

Professional Development Best Practices for Faculty

In order to instill in our students appropriate standards of comportment for the professional environments in which we expect they will work, and to model for them correspondingly appropriate behavior ourselves, we suggest that faculty consider the following “Best Practices” for instilling professionalism through classroom conduct.

1. Expectations and Consequences

Though individual faculty members may disagree about specific expectations for student professionalism during and outside of class, professors should convey, encourage, and reinforce their own set of expectations. Faculty may convey professionalism expectations for the conduct of courses by, for example, specifying them in the syllabus, discussing them on the first day of class, and/or restating them throughout the semester. Once expectations are communicated, faculty should reinforce them by establishing and enforcing consequences for not following their standards of professionalism.

2. Timeliness

Arrive on time for class, and expect students to do the same. Expect students to be in their seats with materials ready to go when class begins, and likewise be ready ourselves. Hold students to account if they are not regularly on time. Timeliness should also be enforced after mid-class breaks, for assignments, for out-of-class meetings, and in all other contexts.

3. Attendance

Clearly specify the attendance policy. Take attendance regularly. Notify students if/when they are in danger of violating the attendance policy, and impose specified sanction(s) on students who violate the attendance rules.

4. Preparedness

Expect students to be prepared for every class, and regularly convey to them this expectation. Consider calling on students, or other techniques, to ascertain whether they are in fact regularly prepared.

5. Attentiveness

Let students know that you expect them to pay attention, and not to be talking among themselves, passing notes, surfing the web, or using a cellphone during class. Speak with students who appear to be violating these proscriptions.

6. Participation and Communication

Let students know that when you ask a question you expect every one of them to be thinking of the answer, not only the one you may have called on. Expect students to use appropriate language and phraseology when speaking in class and to speak in a professionally respectful manner, not using sloppy or overly-colloquial expressions. Correct them when they do not meet these standards.

7. Comportment

Expect students to behave in class as would be expected in a professional setting such as the workplace or courtroom. For example, professors might choose to address conduct such as walking in and out of the room during class meeting hours, eating during class, chewing gum while speaking, or leaving garbage behind in the classroom. Set a model for students by demonstrating attributes expected within the legal profession. Be clear, prepared, and organized. Wear professional attire when teaching to show students what will be expected of them.

8. Technology

Although laptops can be an important learning tool, empirical evidence suggests that students who use laptops in class spend considerable time multitasking and that laptop use in class can be a significant distraction to both users and fellow students. Laptop use has been found to correlate negatively with several measures of student learning. Accordingly, professors should establish a policy regarding laptops and other technology (*e.g.*, cell phones and tablets) during class. Many professors ban laptop use altogether and report greater student concentration and satisfaction with class discussion. Others permit laptops but establish restrictions to mitigate adverse consequences (*e.g.*, use only for class-related purposes and/or sitting in a specified area of the classroom so as not to distract others). The class policy for laptops and other technology should be announced and enforced.