

Response Guide for Difficult Student Situations

The [Student Care Team](#) developed this guide to inform response to difficult situations that may occur in and outside of the classroom. Keep in mind that there will be variables which direct faculty and staff to an appropriate response. This is not an all-encompassing list, nor are you expected to deal with these situations alone. Utilize the campus resources recommended throughout the document.

Faculty and staff are often the first point of contact for many student issues. Departments are encouraged to develop standards on ways to handle these situations. Use this guide as a springboard to begin communication about difficult student situations.

The Student Care Team recommends that faculty review the issues in this document and include a statement about appropriate classroom behavior in your syllabus in order to proactively address these situations. If there is no threat, often the best approach is to deal with these instances in a supportive and structured manner.

Familiarize yourself with campus resources and policies:

- [Code of Student Conduct](#) to determine what constitutes a violation of behavioral standards.
- [Students in Distress Folder \(PDF for printing\)](#) for a flow chart and contact information for University resources. [An HTML only version of the information on the Distress Folder is available.](#)
- [Classroom Disruption Policy](#)

When dealing with a difficult student situation:

- Don't personalize the situation: take a breath and look at the situation as objectively as possible.
- Identify the specific behavior of concern.
- Avoid creating an adversarial relationship where there is no room for movement.
- Look for the educational opportunity. An educational conversation from a University official can have a lasting impact on a student. Look for the opportunity to dialogue about the situation.
- Maintain professional communication.
- Address inappropriate, disruptive, or concerning behavior from the beginning. If you have a concern, do not wait to see if it happens again.
- Use "I" statements:
 - "I am happy to discuss this/speak with you about this matter, however (see "a" and "b," below)."
 - "I hear that you are frustrated, however: (see "a" and "b," below)."
 - "I recognize how frustrated you are and I want to work with you. We need to take a step back for a minute so we can look at this situation together."
 - "Repeat the statement calmly two times. The third time, add, "I am going to end this conversation. I do not.... (see "a" and "b," below).
 - A. "I do not/will not speak with another adult who is yelling (cursing, etc); and/or
 - B. as an educator, I do not/will not speak to someone who uses vulgar/crass/inappropriate/disrespectful language."
- Maintain records of interactions with difficult students.

Self-Harm / Suicide Ideation Situations

Issue	Recommended Responses	Resource(s)
<p>SELF HARM/SUICIDE IDEATION</p> <p>Ex: Student writes in an essay that he/she is depressed and no longer interested in living</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If it is during regular office hours, contact the Counseling Center. • If you are able, walk the student to the Counseling Center for an urgent consultation. • If it is not during regular office hours, contact University Police and provide them with the information. • Officers can contact housing staff and the Dean of Students, or perform a well-being check on the student to verify that they are okay. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Counseling Center • University Police • Dean of Students Office 852-5787 or dos@louisville.edu
<p>SELF HARM/SUICIDE IDEATION FROM FORMER STUDENT OR APPLICANT</p> <p>Ex: Student writes in a request for recommendation letter or application personal statement that if he/she is not accepted into desired program, he/she is depressed and no longer interested in living.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Call local police department to request a well-being check. If the person of concern lives locally in the 7-County region, you may contact the Centerstone Adult Crisis Line anonymously as long as you have phone and address for person of concern. They will send officers to do a well-being check. • You may also follow up with the Dean of Students Office with information so that any previous contact with former student can be reviewed and family can be contacted as necessary. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Centerstone Adult Crisis Line 502-589-4313 • Dean of Students Office 852-5787 or dos@louisville.edu

Threatening Situations

Issue	Recommended Responses	Resource(s)
DIRECT THREAT Ex: Student sends an email that he/she is going to harm you.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Call University Police/911 immediately. • If you are face to face with a student who is threatening you, remain in an open area with a visible means of escape until the police arrive. • Do not touch or crowd the student. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • University Police
PHYSICAL THREAT Ex: During a heated debate in class a student gets upset and threatens to harm another student	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stop class and call the University Police. • When you provide University Police with the details of the situation, they will advise about next appropriate steps. • The University Police will file a report, investigate the situation, and inform the Dean of Students Office. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • University Police • Department Chair
IMPLIED THREAT Ex: Student informs you in an email that you will be sorry for not changing their grade.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Politely respond to the email and ask for clarification about what is meant by "you will be sorry." • If the student is in the room when they make an implied threat, you may ask the student to leave the room or tell the student you are ending the conversation if you feel comfortable. • Depending on the severity of the threat and your level of concern, you can contact University Police. • The police can refer the situation to the Dean of Students Office depending on the level of severity. • Inform your supervisor of the situation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • University Police • Dean of Students Office 852-5787 or dos@louisville.edu • Supervisor

