

## Student Performance: Conduct and Behavior Concerns

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During instruction, higher education faculty should properly address matters of concern related to student performance, conduct and behavior. History is a reminder of this persistent issue. Therefore, a logical sequence of decision-making can be followed to recognize, distinguish and act upon these concerns. Applications for a flowchart tool are offered.

During instruction, higher education faculty customarily face matters of concern related to students' performance, conduct, and behavior. This is not a recent happening in collegial livelihood. Conflicts between students and faculty have persisted since medieval times. Unruly behavior, apathy and other challenges to faculty's patience were commonly reported throughout our country's 1700s and 1800s. The past century was marked by student protests over living conditions, challenges to the social order, and growing pains from enrolling an ever-diverse student body (Holton, 1995). "Generation X" came to college and left an imprint on classroom decorum. Now "Generation Y" or the "Millennials" impress upon the faculty their high expectations for engaging learning experiences (Garner, 2007). So regardless of the day, faculty have needed a repertoire of teaching skills to address different learning and classroom management concerns. The present task is to efficiently and effectively instruct a great number of students who possess a wide-range of needs and goals (Gappa, Austin & Trice, 2007).

Students' performance, conduct, and behavior concerns can be addressed by following a logical sequence of decision-making that leads to resolution. It starts with recognizing a concern as presented by student, observed by instructor, or reported by peers. This is followed by higher education faculty distinguishing the matters: performance equates to achievement, conduct has to honor and order, and behavior is meeting expectations. Correct distinction facilitates appropriate action within the context of institutional policy and administrative procedure. Throughout the process, clear communication is essential between the educator and students.

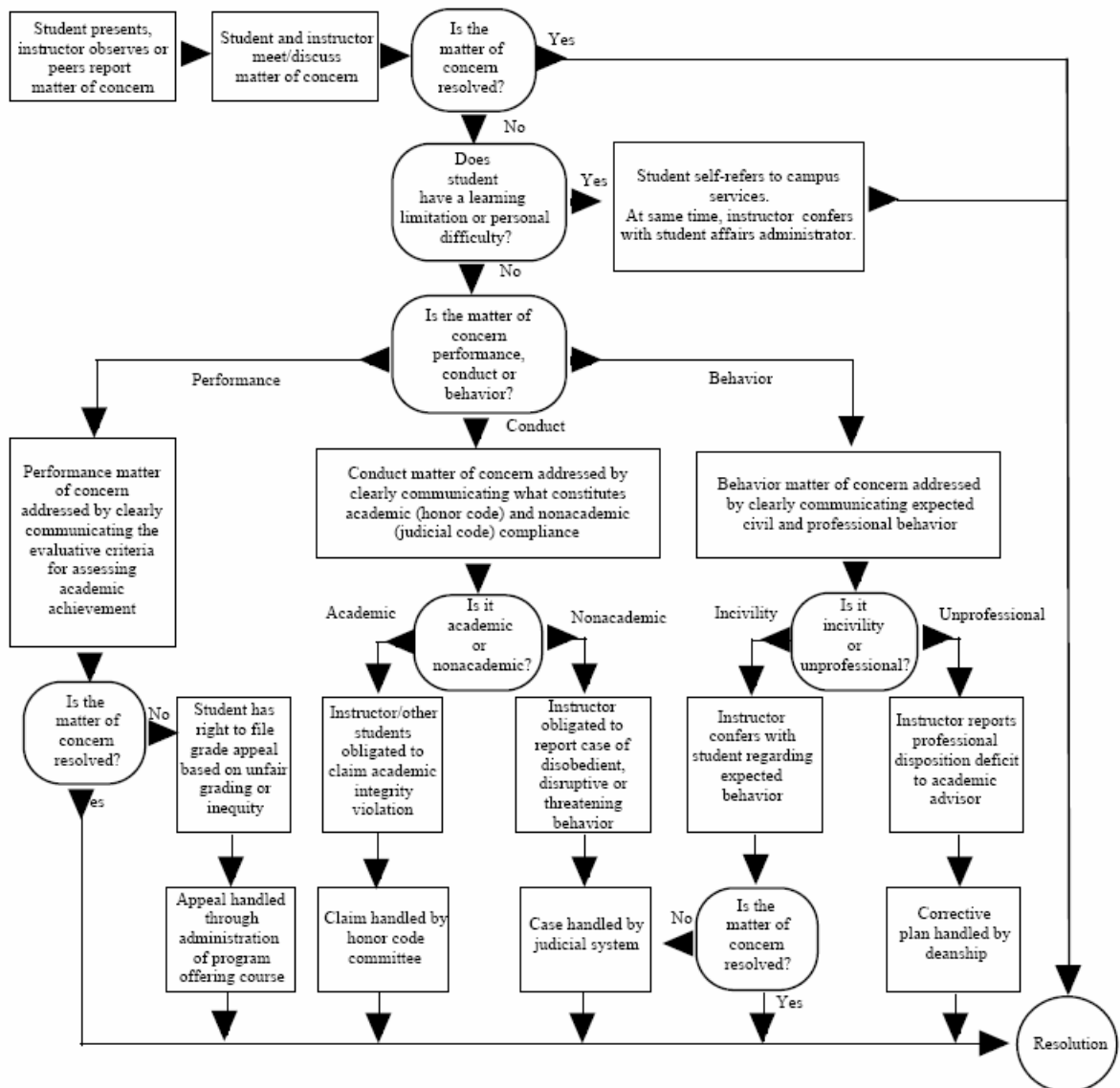
The sequence of decisions is depicted in a flowchart (see Figure 1). Initially, the faculty and student can discuss the matter of concern in hopes of resolving it. Relevant campus services can be suggested especially for the student who self-admits a learning limitation or personal difficulty. At this point, it would be wise for the instructor to confer with the student affairs administrator. This address will hopefully resolve the issue. A persistent concern, however,

