

Recommended Practices for Instructors

Open communication is essential to maintaining a culture of mutual respect, academic integrity, and continuous improvement. The purpose of this document is to reiterate best practices that ensure the following:

- Instructors feel supported with guidance on responding to student concerns about a class.
- Administrators communicate a framework that supports both students and instructors.
- Student concerns about a class are taken seriously and reviewed by department and/or college leadership.

Guiding Principles

- Professionalism and respect are shared responsibilities of all instructors, teaching assistants, and students.
- Concerns about a class are best addressed when communicated through appropriate channels.
- Timeliness is critical: Promptly addressing concerns builds student trust and reduces the likelihood of escalation.

Practices for Instructors

Proactive Practices

Clarify Course Content Early

- Explain the rationale and/or relevance of all course content in the syllabus to learning outcomes in introductory lectures.
- Outline expectations for civil discourse and conduct in the course syllabus in early class sessions. Instructors may want to use the [ArtSci Academic Freedom and Classroom Discussion document](#) as a guide. Further, Texas A&M's "Student Rules"—which establish shared expectations of rights and responsibilities for students and faculty—provide additional guidance, including [Rule 2](#), [Rule 20](#), [Rule 21](#), and [Rule 24](#) related to classroom behavior and mutual respect.

Communicate Regularly

- Remind students how the course content aligns with student learning outcomes and the course description as each new topic is introduced.
- Remind students that there are opportunities to share questions and concerns (e.g., in office hours).
- Provide additional opportunities for students to share questions or concerns (e.g., mid-semester check-ins, anonymous feedback).

- Check-in with teaching assistants who are facilitating discussions or supporting instruction.
- Recognize that any communication with students or instructors could be recorded and/or shared.

Collaborate and Document

- Review curriculum expectations with department leadership.
- Document student concerns, student communications, and any incidents that take place in class.

Build a Support Network

- Identify a mentor and/or administrator to consult if issues arise.

Managing Communication and Student Interaction

In-Class Interactions

- Avoid debating individual students over personal beliefs or perceived “facts.” Direct one-on-one arguments in class can escalate tensions, distract from course learning outcomes, and create the impression that certain voices are being singled out. When objections are raised, thank the student for contributing and reframe the moment as an educational opportunity. For example: *“Thank you for raising that perspective. Let’s use this as a chance to consider the broader range of viewpoints scholars and practitioners have examined. I’d like to hear you and then I ask that you listen to me.”*
- Refocus the discussion on the value of education, critical inquiry, and exposure to multiple perspectives. Emphasize how examining different viewpoints contributes to learning outcomes and prepares students to engage thoughtfully with complex issues beyond the classroom.
- When responding to a student enrolled in the class who is challenging course material relevance, instructors may use this script: *“Please document your concern in writing and send it to my department head, copying me, for review. If any change to the syllabus or lesson plan results, we will communicate these to the class fully and as quickly as possible.”* Provide the student with the department head’s email address.
- Students not registered for the class may not sit in or “audit” without explicit written permission of the instructor and the department head per [Student Rule 2.1](#). Only current students at Texas A&M may be given such approval. In the event an individual not registered for the class enters a classroom and refuses to leave, contact campus police at (979) 845-2345 or by accessing the [campus police website](#).

Handling In-Class Interactions that Escalate from Respectful to Disruptive

- According to [Student Rule 21](#), classroom behavior that seriously interferes with either (1) the instructor’s ability to conduct the class or (2) the ability of other students to profit from the instructional program will not be tolerated. If a student’s actions or speech escalates to this level, class can be canceled for the day or the student could be asked to leave.
- It is valuable to consider possible scenarios and plan for how you might recognize when the line is crossed by a student, prior to an actual situation occurring. Planning might allow you to calmly provide separate warnings that give clarity to consequences and potentially deescalate the interaction.

Adapted from *Recommended Practices for Instructors* prepared by the College of Arts and Sciences 2025.

1. *Example above: “Please document your concern in writing and send it to my department head, copying me, for review. If any change to the syllabus or lesson plan results, we will communicate these to the class fully and as quickly as possible.”*
2. *As I indicated, you can provide your concern in writing to the department head. Now, we need to return to the goals for today’s class. Please refrain from interrupting again.*
3. *I have spoken to you three times, and your interruptions are affecting this learning environment, please leave.*

Email Interactions

- When responding to a student concern via email, consider using this script: *“I am forwarding your concerns to my department head, who is copied above. If any change to the syllabus or lesson plan results, we will communicate these to the class fully and as quickly as possible.”*

Threatening Email Interactions

- If an instructor receives an offensive or threatening email, seek support from the department, college, university, or [campus police](#) ((979) 845-2345) immediately. Any such emails should be forwarded to an administrator without responding to the email. The university has a response team that swiftly provides support for instructors who are feeling threatened.

Notifying Leadership

- Summarize any student concerns and accompanying incidents in an email to the department head within 24 hours.
- Do not engage in further e-mail or in-person discussions after the concerns have been forwarded to an administrator. Let students know: “Department and College administrators are reviewing your concern.”
- Teaching Assistants should notify any supervising faculty immediately with a summary of the concern and any documentation.

Practices for Administrators

Manage Departmental Response Process

- Best practices for responding to student concerns include: (1) establishing a clear mechanism and expectation for instructors to notify departmental administrators, (2) promptly informing the College about classroom incidents, and (3) creating a process for reviewing student concerns.
- Determine an acceptable timeline for responding to students and instructors. Recommended: Less than 24 hours for acknowledgment. Formal response before next class meeting if possible, and not more than three days.

Communicate with Instructors

- Explain the departmental process and timeline for reviewing student concerns with instructors.
- Provide guidance on appropriate timelines for referring to or responding to student concerns.

Provide Opportunities for Instructors to Share Best Practices

- Topics may include syllabus design, crafting student learning outcomes, communicating curricular relevance, addressing sensitive topics, facilitating student discussions, and addressing student concerns.
- Assign mentors to instructors as requested.