others. He or she may exhibit behaviors which indicate something is wrong, may show signs of emotional distress, or may indicate that assistance is needed. They may also be reluctant or unable to acknowledge a need for personal help. The following list is not exhaustive and you should follow up with any student for which you have concern. Behaviors may include:

1. Serious grade problems or a change from consistently passing grades to poor performance;
2. Excessive absences, especially if the student has demonstrated consistent attendance;
3. Unusual or markedly changed patterns of interaction, including avoidance of participation, excessive anxiety when called upon, domination of discussions, etc.;
4. Unusual or exaggerated emotional responses to a given situation;
5. New or repeated behavior which interferes with other individuals’ experience of university activities;
6. Repeated requests for special consideration such as deadline extensions, especially if the student appears uncomfortable or highly emotional while disclosing the circumstances prompting the request;
7. Disclosure of serious problems or crises;
8. Other marked changes in behavior, dress, or hygiene.

How should I respond to a student for whom I have concern?
Depending on the specific situation, there are many ways to address concerning behavior:

1. If there is disruptive behavior in a classroom or lab setting, deal directly with the behavior/problem according to classroom protocol. You may decide to ask the student to leave if the behavior does not stop and continues disrupting others. Appropriately follow-up with the student about their behavior before the next class session.
2. Address the situation with the student directly outside of class. You can invite them to office hours or make an appointment with the student to discuss your concerns and direct them to the appropriate resources.
3. Consult with a colleague, department head, Dean of Students office, or a Counseling and Psychological Services staff member before speaking with the student.
4. Refer the student to the Dean of Students office for assistance.

**When do I refer students for additional help?**

In many cases, faculty and staff provide adequate help through active listening, facilitating open discussion of problems, instilling hope, conveying acceptance, and offering basic advice. In some cases, however, students need professional help to overcome problems and to resume effective coping. The following signs indicate that a student may need counseling:

1. The student remains distressed following repeated attempts by you and others to be helpful.
2. The student becomes increasingly isolated, unkempt, irritable, or disconnected.
3. The student’s academic or social performance deteriorates.
4. The student’s concerning behavior continues.
5. You find yourself doing on-going counseling.

**How do I make a referral?**

While many students seek help on their own, your consistent interactions with them make it more likely that you will identify concerning behaviors. What can you do?

- Speak to the student in a direct, concerned, and straightforward manner. Provide specific examples of what is making you concerned.
- Because many students initially resist the idea of counseling, be caring but firm in
your judgment that counseling would be helpful. Also be clear about the reasons that you are concerned.

- All students have to do is walk into the Dean of Students office or Counseling and Psychological Services to be seen. They do not have to make an appointment.
- Remind the student that services from Counseling and Psychological Services are **FREE AND CONFIDENTIAL**.
- Sometimes it is useful to more actively assist students in scheduling an initial appointment. You may offer to walk the student over to the Dean of Students office or Counseling and Psychological Services.
- If you need help in deciding on whether or not it is appropriate to make a referral, call Counseling and Psychological Services at 919-966-3658 or the Office of the Dean of Students at 919-966-4042.
- If you have an imminent concern for a student based on a threat of harm to self or others call UNC Public Safety at 919-962-8100 or call 911.

**Can I tell a student that they may no longer attend my class?**

While a student’s behavior may be disruptive, it is inappropriate to permanently eject a student from your class without engaging the appropriate processes. If you’ve asked a student to leave a single class session, follow up with the student before the next scheduled session. Explain why the behavior warranted you asking them to leave and refer to the syllabus and the Honor Code if appropriate. Explain your behavioral expectations for continued class attendance and what steps you will take if the student displays the same or similar behavior in the future. These future steps may include referral to the Office of the Dean of Students and, possible, the Honor Court. If the student’s behavior was significantly disruptive, charges may be filed with the Honor Court. Behavior that poses a threat to the safety of others or to the student themselves may be referred to the Emergency Evaluation and Action Committee through the Dean of Students office.

**Do I have to report what a student tells me?**

Never promise a student complete confidentiality, as circumstances may warrant some level of reporting to other university departments or offices. Let a student know that any information they share will remain *private* and only disclosed to university departments or offices that have a legitimate need to know.
What if a student discloses sexual misconduct, relationship violence, stalking, or other forms of harassment?

