Classroom FAQs for Instructors

General Issues

What academic freedom do I have? What about students?
Academic freedom and intellectual diversity have been hallmarks of the ethic of The Ohio State University since it opened its doors in 1873.

- Ohio State welcomes diverse beliefs and the free exchange of ideas.
- Faculty have the freedom to teach, conduct research, publish research findings, and discuss in classrooms, in their own manner, any material that is relevant to the subject matter as defined in the course syllabus.
- Neither students nor faculty should be disadvantaged or evaluated on the basis of their political opinions.

With academic freedom comes correlative academic responsibilities, including:

- Basing grades and other academic decisions solely on considerations that are intellectually relevant to the subject matter;
- Refraining from persistently introducing matters that have no bearing on the subject matter of the course; and
- Differentiating carefully between official activities as faculty and personal activities as citizens, and acting accordingly.

Faculty who have concerns about possible infringements upon academic freedom or responsibility may address these concerns to the University Senate Committee on Academic Freedom and Responsibility.

What student privacy issues should concern me?
The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) is a federal law designed to protect the privacy of students’ education records. Education records include any information or documentation that is recorded in any way, including records produced by handwriting, computer, email, audio, and video, among others. Education records contain information directly related to a student, and are maintained by Ohio State or any party acting on its behalf.

FERPA protects the privacy of students’ education records by setting forth strict instructions and limitations governing the release of information about students. See FERPA Assistance for additional information.

What is academic misconduct?
The Ohio State University’s Code of Student Conduct defines academic misconduct as “[a]ny activity that tends to compromise the academic integrity of the university, or subvert the educational process.”

The most powerful tool for preventing academic misconduct is the content that you share with your students in your course syllabus. Clearly define your expectations for the completion of coursework in your syllabus. If students are allowed to collaborate on coursework, please specify explicitly the nature and limits of authorized collaboration.

Can I deal with cases of academic misconduct on my own?
No. If an instructor believes that a student has committed academic misconduct, the instructor is obligated by University Rules to report the student to the Committee on Academic Misconduct (COAM) within one month of the alleged misconduct.
One of the primary duties and responsibilities of the Committee on Academic Misconduct is to “investigate...all reported cases of student academic misconduct, with the exception of cases in a professional college having a published honor code, and decide upon suitable disciplinary action,” and “instructors shall report all instances of alleged misconduct to the committee.” See Faculty Rule 3335–5–48.7(B)(1)).

What is the Digital Learning Initiative and its collaboration with Apple?
The Digital Flagship University represents a major initiative under Ohio State's strategic plan with particular focus on teaching and learning as well as research and creative expression. Through a collaboration with Apple, Ohio State will establish:

• a student-success initiative to integrate learning technology throughout the university experience
• an iOS design laboratory on the Columbus campus serving faculty, staff, students and members of the broader community
• university-wide opportunities for students to learn coding skills to enhance their career-readiness in the app economy

Additional information can be found at Digital Flagship.

Specific Issues in the Classroom

Is there a requirement for me to have a syllabus?
Section (A) of Faculty Rule 3335-8-19 states: Each course will have a syllabus to be provided to each student explaining how the student’s performance will be assessed. University policy further requires that it be made available to students at the beginning of, and throughout the conduct of the course.

For assistance with creating a course syllabus, please visit the Office of Undergraduate Education's Course Syllabus Recommendations website.

Am I required to take attendance for my class?
Attendance requirements are within the discretion of the faculty and the department and/or college. However, in order to comply with Federal Title IV regulations, all instructors are required to complete a “participation roster” during the first week of classes. The roster allows you to either answer “yes” the student has attended or participated in some way, or “no” the student has not attended and has not participated. Note: the default is set to “yes” so you only need to complete the roster if a student has not participated or attended. See Attendance Requirements

Can I change the time that my class meets after the semester has already started?
No instructor shall change the hour or place of meeting of any class to which a student has been assigned except with the approval of the office of the university registrar. Instructors seeking to deviate from regular university schedules by holding special sessions or examinations must receive approval from their department chair, regional campus dean and director or college dean to hold such special sessions or examinations. This rule does not apply to policies for the scheduling of final examinations which are provided in Faculty Rule 3335-8-15.

