

Dealing with Difficult Students

Tim McMahon (timmc@uoregon.edu) & Chris Loschiavo (chrislos@uoregon.edu) Student Judicial Programs Knight Library, Media Services, Proctor Classroom, Room 42; Friday, Oct. 13, 2006; 8:30 - 9:50am

We are hearing and reading more and more about the challenges instructors face in teaching difficult students. In this workshop, we will provide possible reasons why some students are becoming more difficult and explore specific strategies for dealing with situations you may encounter in the classroom.

(Note: text taken verbatim from cited sources.)

For Faculty Dealing with Disruptive Students

<http://www.jmu.edu/counselingctr/DisruptiveStudents.shtml>

From the Counseling and Student Development Center at James Madison University.

Examples of Disruptive Behavior

Disruptive behavior is defined as repeated, continuous, and/or multiple student behaviors that hamper the ability of instructors to teach and students to learn. Common examples of disruptive behaviors include, but are not limited to:

- Eating in class
- Monopolizing classroom discussions
- Failing to respect the rights of other students to express their viewpoints
- Talking when the instructor or others are speaking
- Constant questions or interruptions which interfere with the instructor's presentation
- Overt inattentiveness (e.g., sleeping or reading the paper in class)
- Creating excessive noise with papers, book bags, etc.
- Entering class late or leaving early
- Use of pagers or cell phones in the classroom
- Inordinate or inappropriate demands for time and attention
- Poor personal hygiene (e.g., noticeably offensive body odor)

More extreme examples of disruptive behavior include, but are not limited to:

- Use of profanity or pejorative language
- Intoxication
- Verbal abuse (e.g., taunting, badgering, intimidation)
- Harassment (e.g., use of "fighting words," stalking)
- Threats to harm oneself or others
- Physical violence (e.g., shoving, grabbing, assault, use of weapons)

It is important to remember that even such conditions as physical or psychological disabilities are not considered a legitimate excuse for disruptive behavior.

Are there other examples that you might have?

Student Resistance Techniques

Technique	Description
Teacher Advice	I would offer the teacher advice: Prepare yourself better so you give better lectures. Be more expressive: Everything will work out to your advantage. You should relate more with students before trying to give any advice: if you open up, we'll tend to be more willing to do what you want.
Teacher Blame	I would resist by claiming that the teacher is boring. The teacher makes me feel uneasy. It is boring; I don't get anything out of it. You don't seem prepared yourself. If you weren't so boring, I would do what you want.
Avoidance	I would simply drop the class. I won't participate as much. I won't go to class. I'll sit in the back of the room.
Reluctant Compliance	I'll do only enough work to get by. Although I would comply with the teacher's demands, I would do so unwillingly. I'll come more prepared, but not be interested at all. Grudgingly, I'll come prepared.
Active Resistance	I won't come prepared at all. I'll leave my book at home. I'll continue to come unprepared to get on the teacher's nerves. I'll keep coming to class, but I won't be prepared.
Deception	I'll act like I'm prepared for class even though I may not be. I may be prepared, but play dumb for spite. I might tell the teacher I would make an effort, but wouldn't. I'll make up some lie about why I'm not performing well in this class.
Direct Communication	I'll go to the teacher's office and try to talk to him/her. After class I would explain my behavior. I would talk to the teacher and explain how I feel and how others perceive him/her in class.
Disruption	I'll disrupt the class by leaving to get needed materials. I would be noisy in class. I'll ask questions I a monotone voice without interest. I'll be a wise-guy in class.
Excuses	I would offer some type of excuse: I don't feel well. I don't understand the topic. I can remember things without writing stuff down. I forgot. My car broke down. The class is so easy I don't need to stay caught up.
Ignoring the Teacher	I would simply ignore the teacher's request, but come to class anyway. I probably wouldn't say anything,; just do what I was doing before. I would simply let the teacher's request go in one ear and out the other.
Priorities	I would tell the teacher I had other priorities: I have other homework so I can't prepare well for this one. I have kids, and they take up my time. I'm too busy. This class is not as important as my others. I only took this class for general education requirements.
Challenge the Teacher's Basis of Power	I would challenge the teacher's authority by asserting: Do others in the class have to do this? No one else is doing it, so why should I? Do you really take this class seriously? If it's such a good idea, why don't you do it?
Rally Student Support	I would rally up student support. I would talk to others in class to see if they feel the same. I would tell my classmates not to go to class. I might get others to go along with me in not doing what the teacher says.
Appeal to Powerful Others	I would talk to someone in higher authority. I might complain to the department chair that this instructor is incompetent and can't motivate the class. I would make a complaint to the dean about the teacher's practices. I would talk to my advisor. I would threaten to go to the dean.
Modeling Teacher Behavior	I would indicate to the teacher that I would participate more if he/she were more enthusiastic about what he/she is doing. I might say: You aren't enjoying it, so how can I? If you're not going to make the effort to teach well, I won't make an effort to listen. You don't do it, so why should I?
Modeling Teacher Affect	I would tell the teacher that if he/she doesn't care about us students, why should I care about what he/she wants? I would say: you don't seem to care about this class, why should I? You have no concern for this class yourself.
Hostile Defensive	I'd take a more active stance and tell the teacher that I'm old enough to know how I can do this class. Right or wrong, that's the way I am. I'm surprised you even noticed I'm in your class. Lead your own life. My behavior is my business.