- The University’s Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office (EOC) [3] provides resources, supportive measures, and reporting options for students who have experienced discrimination, harassment, sexual assault or sexual violence, interpersonal (relationship) violence, and stalking. The EOC works in partnership with the DOS.
  - If a student discloses such an experience, you can provide them with the EOC’s guide [4] for confidential and private resources. You can offer to help them access any of the university’s resources that they may deem helpful.
  - If you are a Responsible Employee, you have a responsibility to share incidents of discrimination, harassment, and or sexual and interpersonal violence with the EOC Office and will need to let the student know about your responsibility. If you are not sure whether you are a Responsible Employees, please visit the EOC website [5].

The University’s SAFE@UNC website [6] has other resources and tips for employees responding to a student disclosure.

What should I do with concerning content in an assignment?

When a student submits work that contains concerning content, consider the meaning and the context. You are encouraged to directly address the concern with the student: to share your concern; to ask about what was shared; and to ask if the student would like to connect with resources and support services. If a student communicates a direct threat of harm to self or others, then you should contact UNC Public Safety.

Should I tell the student that I talked with the Dean of Students office?

It is important to be honest with students when discussing your concerns for them. If you are referring a student to the Dean of Students office, please feel free to share that you
are doing so and the concerning behaviors that are warranting your referral. You should contact our office to discuss how this referral will occur and how to communicate with the student. This simple act can ease the anxiety a student may feel when they are contacted by our office.

**What will I be told about the help a student receives?**

Once a student begins a relationship with the Dean of Students office, it is unlikely that additional information will be communicated back to you. We do not disclose information without a student’s consent unless there is a need to know or there is a health and safety concern. We do encourage students to share with others only the information that they are comfortable sharing. Upon request, we will notify a student’s instructors that they are seeking support from our office.

**Am I expected to make accommodations for the student?**

The Dean of Students office does not request specific accommodations for students. We may notify instructors of difficult circumstances that a student is experiencing, but do not and cannot require an instructor to make specific adjustments to the course. Accessibility Resources & Services does provide students with documentation to inform instructors of approved accommodations.

**Who should I contact if a student has stopped attending class?**

Instructors are encouraged to show their concern by contacting students directly. If a student has stopped attending class after the add/drop deadline or if their attendance is sporadic, the Dean of Students office can also attempt to contact the student and discuss the concern. If a student is unresponsive, the Dean of Students office can attempt to contact the student.

**What resources are there for students who disclose financial hardship?**

The Office of Scholarships & Student Aid manages financial aid packages for enrolled students who apply for financial assistance. Unfortunately, this aid does not always meet a student’s full cost of attendance or unforeseen emergencies. The Dean of
Students office manages the Student Emergency Fund, which is designed to cover one-time, unplanned expenses. We also work to connect students with community resources that can help offset living expenses.

**Can I refer graduate and professional students to the Dean of Students office?**

The Dean of Students office is for all students. Although graduate and professional students typically liaison with student affairs professionals in their respective schools, our office is here to serve all students, regardless of program or enrollment status.

**Managing Class Disruptions**

- Set clear expectations at the beginning of the course in regards to expected conduct of all students. This can be done in your syllabus by setting standards for attendance, cell phone usage, tone of discussions, respect for differences of opinion. Also note that all students are expected to abide by the Honor Code and explain what this requires.

- State in writing possible consequences for students who do not abide by your stated expectations. Be fair and consistent when addressing possible problems and determining consequences.

- If the disruption is a low-level one, you may want to address the entire class instead of singling out certain individuals.

- Do not hesitate to address a potential problem early. The earlier that you address a potential problem, the less likely that it will develop into a more serious problem.

- If a particular student is being disruptive, calmly and respectfully ask him or her to stop their behavior. It is best to speak to the student privately. You may want to set a meeting for the two of you to speak. During this meeting, share with the student your expectations of classroom conduct and how you perceive that his or her conduct is not in line with your expectations.

- If the behavior continues, ask the student to leave the class for the day and inform them that the incident will be turned over to the Honor System for disciplinary action.

- Be sure to document incidents and share with your department chair or dean. You and your department chair are always welcome to consult with the Dean of
Students office.

- Trust Your instincts. If you feel a student is exhibiting behavior that might be dangerous to themselves or others, contact the Department of Public Safety [7] immediately.

A 2015 article from Inside Higher Ed examined this topic. [8]

Urgent Concerns [9]

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