Am I obliged by the university to hold regular office hours? If so, can they be virtual, or must they be face-to-face?
During on-duty periods, faculty members are expected to be available for interaction with students, research, and departmental meetings and events even if they have no formal course assignment. Look to your respective department and college patterns of administration for expectations with respect to faculty office hours.
Am I required to administer a final exam? If so, do I have to give my final according to the university final exam schedule?

Examinations for classes taught on the regional campuses and for classes whose enrollment is exclusively for professional or graduate students registered in the colleges of dentistry, law, medicine, optometry, pharmacy, and veterinary medicine will be scheduled by the offices of the regional campuses and of the colleges respectively.

All other final examinations shall be centrally scheduled by the office of the university registrar. Any deviation must first be approved by the appropriate university official (department chair, regional campus dean and director, or college dean) in consultation with the office of the university registrar, which shall have the power to resolve all conflicts.

Generally, instructors shall announce any approved deviation to the published final examination schedule (this document) during the first week of classes and make arrangements for students with exam conflicts created by such deviation. Also, note that the university does not have a policy regarding students with multiple final exams on the same day. Upon request, accommodations may be made for students at the discretion of the instructor.

What if I want to discuss the need for students to register to vote?

As an academic institution, the university commits to a non-partisan approach to voter education and registration. Should you choose to discuss voter registration with your students, please contact OSU Votes, a non-partisan group in the Office of Student Life. OSU Votes is a student-led movement to register, educate and encourage other students to vote. The group will provide quick workshops for instructor’s classes.

Can I provide transportation in my personal vehicle for students to a class-related event?

Under state law, the driver’s insurance company assumes primary responsibility for personal injury or property damage should there be an accident. Thus, we encourage the use of university owned vehicles or to simply have students drive to events on their own (or use other transportation).

Students should be informed at the beginning of the course that the class will involve travel off campus and if it is a problem, they should reconsider taking the course, unless a reasonable accommodation can be made. It is recommended that information regarding travel requirements/expectations be included in the course syllabus.

Various Accommodation Requests

What should I do when a student requests a change in exam date or will miss a class due to religious obligations?

Our inclusive environment allows for religious expression. Please work with students to reasonably accommodate their religious obligations and observances. An individual’s request for time off from school activities to reasonably accommodate religious needs, observances, and practices is reasonable unless university operations would suffer unduly by granting the individual’s request. For information on religious holidays, visit the Interfaith Calendar website. Instructors should provide information about absences to students during the first week of classes (both orally and within the syllabus) and it is the student’s responsibility to present, at the earliest possible date, a request for the required absence to each instructor whose class is to be missed.

What should I do if a student requests an accommodation for a disability?

Should a student request an accommodation, please have the student contact the Office of Disability Services at ODS. Instructors are expected to provide appropriate accommodations to their students in collaboration with the staff of Disability Services. Instructors also assist students in arranging for note takers, help facilitate the exam accommodation process, and collaborate with students and Disability Services staff to make sure course materials are accessible.

Most students’ accommodations are administered through Disability Services, but when instructors provide accommodations themselves, they must implement the appropriate accommodations correctly. Instructors should not guess or predetermine what students may need without a specific request for accommodations; persons with disabilities have the right to choose not to use accommodations, and in exercising that right, they accept the resulting outcomes.
Am I required to provide exam accommodations to students with disabilities who request it?

Yes. The Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Section 504, as well as the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), protect students with disabilities. These laws require that qualified students with disabilities get equal access to an education, including exam accommodations.

Disability Services determines appropriate accommodations for Ohio State students in consultation with several entities. Decisions for accommodations are based on medical documentation, assessment of the students’ functional limitations, and students’ clarification about specific needs and limitations.

How can an instructor know that the student truly has a disability and needs accommodations?

Instructors may ask students to provide a letter verifying that they have registered with Disability Services. Such students, if registered, will be given a verification letter by Disability Services. Remember, due to confidentiality requirements, the specifics of a disability cannot be disclosed without express student permission.