Student Resistance Techniques (continued)

Technique	Description
Student Rebuttal	I would argue that I know what works for me: I don't need your advice. I don't need this grade anyway. I'm doing just fine without changing my behavior. We'll see when the test comes up.
Revenge	I'll get even by expressing my dissatisfaction with the teacher/course on evaluations at the end of the term. I won't recommend this teacher/class to others. I'll write a letter to put in the teacher's file. I'll steal or hide the teacher's lecture notes or test.

From: "Compliance-Resistance in the College Classroom," by N. F. Burroughs, P. Kearney, and T. G. Plax, 1989, *Communication Education*, 38, 214-229.

Found in: Kearney, P., Plax, T. G., McPherson, M. B. (2006). Student incivility and resistance in the classroom. In T. P. Mottet, V. P. Richmond, & J. C. McCroskey, *Handbook of instructional communication: Rhetorical and relational perspectives* (pp. 235-251). Boston: Pearson Education.

PREVENTING DISRUPTIONS

For Faculty Dealing with Disruptive Students

<http://www.jmu.edu/counselingctr/DisruptiveStudents.shtml>

From the Counseling and Student Development Center at James Madison University.

An Ounce of Prevention . . .

Perhaps the best thing faculty can do to address disruptive student behavior is to create an environment in which it is unlikely to occur. For example, an instructor should:

- Serve as a model by demonstrating appropriate, respectful, and responsible behavior in all interactions with students.
- Use the class syllabus to inform students in writing of standards and expectations for classroom conduct and of possible consequences for disruptive behavior.
- Devote time during the first class to review this information in the syllabus.

Guidelines for Dealing with Disruptive Students in Academic Settings (*By Action of the University Faculty Council: April 12, 2005*)

<http://www.indiana.edu/~ufc/docs/AY05/Circulars/U10-2005.approved.htm>

From Indiana University.

I. Guidelines for In-Class Settings

A. Prevention

Each instructor should prepare his/her students, either via the course syllabus or verbally during the first class period or both, regarding the expectations he/she has regarding the standards for the course. This includes parameters on class decorum, how discussions will be conducted, etc. Furthermore, a statement should be made indicating that the Code's procedures will be followed if misconduct, both academic and personal, occurs within the class. Each academic unit should supplement these guidelines with specific preventive measures appropriate to the unit.

Tips for Dealing with Disruptive Students

<http://www.umsf.edu/services/counser/facstaff/disruptivestudents.htm>

From Counseling Services at the University of Missouri at St. Louis.

- Decide what your limits of acceptable conduct are regarding lateness, sleeping in class, use of cell phones, alarm watches, eating in class, unrelated talking in class, etc.
- Take a preventive approach by setting limits from the beginning. Use your course syllabus to state expectations and "ground rules." Perhaps get students involved in forming group ground rules (but, you retain responsibility for enforcement).
- Be a role model for the behavior you require of your students (e.g., be on time yourself.)

PREVENTING DISRUPTIONS (continued)

Responding to Disruptive or Inappropriate Student Behaviors: General Tips and Guidelines for University Personnel

<http://studentdev.appstate.edu/files/phatfile/2006-Dealing%20with%20Disruptive%20or%20Inappropriate.pdf>
Comprehensive publication from the Office of Student Development at Appalachian State University.

General Strategies

That old adage, “An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure,” applies to most student interactions.