Difficult Behavior Situations

Issue	Recommended Responses	Resource(s)
<p>VERBALLY AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOR Ex: Student becomes emotionally agitated and is yelling at you</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Calmly inform the student that there is an expectation for professional communication between students and faculty, and that the current behavior is inappropriate. • If the student is able to respond to this information positively, then the conversation can resume. • If the student continues to act inappropriately, tell the student you will continue the conversation at a time when the student is able to communicate without yelling. • You may also suggest that the student take some time to reflect about the concern and send you an email. • You can then respond to the email. • If the student is unwilling to calm down and continues to yell, calmly exit the situation and dismiss class if in session. • If the student continues to follow you, inform the student that you will contact University Police. • Call University Police if necessary. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inform the department chair or supervisor of the situation • Depending on the severity, submit a report to Dean of Students Office/Student Care Team 852-5787 or dos@louisville.edu • Failure to comply with a directive by the faculty in this situation could be a violation of the Code of Student Conduct • University Police
<p>AGGRESSIVE STUDENT DEMAND/REQUEST Ex: Student is aggressively accusing you of not communicating clear expectations for an assignment and is demanding aggressively that you change the grade.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask the student to please discuss this in a calm manner and state you would be happy to listen. • An option that some faculty use in regards to grade conversations is to require all students to wait 24 hours or to meet during office hours. • Listen to the concern and attempt to understand the student's rationale. • If you prefer, you could ask the student to submit concerns in writing. • Another option would be to tell the student that you are going to think about the request and will respond after you have had time to evaluate the request. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department Chair • Faculty Colleagues • Student Grievance Officer

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You could consult with your department chair or other faculty in your department. • You can then decide how you will inform the student of your decision- email or at the next class meeting. • If you consulted others before making the decision, you could choose to inform the student that your decision was made after consulting with the department chair or other faculty. • If you think it is appropriate, you can modify the grade or give an alternative assignment. • If you think the expectations were clear, inform the student that the expectations were clear and the grade will stand. • Follow department protocol for academic grievances/complaints. • If the student persists in the argument, inform the student that the next step would be to contact the student grievance officer. 	
<p>UNPROFESSIONAL BEHAVIOR IN AN INTERNSHIP/CLINICAL SETTING</p> <p>Ex: A student's internship supervisor reports that they are not performing professionally</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When students perform poorly in placement, the treatment and service needs of clients and/or the needs of the agency become a priority. • Agency supervisors and faculty should act to protect the needs of the client and the agency to ensure appropriate action is taken. • Faculty and community supervisors need not, and should not, be therapists to students. • Practicum education does not permit automatic access to students' private lives or personal problems. However, students may voluntarily share personal information to explain or rationalize their poor performance. It is important that this personal information be treated confidentially, and that students be provided with guidance, resource information, and concerned support. • Document the problematic behavior and be sure the student is aware of 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practicum / Internship Supervisor • Director of Field Education • Supervisor • Professional Standards • Code of Student Conduct

	<p>the problems that you are identifying.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At the same time, the student may need to be relieved of their client responsibilities, based on the collective judgment of supervision staff and faculty. • A written action plan could be developed for the student to follow to improve the standard of the student's performance. • A deadline should be included for demonstrating the desired behavioral changes, along with a notation that failure to demonstrate sufficient improvement may result in a failing grade in the practicum course. • These guidelines should be given to the student in writing, with copies also distributed to the practicum supervisor, the practicum faculty, and the director of field education. • The student, the practicum supervisor, and practicum faculty should all sign and date the Action Plan. • In some instances, students may be asked to write a reflection paper, demonstrating the student's understanding of the problem and the plan to remediate the situation. • Students may also be given additional practice assignments to demonstrate particular skills needed to satisfy the educational expectations. 	
<p>GENERAL DISRESPECT Ex: Cursing or inappropriate, but not threatening, language; either in person or in an electronic communication.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If the student is belligerent or blatantly threatening, call University Police. • If there is no blatant threat, calmly remind yourself first that, depending upon the student's background, not all students will perceive crass or vulgar language to be inappropriate. • Take a breath (literally). Don't escalate with the comments or take them personally. This is difficult, but the comments are meant to provoke. Handling them calmly may diffuse the situation and teach the 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If the student is belligerent, call University Police 852-6111 or 911