requires the educator to carefully distinguish between performance, conduct and behavior before further action. Although each matter is based on a standard, one concern can overlap another. Student performance is based on a standard of *academic excellence*. That is, the faculty effectively instructs and properly assesses students' achievement. Student conduct is based on *honor and judicial codes*. The university or college maintains academic integrity and manages disruptive behavior. Student behavior rests on the instructor establishing a *behavioral norm*--expectations of civility and professional disposition. These standards are written in institutional policies and overseen by respective administrators who can recommend resources for instructors and students. The educator is bound to and articulates the standards in professional practice. So too, students achieve through academic excellence, comply with the honor and judicial codes, and behave within the expected norm. The following sections further explain the sequence of decision-making while addressing performance, conduct and behavior concerns.

### Performance

Student performance involves the development and display of skills and abilities during a course of instruction. By adhering to the standard of *academic excellence*, the higher education faculty effectively teaches the subject material and assigns fair grades whereas students furnish evidence of competence and achievement. Confusion sets when the instructor mixes student performance with conduct. The latter has to do with academic integrity—that is, students being responsible for their own work. It would be a misstep for the educator to judge and reprimand a suspected case of test cheating. Conduct also pertains to lawfulness and cooperativeness on the part of the student. Likewise, the faculty might confuse student performance with behavior. The latter has to students acting civilly and according to the professional expectations. For instance, the instructor should not lower a class grade simply because the student reports to class late or does not wear appropriate dress unless

**Figure 1: Addressing student performance, conduct and behavior concerns**



those behaviors are stated in evaluative criteria for the course. Academic excellence requires the educator to be clear in assignment descriptions, assessment scoring, participation policies, and stated consequences for absences and late work. Likewise, the faculty needs to apply evaluative criteria and equitably.

To ensure academic excellence, guidelines are available (Brinkley et al., 1999) along with proffered collegial advice (Burke, 2006) for effective teaching and evaluating. Institutions have training programs on instructional enhancement and peer mentoring. More specifically, though, the instructor can communicate academic excellence via the course syllabus. The document not only details how performance will be assessed but also the roles of students and the educator

during the process. Any inconsistency in such communication will corrupt the assessment agreement that the syllabus represents (Habaneck, 2005). A crucial tool incorporated in the syllabus is the rubric, a scoring tool describing evaluative criteria and the levels of performance that lead to different scores (Simon & Forgette-Giroux, 2001).

So to properly address student performance concerns, the faculty should focus on each student achieving the evaluative criteria for the course as specified in the syllabus. If necessary, a student can appeal how his/her performance was evaluated. The academic appeal is based on either improper grading or alleged inequity by the instructor. This procedure is generally handled by the administration of academic program offering the course.

## Conduct

Student conduct involves compliance with policies on academic integrity, college life order, and the protection of individuals and property. By adhering to the *honor and judicial codes*, the college or university respects and ensures individual dignity, honesty, and reputation. Students, in turn, obligate themselves in ways compatible with the institution's educational function. Conduct concerns require two points of clarification. First, academic misconduct differs from its nonacademic version. With academic misconduct, there is a violation of integrity and it takes the forms of cheating, plagiarizing, stealing, or lying. This matter necessitates an honor code review. Nonacademic misconduct is a violation of order and takes the forms of disobedient, disruptive or threatening behaviors. This matter necessitates a judicial code review. As a second clarification, nonacademic misconduct is not the same as uncivil or unprofessional student behavior of which the latter is further described in the next section. Nonetheless, the faculty needs to be clear on academic and nonacademic conduct compliance.