Prevent difficult situations from arising by:

- Being clear and consistent in your communication with students.
- Including policies in the course syllabus that clearly set forth expectations for classroom behavior as well as academic standards for the course. Provide full information in course syllabus on how and when students can reach you as well as policies regarding class attendance, tardiness, and makeup exams.
- Providing early and regular feedback about student progress (for example, an indication of how well students are participating in class discussion).
- Outlining what you consider appropriate classroom behavior.
- Including a statement in the syllabus about academic integrity.
- Including a statement in the syllabus telling students how to disclose a disability to you.
- Along with the discussion of your expectations for student work, discuss aspects of classroom interchange. For example, tell students whether they are permitted to interrupt you with questions during your lecture or if you prefer that they wait until a designated question-and-answer period.
- If you have noticed problems with classes in the past (for example, students who repeatedly are late for an early morning class), present the current class with a list of the issues and “negotiate” a consensus on how these issues will be dealt with this time. (An advantage of these negotiated behavioral guidelines is that students will take part in developing their own rules of conduct.)

PREVENTING DISRUPTIONS (continued)

Contract on Classroom Behavior

<http://www.msu.edu/unit/ombud/Contract.html>

A proposed set of rules for classroom behavior. From Delaney R. Kirk, professor of management, Drake University.

1. Class begins promptly at the beginning of the class period. You should be in your seat and ready to start participating in class at that time. That same rule also applies to me – I should be ready at the start of class, which means having the technology operational.
 - a. Always bring the required supplies and be ready to be actively engaged in the learning process. This communicates preparedness and interest.
 - b. If you come into class after an assignment has already been passed back, please do not ask for your assignment until after the class is over. It's unfair to the other students in class to wait while the professor searches again for your paper because you weren't there the first time. Just ask for it after class, and I'll be happy to supply it to you.
 - c. In deciding whether to attend class, please do not ask your professor if she/he is covering anything important on that day. The course is carefully planned out – every day is important.
2. If you bring a newspaper to class, put it away before the start of class. If you sat in a business meeting and read the Wall Street Journal while the boss was outlining a new strategy, you'd likely be fired or demoted. The same standard applies here. In return, I promise to listen when you are talking to me and to treat you with respect.
3. Similarly, do not study material from other classes during this class. If you feel that you must spend our class time studying or doing homework, please go to the library.
4. Turn your cell phone off or to vibrate before the start of class. I'll also turn mine off.
5. It is fine to bring a drink or a snack to class, as long as it isn't distracting. However, please remember that someone else will be coming into the room after your class is done, so PICK UP YOUR TRASH. You wouldn't visit a friend's house and leave newspapers, cans, bottles, and wrappers lying around after you left, so please don't do it here.
6. I expect to have your attention for the full class period. This means:
 - a. Avoid conversations with people sitting around you. It's a small room – even if you whisper, please realize that other people can certainly see you, and that's distracting to them (and to me.)
 - b. Do not start zipping up your backpack and rustling papers before the end of the class period. There's sufficient time for you to get to your next class to another without disrupting the last few minutes of this class. If one person does it, it seems to trigger others to do it, and it makes the last few minutes (when announcements are often made) less than optimal for everyone.
7. If you know that you'll need to leave before the class is over, try to sit as close to the door as possible so as not to disrupt others. Similarly, if you arrive in class late, just slip in as quietly as possible and take the first available seat you come to.
8. If you are so tired that you cannot keep your head up, you should leave. I realize that environmental factors affect this, including warm rooms, dimmed lights, and material that may not be interesting to you. However, laying your head on the desk or sleeping in class is rude, and it is distracting to others. (Would you consider me rude if you invited me to a party and I slept on your sofa during the party?) I'll try to make class interesting, but remember that my primary goal is to teach you, not to entertain you.
9. Turn in assignments on time. Earthquake, fire, flood, and catastrophic illness are the only reasonable excuses for a late submission. You want the professor to know who you are for the right reasons.
10. Being courteous in class does not mean that you have to agree with everything that is being said. However, you will rarely get your way with anybody in life by being rude, overly aggressive or just plain hostile. If you disagree with me (or I with you) it is a good idea to wait and discuss the situation when you are not angry.
11. The rules of the syllabus, content of the exams, content of lectures, and calculation of the grade you earned are not a starting point for negotiations. While I am always willing to work with students on an individual basis, I cannot negotiate individual terms with each student.
12. Your questions are NOT an imposition – they are welcome and one of the professional highlights of my day. Chances are, if you have a question, someone else is thinking the same thing but is too shy to ask it. Please – ask questions! You'll learn more, it makes the class more interesting, and you are helping others learn as well. But when you have a question or comment, please raise your hand first. Blurting out a question or comment when someone else has already raised their hand is rude – it's like jumping ahead of someone else in line.
13. If emergencies arise that require an absence from a session, be sure to get the notes and all other information that was covered in class from a colleague you trust. Expecting the faculty member to outline the class session in an independent message to you is not realistic as a professor typically has approximately 100 + students in his/her classes each semester.
14. The time to be concerned about your grade is in the first fourteen weeks of the course, not in the last week.

