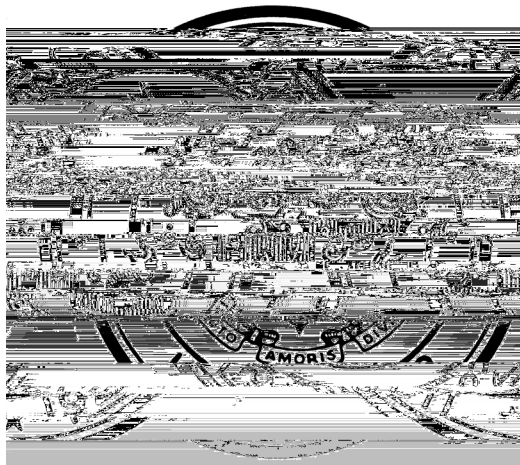


# CLASSROOM PROTOCOLS

## NOTES AND RESOURCES

### FOR SKIDMORE FACULTY



Skidmore College

Preface

Classroom Protocols



Things to keep in mind about students:

While we recognize that students have a wide range of interests, goals, and expectations, we also note common patterns in the way students interact with faculty.

1. Students tell us over and over, as beginning-year students, that they expect college to be much more challenging than high school, and they expect long academic work hours. They also expect their peers to be seriously involved, both inside and outside the classroom, in academic work and discussions.
2. Some also tell us, by the end of the first year or even earlier, that the challenges turned out not to be so different from those they faced in high school, that “getting by” with reasonably good grades is easy at Skidmore, and that they are disappointed in their peers’ intellectual commitments. Some students point out such disparities with a degree of disappointment, some with a sense of relief, some with a mixture of these emotions.

- many of our students use drugs and alcohol, and the effects of this on student academic focus and commitment are a serious topic for all of us to explore;
- they often require adult guidance on identifying academic, personal, and professional goals. Many students expect their parents to be involved in academic advising and decisionmaking processes.

The list could go on, of course. In recent years, members of the Student Affairs staff have focused



topics, when applicable. This encourages transparency and helps to establish a learning environment;

- x avoid making assumptions about the group memberships of students; instead, rely on self-identifications;
- x attend professional development workshops to learn and/or refine related competencies and skill sets.

#### Course Design and Pedagogy

- x review

x



In compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, it is necessary to provide students with disabilities meaningful access to all college programs and activities and to the individualized accommodation necessary for them to have an equal opportunity to succeed.

By faculty legislation, faculty must inform students about the process of requesting accommodations on their syllabus. A disability statement such as the following will establish a line of communication and indicate to students that you are open to discussing their need for accommodation:

Skidmore College is committed to supporting the learning goals of all students in our diverse community. If you have a documented barrier to learning or think you may have a disability, please consult with Meg Hegener, Associate Director of SAS and Coordinator of Student Access Services ([mhegener@skidmore.edu](mailto:mhegener@skidmore.edu)). Accommodations are approved by the coordinator following a review of students' documentation. If you are approved for academic accommodations, please provide your letter of accommodations to me early in the semester or as soon as you are approved so that we can proactively coordinate implementation. Academic accommodations based on disability cannot be granted by individual faculty. For further information, please call (518) 580-8150 to contact Student Academic Services in Starbuck Center.

## Student behavior patterns and the classroom

These comments focus more closely on various behavior patterns that may frustrate faculty and the motivated students in a classroom. With increasing frequency, Skidmore students themselves have been expressing frustration with some of the class-related behavior patterns that both faculty and motivated students find distracting, demoralizing, and unfair to the many diligent students who want to give ~~our~~ their attention to their studies.

### The tone and nature of faculty and student relationships

Clearly there is a wide spectrum of how faculty and students define their interactions, and no single approach to formality, informality, partnership, or accessibility can describe what is effective for different personalities and different disciplinary ~~ures~~. The one recommendation that we have heard from faculty is for the instructor to let the students know how he or she hopes to interact with them. If there once existed some degree of ~~defined~~ relationship between college students and faculty, that has long since evaporated. We have found that many students are eager, or at least receptive, to having the faculty member let them know how to interact with them. Faculty can do some of this directly as the course begins, though the faculty member's consistent modeling of the expected relationship is probably the most effective way to convey expectations to students. It may be that students need to be taught ~~how to~~,  
for example,

- x how they should address the faculty member;
- x where the faculty member falls along the spectrum of "expert," "guide," "educational partner," or



model of classroom experience different from that of merely doing what ~~ants~~ when one wants.