What should instructors do to assist students who have difficulty in their classes? What should instructors do when they suspect a student may have an undisclosed disability?

Many instructors may feel uncomfortable recommending that a student use Disability Services. However, some students who could greatly benefit from accommodations may not be aware of this option. When instructors suspect a student is experiencing academic difficulties because of a disability, privately sharing their observations with the student may be beneficial. Although it is ultimately the student’s choice to disclose a disability to Disability Services, a referral to the office can lead students to explore this means of assistance.

What happens when a student is called to active military duty?

When students who are reservists or members of the National Guard are called to active duty, please be aware of the university’s policies regarding at military service.

Complaints and Disruptions in the Classroom and On-Campus

What should I do to address disruptive, threatening, or discriminatory behavior in the classroom or elsewhere?

Faculty members are empowered to set expectations that the classroom will be a place of respectful discourse free from harassment and threats, and faculty may manage the classroom accordingly.

If you see or are made aware of behavior in the workplace or on campus, including in the classroom, that creates a concern for your safety or that of others, call 9-1-1 immediately.

For additional information on addressing disruptions, the Office of Academic Affairs Guide to Assist Disruptive or Distressed Individuals provides information and resources.

Can I disenroll a student in my class for being disruptive?

After an investigation, including consultation with the instructor and the student in question, the chair (or other appropriate administrative official) may disenroll a student from a course if the student presents a clear and present threat of bodily harm or injury to the instructor or fellow students, or, after warning, continues to engage in disruptive conduct, either of which results in impairment of teaching or learning processes.

If, after attempting to resolve the difficulty by informal means, the department chair (or other appropriate administrative official) deems disenrollment necessary, the affected student shall be notified in writing. The notice shall be delivered by hand or sent through ordinary mail to the student at the last address supplied.

Copies of the disenrollment action shall be sent to the dean of the instructional college, the dean of the student's college, the office of the university registrar, and the office of student affairs. The student may appeal to the executive vice president...
and provost or designee for waiver of disenrollment, provided the appeal is filed within ten days of the disenrollment action. The executive vice president and provost shall make final determination on the appeal within seven days. See Faculty Rule 3335-8-33.

**What should I do if I receive a Buckeye Alert while teaching a class?**

To aid in communication to students, faculty, and staff, downloadable fact sheets and posters about how to respond to Buckeye Alerts can be found at Public Safety website.

Buckeye Alerts, sent via text message, are issued when it is determined that the campus community needs to take immediate action to remain safe. Such instances could include, but are not limited to, an active shooter or a severe weather event. The Alert may contain specific information and action you should take, such as Shelter in Place (“Stay away from windows. In a lecture hall or classroom, shut, lock or barricade the door. Do not allow access to anyone other than police or any public safety official”) or Run. Hide. Fight (“If you can get out, run: escape or evacuate. If you cannot get out safely, find a place to hide. Turn out lights and lock or barricade doors. As a last resort if your life is at risk, fight with aggression to disarm or incapacitate the aggressor.”)

**Sexual Misconduct and Relationships**

**What should I do if I believe I have witnessed sexual misconduct or a student informs me that he or she has been harassed or assaulted?**

Faculty and staff are in a unique position to assist those who report sexual misconduct, including sexual harassment and assault. Faculty and supervisors also have the duty to report instances of sexual harassment of which they are aware. Report such incidents to the Title IX Coordinator or Deputy Coordinator in Student Conduct or Human Resources via phone, email, or in person. For additional information on how to respond and whom to contact, please visit Title IX.

**Can I date or have a relationship with a student?**

Romantic and/or sexual relationships between faculty/staff/graduate associates/undergraduate TAs and students cannot continue whenever the university employee has supervisory, teaching, evaluation, advising, coaching, or counseling responsibilities with the student. The person in the position of higher institutional authority has the responsibility to eliminate the conflict of interest. The conflict of interest must be eliminated in a way that minimizes potential for harming the person with lower institutional authority. Alternative academic/supervisory arrangements must be made to avoid being in a prohibited relationship; if acceptable alternative arrangements are not feasible, the relationship cannot continue. Individuals in positions of power must be aware that romantic or sexual relationships with students are fraught with danger for exploitation and pose a legal risk to both the individual and the institution.

