

DISRUPTIVE CLASSROOM BEHAVIOR

“Adapted from “Reference for Faculty: Academic Integrity & Disruptive Behavior,” compiled by Sandra Rhoten, Associate Dean, Judicial Affairs, Division of Student Affairs, CSU Fullerton

Disruptive behavior can assume many forms: It may be:

- The student who talks incessantly while you are delivering a lecture;
- The student who loudly and frequently interrupts the flow of class with questions or interjections; or
- The student who becomes belligerent when you confront his or her inappropriate behavior in class.
- The student uses unauthorized electronic equipment while in class (cell phone, I pod, etc.)

It is important to differentiate disruptive classroom behavior (that which directly interferes with the ability of the instructor to teach or the ability of other students to benefit from the classroom experience) from behavior that is merely rude or uncivil. While the latter may become disruptive when it is repetitive or persistent, it usually is best addressed by meeting privately with the student to explicitly identify inappropriate behaviors and request that they cease. Students who persist in continuing these behaviors, after having them brought to their attention, risk being disciplined for disruptive behavior.

Initial Class Meeting: Clarifying expectations at the beginning of a course and explaining standards for classroom conduct can assist students in abiding by those standards. Other positive benefits include fostering an expectation among student peers concerning appropriate behavior and having a concrete and agreed upon reference point should inappropriate behavior occur later.

When you are establishing and promoting guidelines for behavior in your course, it is important not to articulate standards you are unwilling to enforce. Likewise, standards for classroom behavior should be fairly and consistently applied, otherwise, confusion and resentment may result. Please include your classroom rules in your syllabus.

STRATEGIES FOR HANDLING DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOR

Class Syllabus: It is best for behavioral standards to be published in the course syllabus and discussed the first day of class. Information should specify the behaviors that are prohibited, how you will manage behavioral issues, and the consequences that may result. Explaining why your behavioral standards are important for the course and benefit students can help students understand and abide by established expectations. A statement in the course syllabus might include: Behavior that persistently interferes with classroom activities is considered disruptive behavior and may be subject to disciplinary action. Students responsible for disruptive behavior may be suspended from class by their instructor for the day of the removal and the next class meeting. Instructors suspending students in this matter should immediately report the action to their division dean or department director.

STRATEGIES FOR RESPONDING TO DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOR

If unacceptable behavior occurs, respond immediately. Students are often slow to pick up on nonverbal behavior such as frowns or glances in their direction. It is usually best to ask the student to step outside the class or to meet with you when the class is over. Students always appreciate being able to discuss problems privately out of the hearing of other students.

MEETING WITH THE DISRUPTIVE STUDENT

Try to keep the meeting on a positive note. It is an opportunity for the student to understand the inappropriateness of his or her behavior and to develop strategies for successfully continuing in the class. In that meeting: Remain calm. This may be difficult if the student is agitated or confrontational, but your calm and reasoned response will best control the meeting. Do not take behavior and/or remarks personally, even though they may be directed at you. Disruptive behavior usually results from other life problems or a general academic frustration.

Be specific about the inappropriate behavior the student has exhibited. Describe the behavior; don't focus on the person. Explain why the behavior is a problem.

Ask questions and summarize what you hear the student saying. Respectful concern may enable you, the educator, to help the student be successful both in your class and in his or her general college experience. Focus on areas of agreement between you and the student.

PERSISTENT DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOR OR EGREGIOUS BEHAVIOR

Both of these situations may call for the instructor to immediately suspend the student from the class. In these situations, instructors may order the students to leave the class at once. If a student refuses to leave, notify him or her that the appropriate dean, director, evening supervisor, or security will be contacted to remove the student and that disciplinary action will result from this action. It is important to call upon administrators or security any time a disruptive behavior situation escalates, or when it is reasonable to interpret behavior (including oral statements) as threatening or harassing to you or other members of the class. Anytime an instructor suspends a student, Board Policy on disruptive behavior must be followed. In some cases, you will need to give the class a short break while you deal with the situation.

During the day contact your division dean, department director, or the Office of Academic Affairs, Ext. 3402. After 5 p.m. and/or weekends contact Evening/Weekend College Coordinator, Ext. 3437 or Security, Ext. 3490.

REPORTING COMPLAINT TO THE DEAN OF STUDENT LIFE

When less formal interventions prove inadequate or ineffective, it is appropriate for the instructor to initiate formal disciplinary action. Through the division dean or department director, the instructor should forward a report to the Dean of Student life, including information identifying the student, the date and location of the incident, and a summary of the incident.

