

De-escalating Confrontations with UWSP Students Regarding the Face Covering Mandate

Created by CITL in consultation with the UWSP Counseling Center

In previous communications, the Provost has shared the initial steps (listed on the second page of this document) for addressing a student who is not complying with the face covering mandate.

If you are not able to de-escalate the situation after following those steps, use the following communication guidelines:

1. Try to **separate the student** from the class so the rest of the class does not gang up on the student and exacerbate the situation.

Example: "Let's take 5 everyone. Student, let's step outside for a second so I can better understand your perspective."

2. Take a couple of **deep breaths**. Remember what you read (and practiced in advance, right?) based on this document.
3. Be present with the student. **Reflect back to them what they are feeling with empathy.**

Example: "What I hear you saying is that you feel masks are an infringement on your rights. I understand that must be really upsetting."

4. **Repeat their options.**

Example: "However, by University Policy, your options are to get a face covering (etc.), or to complete the course requirements fully online."

5. If a student is looking for a fight, **don't take the bait** and get into an argument. That will only encourage them. If they are not responding constructively, **stop engaging.**

Example: "I know this is a difficult time for everyone. If you want to discuss this at a later time, we can. However, University Policy and my obligation to uphold it will not change. I am committed to your academic success and will be happy to support you if you choose to take this course online instead. At this time, I need to end this conversation."

6. **Walk away**, and **report** this to the Department Chair, Registrar, and the Dean of Students ([General Incident Report form](#)).

Initial Steps from “Guidance re: Face Coverings in the Classroom”

- If a student is not wearing a face covering, it would be best to quietly check to see if they forgot it or whether there is a health-related concern preventing them from wearing a face covering. If so, refer them to UWSP’s Disability and Assistive Technology Center to seek a formal accommodation.
- If a student forgets a face covering: “In this building you can go to [see office list for each building/campus location] to pick up a disposable single-use face covering. Please do so now before class starts” OR “Feel free to return to your room/car/apartment to get yours. They are mandatory in all classrooms.”
- If a student refuses to wear a face covering: “You have the option to participate in class remotely/online. I will need you to please leave the classroom. By university policy, I’m not allowed to begin class unless everyone is wearing a face covering. You are welcome to return when you’re willing to wear a face covering.”
- If a student then refuses to leave, consider taking a 5-10 minute break so that the instructor and student can speak privately, and hopefully deescalate the situation: “Unfortunately, if you refuse to wear a face covering and you refuse to leave class, my only option is to cancel today’s class for everyone and report this to the Dean of Students. This will begin a disciplinary process, one result of which may be that you are officially withdrawn from this course. At a minimum, the university will not allow you to attend future classes in person if you are not wearing a face covering.” [Faculty/Instructor should report this to the Department Chair, Registrar, and the Dean of Students ([General Incident Report form](#))]
 - At this point, the Dean of Students office will contact the student for a conversation.
 - If the student is willing to wear a face covering, he/she will be permitted to return to class. If not, he/she will either attend online or be withdrawn from the class depending on the circumstances and the result of the disciplinary process.
- If a student, having been instructed not to attend the next class in person still comes to the classroom, the faculty/instructor should consider repeating the steps above, including canceling the class again.



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