- x While some may claim that students who do not attend and participate in classes are only hurting themselves, we should be mindful of the ways lack of participation may harm the broader educational environment. According to the ~~obvious~~ of more motivated students and the perception of many faculty, the poor attendance of some students can drag down the morale of the academic experience for other students. Motivated students also sometimes feel that the poor attendance of some students is unfair, even if there may be grade penalties for poor attendance. In any case, a potentially good group dynamic can be impaired by the spotty attendance (and lack of preparation) of some number of students. Faculty have often voiced the same concern ~~because~~ of the effect on their own morale. They sometimes even feel responsible for bringing the missing students up to speed ~~later~~
- x Many Skidmore faculty do consider the students' attendance as important to the individual and collective course experience. It is common for faculty to give some weight in the grade to attendance or to participation in general. For example, it is common to see syllabi that dock the grade according to an explicit formula after the third, fourth, or fifth unexcused absence. Other faculty take a stance that ~~is~~ students' perception, less negotiable than this, in that the student is warned of impending failure after the third absence (or some other benchmark). One advantage of the precipice approach to attendance, in contrast to the sliding-scale of consequences, is that the definitive failure point is less likely to lead to negotiations and ambiguities in the minds of students. Students who are already inclined toward irregular attendance tend to use the sliding scale

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## Extended periods of absence

Every semester some number of students (sometimes with parent involvement) request fairly long periods of time away from classes. This usually happens because of a physical or emotional illness and less often because of a planned event of importance to the family. Such requests have

the myriad reasons that some students (and too often their parents as well) provide for leaving early and returning late. The final exam schedule is a particular point of challenge.

The Faculty Handbook makes it clear that students must observe the times of and places for their scheduled exams. The issues are maintaining a serious commitment to the full academic calendar (a big morale issue), fairness to all students (equality of ~~convenience~~ or inconvenience), and the integrity of the exam processes (nearly every year we have a cheating incident made possible by students taking the exams at different times). Faculty need to be explicit about the exam schedule, exam integrity, what ~~students~~ will be expected to demonstrate on the exam, and how much time will be allowed for the final (if fewer than the usual three hours).

Of course, faculty themselves need to honor the entire academic calendar if we are to expect the same from students. A few points to consider:

- x By faculty legislation, "written final examinations may not be given in whole or in part prior to the scheduled examination period." Although individual instructors have every right to schedule quizzes, hourly exams, and ~~written assignments~~ at the times they deem appropriate during the semester, final exams ~~and those more cumulative and culminating tests which can be construed as "final" in nature~~ should be reserved for the final exam period. The final exam period may also be used to ~~schedule noncumulative exams, critiques, and projects.~~ The goal is to preserve the last several weeks of the semester for instructional time and allow students to handle their end-of-semester load in a thorough and responsible manner.
- x Skidmore policy does not allow the scheduling of events during Study Days that would distract students from study and review opportunities. Faculty may not hold exams and final presentations during this period. Review sessions to prepare for exams are acceptable as long as they are not mandatory. Additionally, curricular and ~~co-curricular~~ activities that are not directly related to academic work should not be scheduled by any department, program, office, or committee.
- x The Monday and Tuesday prior to Thanksgiving are instructional days. Faculty thus should not cancel class or excuse absences during this period. Making special exceptions puts pressure on faculty colleagues to do the same and dissuades students from adhering to the full academic calendar.

Student participation and accountability

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behavioral structures until the point at which the student internalizes such commitments. Our experience is that the vast majority of students in serious academic trouble, including those who are disqualified from further study at Skidmore, have plenty of intellectual ability and may reward the faculty's extra educational efforts.