RESPONDING TO DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIORS

Dealing with hostile and oppositional students.

Downs, J. R. (1992). Dealing with hostile and oppositional students. *College Teaching*, 40 (3), 106-109.

Steps toward Harmony

- Ask yourself if you've done anything to contribute to the conflict
- Confer with the student one-on-one in a neutral setting
- Find a common ground
- Try a series of cooperative learning exercises and discuss social skills
- Try not to take attacks personally, or to become defensive
- Talk with colleagues about similar situations and how they handled them
- Integrate problem-solving and conflict resolution activities into your regular lessons
- Use direct confrontation as a last resort

Ways of Dealing with Disruptive Students

http://www.ferris.edu/HTMLS/academics/center/Teaching_and_Learning_Tips/Managing%20the%20Classroom%20Learning%20Environment/DisruptiveStudents.htm

From the Center for Teaching, Learning, & Faculty Development at Ferris State University.

- Never attribute to malice what can be attributed to ignorance (V. Ruggiero)—most of the time students are not trying to be malicious and often are not aware that they are being disruptive.
- More traditionally aged students exhibit behaviors that were acceptable in high school or at least went uncorrected. They are often surprised that college teachers are bothered by these behaviors.
- See all conflicts as an opportunity to educate the student(s) involved.
- If at all possible deal with any significant issues of disruption or disagreement in private (your office with the door open). Dealing with an issue in front of others can cause both the students and the instructor to be affected. You don't need others taking sides.
- Use **I statements** to address the concern ...this way you are owning the problem and giving the student an easy opportunity to save face and get back on task. I statements avoid the issuance of consequences. " I would appreciate it if your would ..."
- Stay calm-- at all cost stay calm—if necessary declare a cooling off period.
- Put yourself in the student's shoes—try to see what is the motivation behind the disruption/problem/ issue.
- Listen carefully—ask clarifying questions that help to define the issue. " I want to make certain that I understand what you are saying is this what you mean"
- Think win-win. Ask the students how they would resolve the issue—this will give them some ownership. Also ask how they would handle the situation if they were the instructor.
- Make certain that your position is clearly defensible.
- Avoid the introduction of side issues. Keep bringing the student back to the issue at hand. Other issues can be dealt with at another time.
- Write down the issue/concern/problem
- Write down the solution/agreement.
- Be as consistent as you can in how you handle each individual occurrence. This includes how you handle even small disruptions in class. Students really take note of inconsistencies in this area.
- Offer the student the option of taking the issue to the next level. Tell him/her who to talk to and where they can find them.
- Keep notes on the conversation(s) that you have with the student. This will help to protect you and make it clear to the students that you want an accurate record of the interaction(s) you have with them.

RESPONDING TO DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIORS (continued)

Guidelines for Dealing with Disruptive Students in Academic Settings (By Action of the University Faculty Council: April 12, 2005)

<http://www.indiana.edu/~ufc/docs/AY05/Circulars/U10-2005.approved.htm>

From Indiana University.

I. Guidelines for In-Class Settings

B. Disruption within Class Period

If a student becomes disruptive (e.g., refuses to quit talking; blocks an entry way; throws things; uses profane, intimidating, or abusive language; repeatedly interrupts others' speech; moves within the classroom without authorization) an instructor should first request compliance from the student, and, if it is not received, he/she may dismiss the student for the remainder of the class period. The student is expected to accede to this request and may subsequently contest this action using procedures established within each unit. If the student fails to leave after being directed to do so, the instructor should enlist the support of other University personnel (faculty members, academic administrators, campus police) to help resolve the situation. Physical force, including touching, must be avoided, and the instructor must judge, based on the nature of the disruption, whether the class period can continue once the offending student departs.