	<p>student that this is not an effective means to get what is desired.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Try a non-threatening, non-escalating “I” statement, such as: "As an educator, I do not speak to someone who uses vulgar/crass/disrespectful language. Let’s discuss this as adults." Repeat this calmly if needed. • An alternative would be: "I find your statements/email, etc., to be vulgar/inappropriate/disrespectful and others may, too. An alternative way to effectively communicate your point would be" • This is a teachable moment; take advantage of it. Most students will calm down enough to have a conversation if you start with statements meant to de-escalate their frustration. 	
<p>FACE COVERINGS/MASKS IN CLASSROOMS</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If a student attends an in-person class without a face covering/mask, then the faculty member should calmly and politely inform the student that there is a requirement that all students wear a face covering/mask in class • The goal is to deescalate the situation and to remember our mission to educate. Inform students of changes to the Code of Student Conduct that require them to follow public health guidelines in a pandemic. • If a student does not have a face covering, tell the student where one can be provided. Allow the student to return to class after the student gets a mask. • If the student simply does not want to wear a face covering/mask, the student should be asked to leave the class. • If a student is requesting an ADA accommodation, have the student contact the Disability Resource Center (DRC). If DRC staff approve a mask accommodation, they would notify the instructor. • If the student refuses to leave the class because they are not willing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students can get a mask in the Admissions Office located in Houchens, Student Activities Center W301, and Student Activities Center W310, during the first week of classes. • Failure to wear a face covering/mask in the classroom will result in the student not being permitted to enter the class and an unexcused absence for that class period. • Inform the department chair or supervisor of the situation. • The Disability Resource Center (DRC) does not intend to provide any exemptions for mask/face coverings on campus. The accommodations the DRC plan to offer are participating in online courses or wearing an

	<p>to wear a face covering/mask, the faculty member could contact the department chair or designee to come to the class and intervene. The chair could request that the student go with them to a location outside of the class to discuss the situation while maintaining physical distance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Depending on the time of the class and the severity of the situation, the faculty member could cancel the class and ask all students to leave. Each department or college can establish standards for when the faculty member can cancel the class and the procedure if the department chair is unreachable. If the faculty member cancels the class, they need to inform their department chair and the Dean of Students Office as soon as the class is over. As a last resort, should the student continue to refuse to leave the class, the faculty member could call University Police. Any incident in which a faculty member contacts ULPD because a student refuses to leave a class when they will not wear a face covering/mask, should be reported to the Dean of Students Office as soon as the class is over. 	<p>alternative style face covering.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Depending on the severity, submit a report to Dean of Students Office (502) 852-5787 or dos@louisville.edu. Failure to leave the classroom when asked by the faculty member could be a violation of the Code of Student Conduct. Call University Police (502) 852-6111.
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Difficult Communication Situations

Issue	Recommended Responses	Resource(s)
<p>ANGRY OR DISTURBING WRITING Ex: Student writes assignment in which they warn of potential harm to self or others, or writing reflects a sense of deep desperation or rage.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If you suspect the disturbing features of the writing are literary (suggest another word: fictional or literal) in nature, discuss your concerns directly with the student. Listen carefully to ascertain any serious threats or hostility. Consult with your department chair or a colleague. Contact the Dean of Students Office to explain the situation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inform the Department Chair Dean of Students Office 852-5787; dos@louisville.edu University Police 852-6111 or 911

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Send the piece of writing to the Dean of Students Office for review of possible Code of Student Conduct violations; Student Care Team referral. • Contact the University Police if you think there is a concern for harm to self or others. 	
AGGRESSIVE ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION Ex: Email to entire class or faculty member	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If a direct threat is involved, call University Police. • Tell your supervisor. • Contact the Dean of Students Office to explain the situation. • Send the communication to the Dean of Students Office for review of possible Code of Student Conduct violations; Student Care Team referral. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supervisor • Dean of Students Office 852-5787; dos@louisville.edu • University Police 852-6111 or 911
INAPPROPRIATE COMMUNICATION Ex: A student in your class expresses that they have romantic feelings for you.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clearly communicate to the student that you are not interested in having an inappropriate classroom relationship with them. • Tell the student to stop the inappropriate communication. • If you must meet with the student in your office keep the door open and have a responsible third party present. • Report and document the situation to your supervisor. • Explain that if the behavior continues, the incident will be reported as sexual harassment. • If inappropriate communication continues, contact the Dean of Students Office to report sexual harassment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supervisor • Department Chair • Dean of Students Office 852-5787; dos@louisville.edu • Sexual and Discriminatory Harassment Prevention Training (PDF)

Well-Being Concerning Situations

Issue	Recommended Responses	Resource(s)
<p>DEATH OF A FAMILY MEMBER Ex: A student emails you about missing class due to the passing of their family member</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Empathize with the student. • Remember it is up to your discretion to allow makeup work. • Know that you might receive an absence notification from the Dean of Students office. • If you feel the student is having a particularly difficult time, report to the Dean of Students Office as a student of concern 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dean of Students Office 852-5787; dos@louisville.edu
<p>MENTAL/PHYSICAL HEALTH CONCERN Ex: Spacing out, looking high, falling asleep in class, appearing disheveled or malodorous, or speaking incoherently</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If someone clearly needs immediate medical attention (examples: passing out, hallucinating, incoherent, intoxicated, or agitated/belligerent), then immediately call University Police/911. • Otherwise, speak to the student after class. • If a student appears spacey or confused or even somewhat disheveled, but otherwise appropriate, start by letting them know they just seem a bit more tired than usual and ask if the student has had enough sleep. The answer will help direct you to appropriate campus resources. • If the student appears high or stoned, but is not disruptive, ask if the student is feeling well. If the student replies “yes,” but clearly does not appear well, tell the student and recommend that you walk together to talk to Campus Health Services. • Some cultures have different norms for disguising body odor. This only needs to be addressed if it’s clearly disrupting class or if the student smells of alcohol or appears disheveled. • If a student was sleeping in class, consider asking if the student was up late with work/school/family. The student’s response may 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • University Police • Counseling Center • Campus Health Services