It is important, of course, to help students feel involved in and responsible for the courses they are taking. This is undoubtedly the most important aspect of classroom accountability. Faculty sometimes express frustration that some students repeatedly come unprepared to class and seem to feel no embarrassment about being an uninformed and uninvolved warm body. Motivated students often object to what they perceive to be special treatment of students who are not meeting classroom responsibilities. Faculty have the right to expect all Skidmore students to take full advantage of their academic opportunities and to meet the standards and expectations set forth by the faculty.

#### Respect, civility, and politeness

The large majority of Skidmore students act in a civil, respectful manner toward one another and toward the faculty. Students also usually understand that dialectical exchanges and disagreements in and outside the classroom are an important dimension of the life of the mind in a college environment. It can no longer be taken for granted, however, that all college students will act with respect and civility. Every member of our community, not least of all the faculty, has the right to expect civil discourse in the exchange of ideas and perspectives. Faculty are encouraged not to ignore or be intimidated by a student who does not observe an appropriate degree of respect (allowing, of course, for the disagreements and frustrations that all individuals experience and have the right to express). Faculty should confront inappropriate behavior, when possible addressing it outside the classroom but in a secure setting (for example, in one's office but with the knowledge of neighboring colleagues). If faculty need advice or help with a problematic student relationship, they should consult with a department or program colleague, their department chair or program director, the Associate Dean of the Faculty, the Student Academic Affairs, Office of Academic Advising staff, or with the Dean of Students Vice President for Student Affairs. These offices and colleagues will be glad to offer strategies or even to meet with the faculty member and the student if the faculty member desires.

#### Disruptive or threatening student behavior

Skidmore has some experience with what seems to be increasing across the nation's college

In some extreme cases of disruptive and/or disrespectful student behavior, it may be necessary for an instructor to request that the student be placed on a “behavior contract” that clearly delineates the instructor’s expectations and the consequences of failure to meet them or that the student be withdrawn from the course in order to ensure the educational rights of other students, to protect the personal and pedagogical rights of the instructor, or to protect the personal or academic wellbeing of an individual student. Such a request is handled through a deliberative process involving the instructor, department chairperson or program director, and the Associate Dean of the Faculty for Student Academic Affairs.

As described in the Student Handbook, formal charges of sexual and gender-based misconduct are investigated by the Title IX Coordinator and brought before an Administrative Hearing Board. Questions about this process may be directed to the Title IX Coordinator.

### Academic integrity and the ethics of scholarship

Academic integrity is another area in which today’s college students generally need instruction. One cannot assume that students will know about the different resources and discovery processes available in different academic areas, how to use these resources with discrimination, how and when to move ahead with one’s own ideas, the rules of evidence and research, the usefulness and limits of research, and the ethical implications of research.





work. If one makes this clear at the outset of the course and explains why the course assignments move along according to a desirable intellectual pattern and developing skills, students will generally rule out the possibility of attempting to hand in late work. If the faculty member does hear a serious extenuating reason, he or she might decide to accept the one late assignment but then make clear to the student that any late work in the future will not be accepted. This unambiguous practice can actually reduce or eliminate the faculty member's monitoring of assignment deadlines.

- x the grade of "Incomplete," according to longstanding Skidmore principle, is supposed to be used rarely and only for the student "who has diligently completed a substantial amount of the course work but who, because of serious and unforeseen academic, medical, or personal difficulties, has been unable to complete the work for the course" (quoted from the section on "Grades" in the [Skidmore College Catalog](#)). Each semester the Committee on Academic Standing (CAS), during its biannual review of student academic records, expresses concern that some number of Incompletes depart from this practice because of misplaced sympathy on a faculty member's part. In other words, the student awarded the Incomplete has not been diligent, has not completed most of the course work, and seems to have no serious extenuating circumstance. Sometimes, in fact, the student has hardly ever been involved in the course and still receives the opportunity to complete the work. The CAS is concerned about the (eventual) awarding of credits and grades to students under these circumstances and about the fairness to other students whose records are up for review with respect to minimum continuation standards;
- x a student has the right to be informed in a timely and clear manner of the basis for the evaluation of their academic performance in a course, and a student is entitled to fair, equitable treatment in their academic relationships with members of the faculty. In most, if not all instances, the College expects any misunderstanding regarding grading will be resolved informally, either in writing or in discussions, between a student and an instructor.
- x legislation in the Faculty Handbook says that no grade, once it is turned in to the Registrar, may be changed