**What should I do if a student has a complaint about me or my course, and we cannot resolve it ourselves? Under what circumstances should I refer a student to the University Ombudsman?**

The university gives students several options for filing complaints and grievances, depending upon the context of the situation and the level of the student.

In the academic context, undergraduate and graduate students are advised to resolve any dispute or grievance with the person or persons most closely involved – starting with the course instructor. If that step does not produce an acceptable result, the student is advised to work with the department and then the college.

If the complaint is not resolved to satisfaction, students are encouraged to file a grievance with the office of undergraduate education or the graduate school.

In the non-academic context, turn to your department and college POA for assistance. In addition, you should communicate with your department chair or associate dean for academic affairs.
Political and Personal Financial Activities

Can I participate in political activities on university time?

University staff and faculty members are encouraged to fully and freely exercise their constitutional right to vote, as well as express their personal opinions regarding political candidates, issues, local, state and national programs, initiatives and referendums. However, as employees of a public institution there are restrictions on exercising these rights in a manner that suggests university endorsement of a cause or candidate.

As an employee of the university, it is inappropriate to either participate in political activities or solicit participation of others in political activities, either during normal business hours or at any time when using university assets. For specific guidelines, please visit Guidelines Regarding Political Activity by Employees of the University.

Can I use university resources for my personal gain? Can I use university resources to campaign for a candidate or issue? What is meant by “university resources”?

Faculty are to “refrain from using [university] resources for personal commercial purposes or for personal financial or other gain. Personal use of university computing resources for other purposes is permitted when it does not consume a significant amount of those resources, does not interfere with the performance of the user’s job or other university responsibilities, and is otherwise in compliance with this policy.” See Responsible Use of University Computing and Network Resources.

Moreover, faculty are restricted from using their university position, university facilities and resources, or the university name in any form that suggests institutional endorsement.

University resources include, but are not limited to, telephones, duplication services, cash, campus mail, computing equipment, OSU email accounts, and any other equipment, supplies, space and vehicles.

Additionally, the university name, logo, insignia, or other identifying marks must not be used in any announcement, advertising matter, publication, correspondence, or report in connection with personal or unofficial activities of employees.

Can I accept compensation/honorarium for work outside the university?

The university encourages faculty to participate in external consulting and professional activities that align with the strategic mission of the college for which they work. As a general rule, the proportion of a faculty member’s professional effort devoted to consulting should not exceed one business day per week. Any approval for outside work remains within the discretion of the department chair and/or dean. Faculty members should avoid any conflict or appearance of conflict and commitment between consulting and university responsibilities. In particular, the disruption of formal instructional activities because of external activities must be avoided.

When accepting compensation, such as an honorarium, for one’s external work or professional activities, such leave must fall within the requirements of the paid consulting policy and/or vacation leave policy and Ohio State cannot pay for travel, lodging, and food. Please review your respective Department and College Patterns of Administrations for additional requirements and limitations.

Faculty with administrative appointments have additional obligations. Faculty with administrative responsibilities (e.g., center directors, chairs, assistant and associate deans, associate deans, deans) are prohibited from accepting honorarium or other types of compensation (other than travel expenses) for consulting/work conducted for an entity external to Ohio State when the external work activities overlap with the faculty member’s administrative responsibilities.

Please see the Faculty Paid External Consulting Policy and Faculty Conflict of Commitment Policy for disclosure and approval requirements.

Can I assign a textbook or other teaching aid that I authored for my class?

Should a faculty member wish to use a textbook or other material that is authored by the faculty member and the sale of which results in a royalty being paid to him or her, such textbook or material may be required for a course by the faculty member only if (1) the faculty member’s chair/program director and dean or designee have approved the use of the textbook or material for the course taught by the faculty member, or (2) an appropriate committee of the department or college reviews and approves the use of the textbook or material for use in the course taught by the faculty member. Sales of such items shall not be conducted directly between a faculty member and a student.