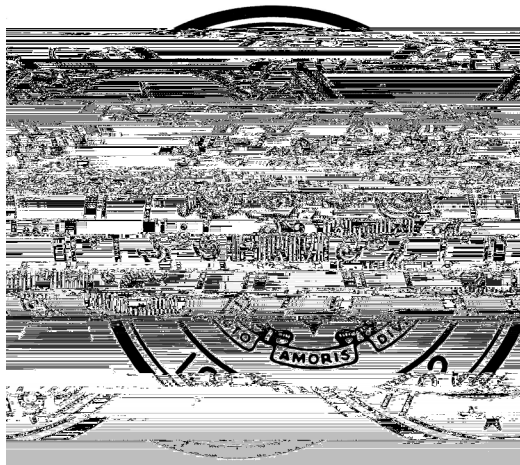


# CLASSROOM PROTOCOLS

## 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. Some pack their bags and transfer to other schools.

- 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 attention on students as emerging adults who enter a transitional state as they move across various thresholds in their intellectual and personal development. This development is seldom in a straight line; instead, college students develope Affntt lf12 ( t)-10 5s e (f)3B Tw 0[6 (s)1 (



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





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 needs 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~~,  
how they should address the faculty ~~member~~;  
where the faculty member falls along ~~the~~ spectrum of "expert," "guide," "educational partner," or ~~ar~~62 (s)-1 (t)--1 (t)pf th tpu-2 (ude)4 (x-12 (ym4 (m)-2 ( know)1 -1.1 Tc )4 (nt)-2 (s)-1 ( ne



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

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~~

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:

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.

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.

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

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If you decide to respond directly to the infraction, please ~~with~~ within the Skidmore integrity definitions and penalty guidelines. The most typical Skidmore ~~face~~ response to a



some faculty have successfully implemented a policy that simply does not allow for any late 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 objectives, 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 late work in the future will not be accepted. This unambiguous practice can actually reduce or eliminate the faculty



## 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), where 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 new electronic resources with advising and registration processes.

We treat advising as a significant part of our teaching mission, not as a mechanical process or as the advisor's giving or withholding of permission. Good advising is both information-based as well as reflective and philosophical. The faculty advisor can help the student comprehend issues of intellectual and personal growth and discover a wide variety of intellectual, personal, and career-related links beyond the student's immediate experience. A faculty advisor can also encourage the advisee to consider new opportunities and raise new questions about academic life, help the advisee clarify intellectual and personal aspirations, and help the student appreciate the relationships between liberal learning and life after Skidmore. Faculty advisors often provide specific information and broader contexts, often suggest options to be explored, and direct students to the resources they might need; however, students themselves remain centrally responsible for their academic choices.

Advising is a significant educational responsibility of all full-time Skidmore faculty. In most cases, faculty who have just joined the institution are not assigned advisees, though they may be asked to advise during their second or third year of teaching. The Office of Academic Advising works with the First Year Experience program as well as department chairs and

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other credit-bearing activities, including courses offered through the Periclean Honors Forum, independent study projects, or an interdisciplinary minor. Faculty also might recommend that students meet motivated students through Periclean Honors Forum events or other student cultural and academic organizations, participate in the annual Academic Festival, locate a stimulating internship or volunteer service project, or plan a course of study abroad. Skidmore also has a variety of undergraduate research opportunities, including the faculty/student collaborative research program during the summer and Student Opportunity Funds for projects during the academic year. The College also provides support for faculty working with students on national merit scholarships and fellowships and graduate studies. The Office of Academic Advising and the Student Academic Development Coordinator are pleased to guide motivated students toward these and other options. First-year students also might be advised to consult with the Director of the First Year Experience on a range of possibilities.

### Students experiencing academic problems

As in the case of students seeking academic challenges, Skidmore's faculty are noted for offering to help students in their classes who want to work more successfully. In their teaching and advising roles, faculty are also urged to become familiar with formal academic support services provided by the Office of Student Academic Services, which provides peer tutoring services, organizes study groups, and offers programs on enhancing study skills. The office staff also includes the Coordinator for Student Access Services. Students may also wish to consult with The Philip Boshoff Writing Center, the World Language & Literatures Resources Center, and the MCS Computing Lab.

The Office of Academic Advising also counsels many students and faculty each year regarding a range of academic difficulties. Office staff welcome inquiries or suggestions from faculty on all matters affecting students' academic lives.

An important part of Skidmore's response to students in serious academic jeopardy is the system of notices for unsatisfactory work. The Office of Academic Advising maintains an [Academic Alert form](#) for reporting unsatisfactory work to office staff as well as to the student and their faculty advisor.

While faculty are not required to use Academic Alerts, they are our only means of responding on several useful levels to students in jeopardy and our only way of knowing if students are floundering in more than one course. The notices have many times proved an effective means of getting the student's attention. The Office of Academic Advising has a carefully defined process for using the notices, depending on the student's class year (for example, usually devoting more attention to first-year students than to seniors) and degree of jeopardy (for example, making a more concerted response to students who are already on academic probation). Staff also use the notices to recommend appropriate referrals to the Office of Student Academic Services (including the Coordinator for Student Access Services), the

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## Resources for faculty

### *Department chairs, program directors, and other faculty colleagues*

A department chair or program director is, among other things, responsible for the quality of instruction in their academic unit and can often be an excellent resource, especially for newer members of the department or program. Chairs and directors are experienced faculty, and they also tend to hear about a broad spectrum of faculty teaching strategies and student responses to the various teaching efforts. Individual colleagues can often serve a similar purpose. Some departments and programs have in fact developed a coherent department culture that can help

in many of the faculty's academic processes and committees and offer assistance in developing 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.

applications for specialized post-graduation scholarships. The office also provides English as a Second Language (ESL) support and works with students with disabilities.

### *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 at Skidmore 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:

*The Philip Boshoff Writing Center*

*Health Services*

*Residential Life*

*Opportunity Program*

## Concluding reflections

Within the bounds of good sense and fairness, and within the frameworks that the faculty as a whole or the academic departments and programs have formally embraced, individual Skidmore faculty are responsible for deciding just how to conduct their courses, what materials and perspectives to include, and what educational goals are to be achieved. The suggestions contained in this document cannot and should not infringe upon that extraordinarily important principle of academic freedom or upon the many case-by-case decisions that good instructors must make in relation to their students.

With that central principle in mind, we encourage faculty to