Classroom Management of Non-Academic Misconduct in the Remote Environment

Transitioning Student Conduct to a Remote Environment

While our teaching, learning, and student engagement methods have changed to facilitate remote instruction, our policies governing these interactions remain the same. The university is committed to providing a safe and inclusive experience for all our students, faculty, and staff. The Undergraduate Calendar and non-academic misconduct policy already address many behaviors that might become an issue remotely. This document highlights some common inappropriate behaviors, observed particularly during synchronous sessions, and how instructors might successfully manage and remediate these.

What constitutes non-academic misconduct?

The University of Guelph's policy on non-academic misconduct sets expectations regarding student conduct as members of the University of Guelph community. The policy applies to all student non-academic behaviour on campus and to students who are engaged in University programs off campus, with the exceptions stated in the policy. The policy covers behaviour related to diversity, integrity, learning inside and outside the classroom and safety. It does not include plagiarism and other types of academic misconduct.

Like any other class, students in remote classes are bound by this policy. Common examples of non-academic misconduct associated with remote instruction include, but are not limited to, harassment, disruption, and intimidation. It should be noted that obstruction and interference is also covered by the academic misconduct policy. The primary responsibility for managing the classroom environment rests with individual instructors. Students who engage in any prohibited or unlawful behaviour that results in disruption of a class or other supervised academic activity may be directed by the instructor to immediately leave the instructional area until the incident can be satisfactorily resolved. Persistent disruptive behaviour may result in a formal allegation of non-academic misconduct under Student Judicial Policy.

Non-academic misconduct in the remote environment

The remote environment can present unique classroom management challenges due to the nature of engagements and learning. Human interactions are tricky, and they are even more so in remote environments. When people cannot see or hear one another, and they are constrained by the time lag between messages, it is easy to be misunderstood. Students may feel more disconnected, confused, and anonymous in the remote environment, which can lead to difficult or inappropriate behaviours. Students may be familiar with engaging and conversing in online environments, but their online communication preferences may not be appropriate in your course. Students may make unintentional mistakes due to navigating the different expectations, norms, and approaches of each of their courses. The approach of instructors in these situations should be to educate and pre-emptively remediate these behaviours.

Strategies to Prevent Classroom Management Challenges

The following strategies can help to create a classroom learning environment that encourages active and respectful interactions. When students know what is expected and what steps they need to take, they experience less frustration and anxiety - these emotions are common causes of difficult behaviours. When students feel connected to their peers and instructor, and feel supported, they are less likely to initiate or participate in disrespectful or inappropriate behaviours.

Strategy	Ideas, Approaches, and Additional Resources
Inform and Educate: Communicate clear expectations for behaviour and participation	Provide a list of expectations, or involve students in creating class norms or ground rules. Think about what is negotiable vs. non-negotiable. Consider drafting expectations around: How students should interact with you and with their peers (e.g., appropriate discussions, peer feedback) Use of course technology (e.g., language, sharing, confidentiality, appropriate use of functions on synchronous platforms - chat renaming, microphone, video) Be clear about how violations will be dealt with and consequences, including following UofG's Policy on Non-Academic Misconduct. Communicate expectations in multiple formats: on Courselink (e.g. announcements), in the syllabus, and during any synchronous sessions.
Provide structure and routine	Establish a weekly routine, with consistent dates/times that materials are posted, assignments are due, feedback is given, how students can reach you Update students with weekly announcements and checklists noting what they should be doing and key dates Be transparent with why you are asking them to follow the guidelines/routines you have set out
Cultivate community and build positive relationships	Get to know your students and provide opportunities for them to get to know each other (e.g., ice breakers, using students' names) Provide regular opportunities for students to interact with you and with each other (e.g., in pairs, small groups) Use active learning strategies
Be present and provide support	Monitor students' progress. If students are not participating in class activities or assignments, contact the student privately. Tell students how and when you will communicate with them, and how they can contact you (mode and availability). Ask students to share any relevant needs, challenges, and requests with you early in the course. Model course engagement. For example, if you have a discussion board, be active, present and post strategically. Gather regular anonymous feedback from students about how the course is going and ideas they have to improve the course

Use synchronous platform settings (e.g. Zoom) to manage interactions	Mute students' audio/video (mute all) Control the chat (allow who participants can chat with) Automatically save the chat to ensure you have a record of interactions Control the option for students to rename their Zoom name

Additional Resources:

5 Ways to Connect With Online Students, Darby, F. (2020). The Chronicle of Higher Education.
Effective Online Communication, Learning and Teaching Office, Ryerson University
How Important is Instructor Presence in Online Classes?, Spielmaker, A. (2018)
Building Community and Managing the Classroom, Yale Poorvu Centre for Teaching & Learning
The Core Rules of Netiquette -- Excerpted from Netiquette by Virginia Shea
Etiquette & Expectations: OpenEd, University of Guelph

Managing Difficult Situations or Behaviours

Difficult Behaviour	Potential Responses/Solutions
Offensive remarks and disruptive behaviour (e.g., inappropriate comments, inappropriate screen names, bullying)	Intervene quickly and supportively so that the other students know you are involved and that they are being protected. In a public setting, rely on formality. Respond to the question or issue in a general way; do not be drawn in by personal comments or challenges. Have a private discussion with the student to try to ascertain the reason for their behaviour. Refer to UofG's Policies on Non-Academic Misconduct and Academic Misconduct (Obstruction and Interference).
Challenging the instructor's authority or credibility (e.g., they answer questions addressed to you, contradict you, stage a "mutiny" among the students, publicly question aspects of your course or pedagogical approach)	If it happens in a public forum, respond quickly in a general way to the substance of the concern, without acknowledging the hostility behind it. Follow up with the student privately to discuss the issues or concerns that the student may have. Acknowledge their opinion and their desire to improve the course or their learning experience. State your own opinion clearly and add context that the student may not be aware of. Establish credibility and authority by providing background information about yourself and sharing your expertise in videos/messages throughout your course.
Off-topic participation (e.g., ignoring the general	Intervene quickly by briefly summarizing key points, and ask follow up questions to steer the student back on track (e.g., "What you said

direction of the discussion, raising issues that are only tangentially related to the topics under discussion)	about X is interesting. How would you respond to [student's] comment about Y?") Acknowledge the student's comment and share a connection to upcoming content or opportunities to discuss that topic, "This is an interesting point—we may be able to take it up later, in week 5."

General guidelines for responding:
- Deal with difficult situations immediately and without exceptions. Be consistent in your response.
- Emotion and intent can be difficult to discern. If something is unclear, ask for clarity.
- Whenever possible, give students the benefit of the doubt. Be respectful and patient. Many students do not realize that they are being rude or inappropriate.
- Rely on formality. Formality in online communications signifies seriousness, clarity and firmness to students.
- Consult with your Chair or Dean when appropriate.

Campus contacts and additional resources:

Office of Teaching and Learning – Martin Williams, Director: martin.williams@uoguelph.ca
University Secretariat – Kristin Ingoldsby, Judicial and Privacy Officer: k.ingoldsby@exec.uoguelph.ca
Student Housing – Kristin Lennan, Residence Behaviour and Wellness Manager: lennank@uoguelph.ca

Managing Difficult Behaviours in the Online Classroom, University of Victoria
Managing "Difficult" Students In the Online Classroom, Ko, S.
Difficult Online Students, Zellner, A. (2014)