



OFFICES OF THE DEAN OF STUDENTS
Student Advocacy and Judicial Affairs
University of Wisconsin-Madison

Addressing Disruptive Classroom Behavior: A Guide for Instructors

Occasionally instructors may have a student who exhibits disruptive behavior in the classroom. Disruptive behavior may include but is not limited to: yelling, being overly argumentative, and using inappropriate language. Such disruptive behavior may persistently or grossly interfere with the academic learning environment, thereby making it difficult for other students to learn and instructors to teach (Amada, p. 8). The following guidelines are intended to assist instructors in dealing with these situations. They are not intended to provide information on classroom management or to tell instructors how to teach.

NOTE: Language is important! It should be used in a de-escalating fashion. Strongly or assertively requesting the behavior to stop rather than ordering the behavior to stop might be more effective.

- Some disruptive students may have emotional or mental health disorders. While some students may be considered disabled, and thus fall under the protections of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, they are expected to adhere to the same standards of behavior as any other students. Instructors should set standards for classroom behavior early in the course and implement them for all students, in accordance with principles of academic freedom.
- Some disruptive behavior can be dealt with by the instructor in an informal manner by speaking directly with the student and setting clear expectations for further conduct in the classroom. Instructors may wish to consult with their Department Chair and/or other colleagues for help and advice in such matters. The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) should be followed in such cases and instructors should speak in a general sense about the behavior.
- Since there are a wide variety of disruptive behaviors possible, the instructor may want to discuss the student's behavior with a member of University Health Services, Counseling and Consultation staff (5-5600) and/or seek consultation from the On-Call Dean in Student Advocacy & Judicial Affairs (SAJA) in the Offices of the Dean of Students. These staff will assist the instructor in developing strategies for working with the student.
- If a student continues to be disruptive, inform the student that the displayed behavior is disruptive and request the behavior cease. If the behavior continues, request the student to leave the classroom. If they refuse to leave, University Police should be

called to remove the student (911). For such cases of repeated, blatant, and clearly irresolvable disruptive behaviors, instructors should document the situation and contact the On-Call Assistant Dean in SAJA (3-5700). The on-call dean will consult with appropriate staff and the instructor in determining an appropriate response, which may include initiating disciplinary proceedings.

- Any time a student's classroom behavior is threatening towards any person (including the student him-/herself), the University police should be called immediately (911) and the student removed.
- It is vital the instructors clearly document incidents of disruptive behavior so an accurate record may be maintained. Documentation in this instance means to write down specifics of the event in chronological order.
- Students removed from a classroom may be permitted to return to the class after agreeing to the condition that there will be no further disruptive behavior in the class. Such students also may be sanctioned through the University non-academic misconduct procedures, with an Assistant Dean of Students from SAJA acting as an investigating officer.
- The investigating officer will keep the instructor and student informed the status of any disciplinary proceedings, especially in regard to any return of the student to the class.
- The removal of a student from a class, voluntarily/involuntarily, and/or temporarily/permanently; is a serious step, not to be taken lightly, and therefore must be handled utilizing whatever due process is appropriate.
- There may be situations occurring outside the classroom where instructors feel threatened or very uncomfortable with a student's behavior. Instructors should report these situations to the Office of the Dean of Students (3-5700) and/or the University police (911) so appropriate interventions can happen before the matter escalates.

For further information consult the following website for the UW System Code of Conduct. <http://www.wisc.edu/students/conduct/htm>

Another good resource on disruptive students is [Coping with the Disruptive College Student: a Practical Model](#) by Gerald Amada, PhD.

Nothing in these guidelines is intended to infringe upon the academic freedom of instructor or student. Two fundamental principles which should be observed include:

- 1) Students have the right to express opinions germane to the subject matter of a course;
- 2) Instructors have the right to guide classroom discussion and to set reasonable limits on the classroom time made available to students for the expression of their opinions.

The responsibility for striking a balance between these principles rests with instructors.