IV. Tips for Responding to Disruptive Students

1. Remain calm and request compliance from the student in concrete terms (e.g., "please lower your voice" or "please sit in your chair").
2. Ask the student to speak with you to discuss the concerns both may have. Acknowledge the emotions of the student ("I understand you are upset"). Do not engage the student in a debate. It is recommended that an observer be present when this meeting occurs.
3. Try to reach an agreement that is mutually satisfying; that is, you still have control of the academic setting and the student is not disgraced in front of his/her peers.
4. If the student refuses to comply, indicate that you will enlist the aid of others to stop the behavior and that the behavior is subject to disciplinary proceedings of the university.
5. If the student continues to refuse to comply, leave the academic setting to call for assistance or ask someone else in the vicinity to enlist the help of others. Be specific regarding whom you want called/contacted.
6. If a student is violent or threatening, remove yourself and instruct others to remove themselves from the situation and summon campus police as quickly as possible.

Tips for Dealing with Disruptive Students

<http://www.umsf.edu/services/counselor/facstaff/disruptivestudents.htm>

From Counseling Services at the University of Missouri at St. Louis.

- Deal with disruptive behavior early, before you get angry or feel threatened.
- Familiarize yourself with the student conduct code and the University processes for discipline cases.
- Don't take students' behavior personally. Understand that they are coming into the classroom with their own personal history and issues. Don't let them "hook" you. Don't give them the power to judge you.
- If you need to reprimand a student, speak with the student privately if possible. This will avoid defensiveness and/or "acting out" in response to being shamed in front of their peers.
- Convey your interest and concern to the student. Take a non-defensive stance to try to understand where the student is coming from. Meet with student to discuss the disruptive behavior, but also include discussion of their educational objectives and aspirations.
- When necessary, set specific behavioral expectations for a student and then hold to them.
- Use assertive communication: "I" statements; focus on behavior, not personality; don't use labels; state clear expectations for appropriate behavior.
- Document disruptive behavior for possible future reference. Include name of student, date and time of incident, describe incident in behavioral terms, and use quotes where possible.
- Have a safety plan in case of violent or dangerous behavior. The plan may include dismissing class, contacting campus police, having a code word that signals another to call for help (if you are calling from your office), have an escape route planned, etc.

RESPONDING TO DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIORS (continued)

For Faculty Dealing with Disruptive Students

<http://www.jmu.edu/counselingctr/DisruptiveStudents.shtml>

From the Counseling and Student Development Center at James Madison University.

Guidelines for Dealing with Disruptive Students

Responding to Disruptive Behavior

Some general suggestions for dealing with the disruptive student behavior are:

- A general word of caution directed to the class rather than at an identified student may effectively deter the disruptive behavior.
- Deal with the disruptive behavior immediately. Ignoring the behavior will likely cause it to increase.
- Work against the human tendency to take the disruptive behavior personally. The behavior usually has little to do with you, and you are simply the unfortunate target of it.
- If the student's behavior is irritating, but not particularly disruptive, consider talking with the student privately after class. If you feel unsafe being alone with the student for some reason, request that a colleague or your department chair attend the meeting.
- If it is necessary to deal with a student's behavior during class, you should calmly but firmly inform the student that the behavior is disruptive and ask that it be stopped. Example: "Your use of your cell phone is bothering me and disrupting the class. Please end your conversation now and refrain from in-class phone calls in the future."
- If the disruptive behavior continues during either the present or some future class, warn the student (perhaps in private) that such behavior may result in student disciplinary action. Example: "I've already warned you about talking when I am speaking to the class. If you disrupt the class again in this manner, you will be referred to the Office of Judicial Affairs."
- If the student continues the disruptive behavior despite this warning, the student should then be asked to leave the classroom. Following the class, the instructor should contact the Office of Judicial Affairs and provide pertinent information about the student's behavior. The Office of Judicial Affairs will determine if a charge will be placed against the student.
- If the student refuses to leave the classroom after being instructed to do so, s/he should be informed that this refusal is a separate instance of disruptive behavior subject to additional penalties.
- If the student continues to refuse to leave the classroom, the instructor may choose to adjourn class for the day.
- Keep a log of the date, time, and nature of all incidents of disruptive behavior and any meetings you have with the student. Document incidents and meetings immediately, while specifics and details are still fresh in your memory.
- Keep your department chair apprised as the situation develops. Ask for guidance and support from her/him and from colleagues.