To ensure honor and judicial codes, the instructor can follow guidelines on academic integrity (Dannells, 1997) and maintenance of classroom orderliness (Kuhlenschmidt & Lane, 1999). Many institutions have orientations on academic and nonacademic conduct. More specifically, though, educators can communicate the honor and judicial codes through the course syllabus. The document should describe academic integrity and its compliance. The higher education faculty could have students sign a pledge to that effect. If plagiarism detection systems are in use, this should be made known to the students. For nonacademic conduct issues, the syllabus can outline the appropriate course of action in individual cases of disobedience, disruption or threatening behavior. This could involve emergency response by campus law enforcement.

So to properly address student conduct concerns, the instructor should focus on each student being compliant with academic integrity as well as judicial behavioral criteria as contained in university policy. In an academic-related incident, the educator is obligated to file claim to the honor code committee. Such a claim could also be filed by other students in the same class. For nonacademic matters, the faculty should refer the case to the judicial system. Either claim or case is handled through the judicial affairs office that is customarily overseen by student life deanship.

## Behavior

Student behavior involves thinking, expressing and acting during the course of schooling. Adhering to the *behavioral norm*, the faculty has expectations of students' civility and professional disposition. Students, in turn, meet expectancies through their demeanor and exemplarity. A behavioral norm is essential for students studying a discipline and, for many, completing a professional program. By this standard, the instructor has to recognize incivility as inappropriate class behavior and distinguish it from nonacademic misconduct. The educator also has to determine when student behavior is unbecoming of a professional in the making. Hence, the faculty must be a good communicator since many times students are unaware or uncertain of what is expected of them behaviorally.

To ensure the behavioral norm, the educator can follow guidelines for minimizing students' uncivil behavior (Perpmutter, 2004) and encouraging respect and discipline (Carbone, 1999). Crucial to this is the instructor serving as a role model and exhibiting the type of behavior expected from the students (Singham, 2005). Many institutions have established classroom decorum standards. Some schools evaluate students on professional dispositions in their field of study (NCATE, 2001). Here again, the educator can use the course syllabus to articulate reasonable behavioral expectations. In addition, on the first day of class, the instructor might ask students what they think the expected behavioral norm should be. Students are generally strong supporters of classroom decorum and internalize a sense of ownership by contributing to this standard. Once consensus is reached, the course syllabus can have an addendum of behaviors considered uncivil followed by the recognized procedure for correcting the matter. In the case of professional dispositions, students are asked to complete self-assessments through their coursework and receive faculty feedback on such behaviors as punctuality, regular class attendance, dress code, emotional management, acceptance of constructive criticism, and respectful communication.

So to properly address student behavior concerns, the higher education faculty should focus on each student meeting agreed upon expectations of civil and professional behavior. Through good personal interactive skills, the instructor can tactfully handle in-class incidents of incivility and follow-up with individual conferences. Further occurrences could be deemed disruptive and warrant disciplinary action via the judicial system. When it comes to professional dispositions, the faculty can alert the student of a cited deficit and the need for corrective action. A report is usually filed with the student's academic advisor. A persistent professional disposition deficit is usually handled by the deanship of that academic unit.

### Resolution

There are additional considerations as faculty and students work with administration toward the resolution of performance, conduct and behavior concerns:

- Incidents of concern should be documented by the instructor since that information might be requested during a grade appeal, an honor or conduct code claim, or professional disposition action;
- Information gathered and shared should be consistent with institutional policy and procedure grounded in information privacy as well as disability discrimination prevention regulations;
- All higher education faculty should be oriented to the standards, policies and procedures, however, beginning as well as part-time faculty might require mentoring on these matters; and
- Many colleges and universities recognize the important role of the student advocate or ombudsman who can assist the student through an appeal, claim or corrective action.

### Conclusion

The centerpiece to this article is a flowchart of decision-making. Obviously, the tool is useful to individuals during the course of their instruction. The flow diagram could also be incorporated into pre-service as well as in-service faculty and staff training programs. The diagram can act as a communication device between high education faculty and student affairs administrators. On a larger scale, it can act as a model of administrative operations especially during the institution's accreditation review.

The assumption has been applying the flowchart to student performance, conduct and behavior. Ironically, this sequence of decision-making can also be a humbling self-improvement opportunity for the higher education faculty. Conflict relating to *academic excellence, honor and judicial codes, and behavioral norms* might have its roots in instructors' problematic and precipitous behaviors (e.g., lateness to class, poor taste in humor, demeaning comments in class). Any proclivity for student incivility will likely be exacerbated by faculty unprofessionalism (Wale & DeLuca, 2008). There are many points within the flowchart of decision-making for students and faculty, alike, to discuss and resolve these matters.

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