The Dean of Student Life will contact the instructor to investigate the incident. He will work with the instructor to determine an appropriate remedy. Remedies include additional disciplinary action such as a five-day suspension, a behavior contract concerning the class, anger management counseling or other educational intervention, or, in more severe cases, long-term removal from the class (a student may not be removed from class permanently without the opportunity for a disciplinary hearing). Conclude by summarizing any resolution and articulating expectations for the future. Be clear that the result of continued inappropriate behavior will be cause for possible disciplinary action. It is good practice to keep notes of your meeting with the student for future reference in case the problem persists. It is also good practice to write a letter or note to the student briefly summarizing the meeting and the resolution. If the note is hand-written, always keep a dated copy.

These recommendations are based on the expectation that students can and will be reasonable if they have adequate information, clearly understand parameters, and are treated with respect. Usually, most student disruptive behavior is solved after a conference such as the one described above. However, sometimes disruptive behavior persists.

Following consultation with the instructor, the student will be required to meet with the Dean of Student Life to discuss the behavior. It is possible that the matter can be resolved administratively without further involvement by the instructor. In some cases, it is necessary to convene a formal hearing in the matter, and the instructor may be called as a witness.

DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOR OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM

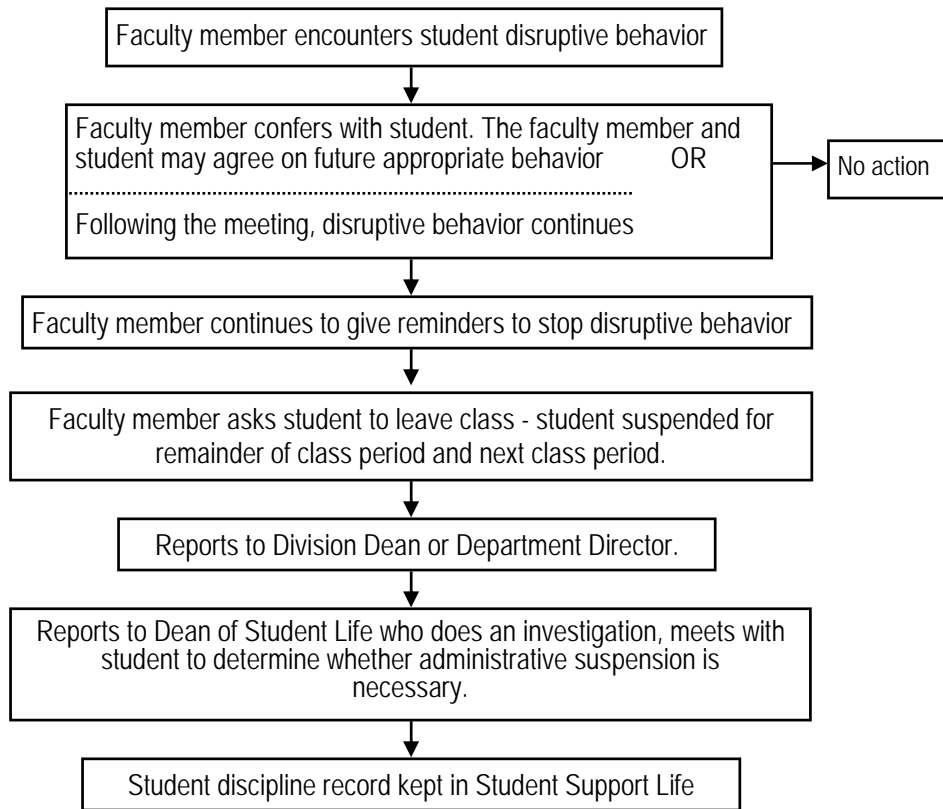
Faculty may encounter threatening, intimidating or harassing student behavior during office meetings, before or after scheduled classes, or in spontaneous meetings on campus. Should this occur, strategies for responding to the student generally are the same as those outlined in "Meeting with the Disruptive Student." Some of these include:

- Remain calm. Speak in a calm, controlled manner. This may prevent the situation from escalating or may diffuse the tension.
- If outside a scheduled meeting with the student, identify a more appropriate place and time to discuss the matter.
- Use a "time-out" to allow the student to regain composure, or explain that if the student cannot maintain composure, it is not possible to discuss the issue at this time and that a meeting should be scheduled when the student can be composed.

- If inappropriate behavior persists or is threatening, explain to the student that the Dean of Student Life or security will be called and disciplinary action initiated if the behavior does not cease. Follow through on this if the student persists.

It is important to differentiate between student behavior that is threatening or harassing, and that which is merely uncivil or rude. While the latter does not warrant the intervention of administration/security or disciplinary action, other strategies outlined above can be effective in curbing such behavior.

The Discipline Process: Disruptive Behavior



Egregious or Threatening Behavior