If the Student Seems Dangerous . . .

If you sense that a disruptive situation is escalating and that a student may pose a physical threat to you or other students:

- Maintain a safe distance and do not turn your back to the student.
- Unless you are under physical attack, do not touch the student or the student's belongings. Initiating physical touch may be interpreted by an agitated student as an assault.
- Use a calm, non-confrontational approach to defuse the situation. Example: "*Please lower your voice. We can't continue to talk if you threaten me.*"
- If a threat of harm is present, do not mention disciplinary action or police intervention. If you have already mentioned these, work to refocus the student's attention away from the future consequences of her/his behavior. Example: "*You've raised some important issues. I need to consult with my department chair to see what we can do.*"

If the disruptive student threatens to harm you, other students, or her/himself:

- Immediately dismiss the class and inform the Campus Police (86911). The Police will investigate the threats, warn intended victims if necessary, and determine whether the student may have committed a crime. It may also be a good idea to ask the Police to contact the Counseling Center about the incident or to make contact yourself (86552).
- After the danger has passed, consult with the Office of Judicial Affairs regarding the judicial process and what sanctions may be imposed.

RESPONDING TO DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIORS (continued)

Teaching Large Classes

<http://www.senecac.on.ca/quarterly/1994-vol02-num01-fall/herteis.html>

By Eileen M. Herteis, *College Quarterly*, Fall 1994 - Volume 2 Number 1

At a conference on teaching and learning in higher education held at York University participants were invited to consider three major questions. The following is a compilation of their responses. Interestingly and perhaps predictably, a large number of the tips addressed the problems of student anonymity and passive learning.

Q. 1. What can an instructor do to improve student motivation, morale and self-discipline in large classes?

- Get to know students as early as possible in the year to reduce anonymity. Learn students' names. Have students introduce themselves in class. Greet students at the door with handouts. Talk to students after class.
- Encourage students to see you during office hours. Provide them with your office phone number.
- Practice creative listening in the classroom.
- Once a week, in the last ten minutes of class, have students write three sentences in clear English, with each sentence describing a concept learned during that week's lectures. Concept sheets should be marked and should be worth 10% of the total mark of the course.
- Distribute a letter to your class at the beginning of the course, sharing a bit of yourself with them. Explain why you are there. Encourage students to also share a bit of themselves and their concerns.
- Ask for student input. Have the class elect class representatives or a student advisory committee, and meet with them regularly.
- Convey caring by commenting on papers.
- Be a model of discipline. Be on time, organized, knowledgeable and well-prepared. Always begin and end classes on time.
- Let students know it matters that they attend class. Take attendance. Use the first 15 minutes of class for the most important announcements (e.g., marking schemes, readings, etc.). This discourages student lateness.
- In a large class, be larger than life, exciting and dynamic. You need to be borderline manic, or at least not understated.
- Divide class time into two or three parts with breaks for questions, one-minute essays and evaluation of lectures.
- Enhance involvement by staging debates, eliciting opinions, asking questions and encouraging students to share their experiences.
- Make lectures relevant. Relate subject matter to the real life that exists outside of class.
- Be tolerant and treat students as adults. Many come from high school expecting a certain guidance which may or may not be provided. Many potential problems will sort themselves out without embarrassment to instructors or students.

Q. 2. What is your best tip for dealing with disruptive students?

- Stop and ask the disruptive student (who is usually chattering) to be quiet. Tell the student you've never had a class you've had to do this with (untrue, but hopefully embarrassing). Invite the student to leave.
- If you ask students to leave, speak to them later.
- Speak to the disruptive student after class. Share what you see and encourage the student to share his or her perspective. Try to use the disruption positively; validate it and use it for content.
- Never lose your temper.
- Treat a disruption as a question ("Sorry, is there a question at the back?").
- If there is a problem, ask yourself what you did wrong before blaming the students.
- If students are aimlessly chattering, find out why. There is always a reason; deal with that reason.
- Stop the class and stare for a long and meaningful moment at the disrupter(s) without singling anyone out. This often causes students to discipline themselves.
- Use peer pressure; allow other students to provide solutions to the disruptions.
- Ask disruptive students why they are disruptive. If they claim to be bored, ask them to stay away from class.

RESPONDING TO DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIORS (continued)

Coping with Disruptive Student Behavior in the Classroom

[http://conduct.truman.edu/docs/Disruptive%20Behavior7-2003%20web\(1\).pdf](http://conduct.truman.edu/docs/Disruptive%20Behavior7-2003%20web(1).pdf)

From the Office of Citizenship and Community Standards at Truman State University.

