

Dealing with Disruptive Students

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3 Levels of Disruption

- **Interfering** with learning environment
- **Uncomfortable** or potentially threatening
- **Imminent physical threat** to the instructor, fellow students, or themselves



Interfering

- Not necessarily threatening in nature, but interferes with the learning environment for other students
- The instructor can usually handle these situations without other interventions



Interfering - Examples

- Using cell phone during class
- Sleeping
- Monopolizing classroom discussions
- Disrespecting the rights of other students and/or the instructor
- Entering the classroom late or leaving early
- Doing homework for another class



Interfering – Suggested Responses

- Immediately deal with disruptive behavior (ignoring the behavior may cause escalation)
- If the behavior is irritating but not particularly disruptive, consider a private meeting during instructor office hours
- For behavior that must be dealt with in class, calmly but firmly inform the student that the behavior is disruptive and ask that it stop
- Continued disruption may necessitate asking the student to leave the class; if the student refuses, the next level has been reached



Uncomfortable

- If the student makes others feel uncomfortable or exhibits behaviors that may be threatening to the instructor and/or other student(s) this rises above the level of merely interfering with the learning environment
- These behaviors may initially be dealt with by the instructor, but other University resources (counseling center, SOCAT, etc.) may need to be made aware of the situation



Uncomfortable – Examples

- Refusal to leave class or follow directions
- Threats regarding grades
- Use of profanity
- Intoxication
- Verbal abuse (taunting, harassing, intimidating)
- Extreme anger
- Mention of suicidal thoughts
- Focus on death and dying



Uncomfortable – Suggested Responses

- Use a calm, non-confrontational approach to defuse the situation
- Maintain a safe distance and do not turn your back to the student
- Do not let the student get between you and the door
- Unless you are under physical attack, do not touch the student or the student's belongings



Uncomfortable – Suggested Responses

- Document all incidents thoroughly and notify your Dean/Director, Student Rights and Responsibilities, and SOCAT; call the University Police if you feel unsafe
- Know your limitations, handle the situation if you can, but don't hesitate to reach out for help
- While it is not usually necessary to dismiss class to deal with the uncomfortable situation, you may elect to do so if you feel that the situation can be most effectively resolved that way



Threatening

- The student is physically threatening to the instructor, other students, and/or him/herself



Threatening - Examples

- Verbal threats to harm oneself or others
- Physical violence
 - Shoving
 - Grabbing
 - Assaulting
 - Showing or
 - Using weapons



Threatening – Red Flags

- Violent fantasy content of writings/drawings
- Anger problems
- Fascination with weapons, fighting, combat
- Loner
- Suicidal or homicidal ideation
- Stalking
- Victim/martyr self-concept
- Paranoia
- Violence and cruelty



Threatening – Physical Indicators

- Raspiness in voice
- Repeated phrases
- Sweating (no apparent reason)
- Mouth breathing (no apparent reason)
- Tightening jaw/clenching jaw
- Weight shifting
- Fist clinching
- Target glance (glancing in direction of intended blow)
- May try to distract with furtive movement



Threatening – Suggested Responses

- If threat of physical harm is imminent, do not mention disciplinary action or police intervention
- Work to refocus the student's attention away from the situation
- Call the University Police as soon as you can safely do so, or send a TA or another student to call **"9-1-1"**
- Dismiss the class to defuse the situation
- Get Student Rights and Responsibilities and SOCAT involved



Source Credit

- Material Excerpted from Appendix M of the Virginia Tech Review Panel Report (Contributed by Roger Depue, Ph. D)
- Guidelines for Dealing with Disruptive Students (York Technical College)

