

CLASSROOM DISRUPTION ADVISORY

Classroom disruption by students is a rarity at the University. The Office of Student Conduct offers the following advice to assist faculty members who have never encountered a disruptive student, and may be unsure how to respond.

1. **Faculty members are responsible for management of the classroom environment.** Teachers (as one court recently suggested) can be compared to judges: both focus on relevant issues, set reasonable time limits, assess the quality of ideas and expression, and make sure participants are heard in an orderly manner. While their ultimate goals may be different, both judges and teachers need to exercise authority with a sense of fairness, and with appreciation for the reality of human fallibility.
2. **Classroom disruption should be seen as a disciplinary offense, as defined by the University's *Code of Student Conduct*.** The term "classroom disruption" means behavior a reasonable person would view as substantially or repeatedly interfering with the conduct of a class. Examples include repeatedly leaving and entering the classroom without authorization, making loud or distracting noises, persisting in speaking without being recognized, or resorting to physical threats or personal insults.
3. **Both students and faculty members have some measure of academic freedom.** University policies on classroom disruption cannot be used to punish lawful classroom dissent. The lawful expression of a disagreement with the teacher or other students is not in itself "disruptive" behavior.
4. **Rudeness, incivility, and disruption are often distinguishable, even though they may intersect.** In most instances, it's better to respond to rudeness by example and suasion (e.g. advising a student in private that he or she appears to have a habit of interrupting others). Rudeness can become disruption when it is repetitive, especially after a warning has been given.
5. **Strategies to prevent and respond to disruptive behavior include the following:**
 - a. Clarify standards for the conduct of your class. For example, if you want students to raise their hands for permission to speak, say so, using reminders, as needed.
 - b. Serve as a role model for the conduct you expect from your students.
 - c. If you believe inappropriate behavior is occurring, consider a general word of caution, rather than warning a particular student (e.g. "we have too many contemporaneous conversations at the moment; let's all focus on the same topic").

- d. If the behavior is irritating, but not disruptive, try speaking with the student after class. Most students are unaware of distracting habits or mannerisms, and have no intent to be offensive or disruptive.
 - e. There may be rare circumstances when it is necessary to speak to a student during class about his or her behavior. Try to do so in a firm and friendly manner, indicating that further discussion can occur after class. Public arguments and harsh language must be avoided.
 - f. A student who persists in disrupting a class may be directed to leave the classroom for the remainder of the class period. Whenever possible, prior consultation should be undertaken with the Department Chair and the Director of Student Conduct (301.314.8204).
 - g. If a disruption is serious, and other reasonable measures have failed, the class may be adjourned, and the campus police summoned. Teachers must not use force or threats of force, except in immediate self-defense. Prepare a written account of the incident. Identify witnesses for the Campus Police, as needed.
6. **The Office of Student Conduct can help** by reviewing University disciplinary regulations with you, and meeting with accused students formally, or informally. It is better to report disruptive incidents to us promptly, even if they seem minor. One of our preferred strategies is to develop behavioral contracts with students, so they have clear guidelines about what behavior is expected of them. In the most serious cases, we can suspend students immediately, pending disciplinary proceedings, or medical evaluation.
7. **Some situations may arise that necessitate additional consultation.** The Behavior Evaluation and Threat Assessment (BETA) Resource Group consists of representatives from the Counseling Center, Mental Health Service, Office of Student Conduct, and Department of Public Safety. The group is available to meet with faculty or staff members who have concerns about a student's behavior and is able to provide guidance for an appropriate response. The BETA group chair is Jonathon Kandell, assistant director of the Counseling Center and may be reached at 301.314.7658 or jkandell@umd.edu.
8. **In the event of an emergency or crisis situation, immediately contact the University Department of Public Safety – 911 OR 301.405.3333 (cellular and non-University line). The general information telephone number is 301.405.3555.**

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