Students who wish to question their grade should do so soon after notice of the grade has been given. They should request an explanation of the grade from the course instructor, who holds final responsibility for his or her grading criteria and judgments. If, after consultation with the instructor and the department chairperson, the student believes the grade reflects a severe bias or unfair practice on the part of the instructor, the student may present evidence to the Committee on Academic Freedom and Rights (CAFR). Note that CAFR does not have authority to change a grade, but the committee can consider inquiries, complaints, and formal charges of violations of academic freedom and rights related to grades. If the CAFR recommends that a grade be changed, and the instructor concurs, a petition to change the course grade can be submitted to the Committee on Academic Standing (CAS). According to the CAS Operating Code, "on rare occasions a grade change request comes to the CAS as the result of a CAFR decision. The CAS implements these decisions when the faculty member concurs with, or does not oppose, the grade change request (even under these circumstances, the instructor retains full authority over the grade.)"

## Handling the student ratings and "long" forms (formerly, "evaluations")

Faculty continue to re-examine the structure and purposes of the student ratings. In the current system, each course must be rated both by the short form supplied by the Dean of the Faculty and Vice President for Academic Affairs Office and by whatever longer form the individual departments or programs use. Students are sometimes skeptical about the effect of their ratings of faculty; they are also concerned that faculty may connect the student's name with their forms. It is a useful practice to let students know that the forms are important to the faculty as they assess their teaching efforts and that the forms are considered in promotion and tenure processes. It is also useful to let students know exactly how the forms will be handled and to assure them that the faculty member will not be able to connect comments with individual students.

Many faculty administer the forms the last class day. Note that faculty should never handle the completed short or long forms but should have them collected and returned to the department or program office by a member of the class or another appointed person. Faculty should never view the long forms until the student name has been removed and until after grades have been submitted. We also strongly advise that faculty leave the room when course rating forms are being administered. Students sometimes complain that the faculty member's presence adds an element of pressure to the process, making it seem less confidential.

## Office hours and advising

There is no Skidmore standard for the number of faculty office hours each week, though usually we mention 3-5 hours per week as a benchmark, with other hours by appointment. [Faculty Handbook](#) (Part I, VII.C5) on academic obligations mentions that "Faculty members will post and observe regular office hours for consultation and guidance of students and will report those hours to the department Chair."

## Academic advising

The Office of Academic Advising is committed to supporting and enhancing a strong academic advising system and views advising as an extension of teaching. Staff in the Office of Academic Advising regularly conduct conversations with faculty about the quality and status of advising at Skidmore. We need to determine the most compelling means of bringing students and faculty together for advising, how advising enriches the students' academic and personal experience (according to student as well as faculty perspectives), how advising fits into faculty workloads, what credit and recognition faculty might achieve for good advising, how we might assess the quality of advising and improve its effectiveness, and how we will integrate

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other credit



and implementing academic policies, curricular goals and advising resources. The Office collaborates with Student Academic Services to provide support services for students. In addition, the staff addresses academic problems or dispute resolution, and handles interactions among faculty, students, and parents.

### Career Development Center

Among its many functions, the Career Development Center provides students and faculty with explicit information on links between a college education and careers and professions, graduate school information, and a vast library of internship possibilities.

### The Counseling Center

While staff in the Counseling Center must hold in confidence their counseling interactions with individual students, the staff can provide informed general advice to faculty who believe they are working with a student facing a temporary or chronic emotional difficulty. Staff can also give advice on making an effective referral to the Center.

### Other Resources

There are so many other resources available to help faculty with academic and classroom related issues that the list could go on at great length. Among the many areas to be mentioned in this context are:

- x The Philip Boshoff/Writing Center