	direct you to appropriate campus resources.	
CONCERN FROM SOMEONE ELSE Ex: A student tells you that they are concerned about another student's well-being	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask the student what the student has heard from the other student and why they are concerned. • If the student is in your program or you know the student, you can discuss the concerns with the student. • Depending on the severity, contact the Dean of Students Office to report the concern. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dean of Students Office 852-5787; dos@louisville.edu
STUDENT DEALING WITH FOOD INSECURITY OR HOMELESSNESS Ex: A student discloses to you that they have not eaten recently because they cannot afford food	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss this with the student in an environment that they feel comfortable. • Empathize with the student. • If you feel comfortable refer or give information to the student about the Cardinal Cupboard, Coalition for the Homeless, or LouieConnect.com • Contact the Dean of Students Office to report a student of concern. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cardinal Cupboard • Coalition for the Homeless • Dean of Students Office 852-5787; dos@louisville.edu
LGBTQ STUDENT Ex: A student comes out to you and seems to be having difficulty with their sexuality or gender identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Empathize with the student. • Refer the student to the resources that would address the problems that they are presenting. • If you are unaware of specific issues refer the student to the LGBT Center or the Dean of Students Office. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LGBT Center • Safe Zone Training • Counseling Center • Dean of Students Office 852-5787; dos@louisville.edu

Policy Involved Situations

Issue	Recommended Responses	Resource(s)
<p>TITLE IX Ex: A student disclosing to you that they were sexually assaulted</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take the matter seriously and listen to the student intently. • Remain neutral. • Do not minimize the situation, but also do not panic. Minimizing could make the student feel unimportant. Panicking could scare the student away from sharing. Remain calm and collected. • Ask the student if they feel safe. • Be empathetic without promising outcomes, judging, or expressing opinions. • Do not promise confidentiality - Inform the student that you are a mandatory reporter. Explain that you will have to report to the Title IX coordinator or the Deputy Title IX Coordinator in the Dean of Students office. Inform the student that they should expect to hear from the Dean of Students Office. • Report to the Dean of Students Office. • Provide the student information through the Resource Guide or about PEACC and the Counseling Center. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dean of Students Office 852-5787; dos@louisville.edu • PEACC (confidential) • Counseling Center (confidential) • Campus Health Services (confidential)
<p>ACADEMIC DISHONESTY Ex: A student's paper seems to have been plagiarized</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The authority of academic dishonesty falls within the individual academic units of the University. • Speak to your supervisor or department chair to discuss the policy or process for this situation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supervisor • Department Chair
<p>FREE EXPRESSION Ex: A student tells you that you are violating their first amendment right of free speech</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students might write about challenging ideas in papers; however, unless you believe the student is a danger to self or others – grade the student by the rubric, not whether you agree with the content. • Ensure the student knows that their free speech will not be sanctioned, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student Code of Conduct • Dean of Students Office 852-5787; dos@louisville.edu

	<p>but if other violations occur, such as disruption, that might be sanctioned. (i.e. a student may go to a speech and hold a sign, but cannot yell and shout causing a disruption)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refer students to the Student Code of Conduct. • If student has a strong passion for advocating, introduce them to groups on campus that focus on advocacy efforts. • If the student has questions about what they can and cannot do, refer them to the Dean of Students Office to discuss. 	
<p>NO CONTACT LETTERS</p> <p>Ex: Two students in your class have a no contact letter between them</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review the letter or discuss with the student the expectations. • Remember that with a no contact letter there is not a proximity component. • There should be no group work or no comments/responses on blackboard between these students. • Contact the Dean of Students Office with any additional questions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dean of Students Office 852-5787; dos@louisville.edu
<p>COMPASSIONATE WITHDRAWS</p> <p>Ex: A student approaches you about applying for a withdraw due to mental health reasons</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be prepared to fill out instructor remarks sheets, the student should provide these sheets. • Instructor remarks include information regarding last date of attendance, progress in coursework, and if you support a withdrawal. • If you have any questions, contact the Student Advocate in the Dean of Students Office. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student Advocate • Dean of Students Office 852-5787; dos@louisville.edu