

# Frequently Asked Questions: Dealing with Underperforming Student Employees

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## RCAC progressive disciplinary model for students

The Research Computing management team has implemented a progressive disciplinary model providing the student employee the opportunity to address the problem (per Student Program Mentor/Mentee Handbooks).

- 1.) Coaching
- 2.) Verbal warning will be issued
- 3.) Written reprimand will be given outlining the incident, why the behavior is inappropriate, what needs to change, and the consequence of non-compliance
- 4.) Termination

\*Situations involving discrimination and harassment fall outside of the progressive discipline model and will result in immediate termination.

### Q1: How should I address an underperforming student employee?

A1: Address the issue in a private and constructive manner. Schedule a meeting with the student to discuss your concerns, provide specific feedback on their performance, and set clear expectations moving forward.

### Q2: What steps can I take to support an underperforming student employee?

A2: Offer additional training, resources, or mentoring to help the student improve. Provide clear guidance and regular feedback to ensure they understand their responsibilities.

### Q3: If the student's performance does not improve, what should I do?

A3: If the student's performance does not improve despite your efforts to support them, follow the RC progressive discipline model. Document the issues, discuss the consequences of continued underperformance, and give them a chance to explain their challenges.

Q4: Can I terminate a student employee for underperformance?

A4: Yes, termination may be necessary as a last resort if the student consistently fails to meet expectations and shows no improvement after appropriate support and feedback. However, consult with your HR department or supervisor to ensure compliance with relevant policies and regulations.

Q5: How can I maintain a professional and respectful approach during the process?

A5: Be empathetic and non-confrontational while discussing the issues. Focus on the behavior and performance, not the individual. Offer support and encouragement for improvement while emphasizing the importance of meeting expectations.

Q6: Should I involve other team members or supervisors in the process?

A6: If necessary, you can involve relevant team members or supervisors to provide additional insights and feedback. Collaborative input can be beneficial in understanding the student's performance from different perspectives.

Q7: What should I do if the underperformance is due to personal issues?

A7: If personal issues are affecting the student's performance, show compassion and offer support. Encourage them to seek assistance from counseling services or support programs available on campus.

Q8: Is it appropriate to give a warning before termination?

A8: Yes, providing a warning before termination is part of the RC disciplinary model. This gives the student an opportunity to understand the seriousness of the situation and a chance to improve.

Q9: How can I prevent underperformance issues in the future?

A9: Clearly communicate expectations from the beginning of their employment. Provide proper training and resources. Regularly review their progress and offer feedback. Encourage open communication so issues can be addressed promptly.

Q10: Should I document the underperformance and discussions?

A10: Yes, maintaining a record of underperformance, feedback, and discussions is crucial for tracking progress and demonstrating that you have taken appropriate steps in dealing with the situation. This documentation can be valuable if further action is necessary.

Having difficult discussions about poor performance

Having difficult discussions about poor performance with student employees can be challenging, but it is essential for their growth and development.

Remember, the goal of these discussions is not to be punitive but to support the student in their growth and development. Approach the conversation with a positive and constructive mindset, focusing on helping them succeed in their role.

The following is guidance and steps you can use to navigate such conversations effectively:

### 1. Prepare for the Discussion:

- Gather specific examples and evidence of the student's underperformance.
- Review their job description and performance expectations to ensure clarity.
- Identify areas where improvement is needed and be prepared to offer constructive feedback.

### 2. Choose the Right Time and Setting:

- Schedule the meeting in advance to give both parties time to prepare.
- Choose a private and comfortable location where the student feels at ease and can speak openly.

### 3. Use the Situation, Behavior, and Impact (SBI) Model:

- **Situation:** Begin the conversation by describing the specific situation or behavior that needs improvement. Be objective and avoid making personal attacks.
- **Behavior:** Address the behavior or performance issue directly. Focus on observable actions and outcomes.
- **Impact:** Explain the impact of the student's underperformance on their work, the team, and the organization. Emphasize the importance of meeting expectations.

### 4. Listen Actively:

- Allow the student to share their perspective and any challenges they might be facing.
- Listen attentively without interrupting or passing judgment.
- Use open-ended questions to encourage them to express themselves.

### 5. Be Empathetic and Supportive:

- Show understanding and empathy for any personal challenges the student may be experiencing.
- Offer support and assistance, such as additional training or resources.

## 6. Collaborate on Solutions:

- Work together to identify potential solutions and strategies for improvement.
- Set clear and achievable goals with a timeline for improvement.

## 7. Provide Clear Expectations:

- Ensure the student understands the expectations and consequences of continued underperformance.
- Discuss the importance of their role and how their contributions impact the team and organization.

## 8. Follow Up:

- Schedule follow-up meetings to monitor progress and provide ongoing feedback.
- Recognize and acknowledge improvements and efforts made by the student.

## 9. Document the Discussion:

- Keep a record of the discussion, including the issues discussed, the agreed-upon action plan, and any commitments made by both parties.

## 10. Seek Support if Needed:

- If the student's performance does not improve, consult with your HR department or supervisor for guidance on further steps.

## When to address poor student employee performance?

Addressing poor student employee performance should be done as soon as you notice a consistent pattern of underperformance or when the performance falls below the expected standards.

It is essential to address the issue promptly to prevent it from escalating and negatively impacting the team's productivity and the student's learning experience.

Remember that addressing poor performance should be done with empathy and a focus on helping the student improve. Provide support, resources, and clear expectations to guide them towards success. Regular communication and ongoing feedback are key to addressing performance issues proactively.

Here are some key timing considerations:

### 1. Ongoing Feedback:

- Provide continuous feedback throughout the student's employment. If you notice specific instances of underperformance, address them as soon as possible to prevent the behavior from becoming a habit.

### 2. When Performance Deviates from Expectations:

- Address poor performance when you notice a significant deviation from the agreed-upon performance expectations or job responsibilities.

### 3. As Soon as the Issue Arises:

- If a serious performance issue arises, address it promptly to prevent it from affecting the student's work, team dynamics, and overall productivity.

### 4. During a Performance-related Incident:

- If a student employee makes a noticeable mistake or an error that impacts their work or others, address the situation immediately to provide guidance and prevent similar incidents in the future.

### 5. When it Affects Team Dynamics:

- Address poor performance if it is affecting the morale, productivity, or performance of the entire team.

### 6. Before it Escalates:

- Early intervention can prevent minor issues from becoming more significant problems later on. Nipping poor performance in the bud is crucial for the student's growth and development.

### 7. After Collecting Sufficient Evidence:

- Ensure you have collected enough evidence and specific examples of the student's underperformance before addressing the issue to have a constructive and fact-based discussion.

## LinkedIn Training Resources

Addressing Poor Performers (35min): <https://www.linkedin.com/learning/become-a-better-coach-for-your-team/addressing-poor-performers?u=21108259>

How to Handle and Confronting Poor Performers (49min):

<https://www.linkedin.com/learning/how-to-handle-poor-performers/the-importance-of-performance?u=21108259>

Having difficult conversations: A Guide for Managers (59min):

<https://www.linkedin.com/learning/having-difficult-conversations-a-guide-for-managers/leadership-skills-and-mindsets-for-difficult-conversations?u=21108259>