ADDRESSING DISRUPTION

Although it may be uncomfortable for the faculty member to address a disruptive behavior, it is important for the student's development. Students may be unaware of their behaviors or how they affect others. In addition, approaching a student may lead to a greater understanding of the issue by both the student and the faculty member. There are some general guidelines one can use in discussing a disruptive behavior with a student.

- Conduct the intervention in private and whenever possible, have another faculty member present as a witness to the discussion.
- Describe to the student the behavior as you see it in objective terms. Avoid attributing the behavior to the student's character.
- Explain the effect the behavior has on the classroom environment you are trying to create. Address how you feel about the behavior and why it is important to you.
- Listen to the student's response to this information. Some disruptive behavior reflects a lack of skill in interpersonal relationships or an unwillingness to consider the needs of others. Whereas other behavior reflects psychological or emotional concerns and may result from a situational crisis (such as stress or death of a loved one) or from a chronic mental illness or personality disorder.
- Decide with the student how to resolve the situation. Explain to the student your expectations for behavior in the future and the potential consequences that may be incurred including forwarding the case to the University Conduct Officer.
- Refer the student to appropriate resources such as their academic advisor, the University Counseling Services (UCS), the Student Health Center (SHC), and the Dean of Student Affairs Office.
- Consult with your Division Head or the Assistant Dean of Student Affairs/University Conduct Officer for assistance in working with students who exhibit disruptive behaviors.
- In the case of a threat of violence, contact the Department of Public Safety immediately at 911.

Managing Classroom Behavior: Rights of Faculty and Students

<http://www.purdue.edu/ODOS/osrr/behavior.htm>

Authored by Stephen J. Akers, Ph.D., Executive Associate Dean of Students, Purdue University, 2006

Responding to Conflict and Classroom Behavior

Addressing irritating behavior, as distinguished from disruptive conduct, can be deferred more easily until after class, whereas disruptive conduct may substantially impede the class progress and require immediate response. **If potentially disruptive behavior is occurring, a general word of caution to the class rather than directed at a particular student may be effective in deterring a problem.** When a particular student **persists in being potentially disruptive** or, in fact, has **interfered with a controlled discussion** or **impeded the educational process** of the class, **address the problem as early and as privately as possible.** To confront the behavior in front of the student's peers may cause the student to feel a greater need to defend the behavior.

When necessary, **deal with behavior during class firmly but politely, and direct the student to wait after class to discuss the matter further.** On rare occasions, if the disruptive behavior continues, it may be necessary to request the student to leave the class immediately. If the student refuses to leave the class, the instructor has the authority and may choose to adjourn the class for the day. Only if the well being of the instructor or other students is threatened or harm is imminent should the Purdue Police be summoned. This would occur only in rare circumstances. Immediately following class, notify the Office of Student Rights and Responsibilities, giving pertinent information about the student, your observations of the student's behavior, and witnesses to the behavior. You also should notify the course coordinator and/or department head promptly.

RESPONDING TO DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIORS (continued)

Responding to Disruptive or Inappropriate Student Behaviors: General Tips and Guidelines for University Personnel

<http://studentdev.appstate.edu/files/phatfile/2006-Dealing%20with%20Disruptive%20or%20Inappropriate.pdf>
Comprehensive publication from the Office of Student Development at Appalachian State University.

Taking care of YOU:

Consider the following strategies when dealing with a difficult student:

- Stay calm.
- Safety first – for yourself and the other students in your classroom and/or office.
- Listen rather than talk.
- Don't feel compelled to resolve the conflict on the spot.
- Move the scene of conflict away from other students.
- Attempt to put yourself in the student's shoes. Ask yourself what might be behind the student's behavior.
- Recognize that solving the student's problem is not all your responsibility.
- Don't take the bait. Do not be drawn into an argument.
- Recognize when to draw the line – don't take abuse. Set limits for the student. Define permissible behavior and consequences.
- If necessary, inform your department chair of the situation.
- Get suggestions/help from colleagues or administrators, if needed.
- Contact the University Counseling and Psychological Services Center (828-262-3180) or the Hubbard Center (828-262-3040) if you need to discuss general strategies.
- Always document conflict-oriented (or even unique) interactions with students.
- **If you feel threatened, contact University Police (828-262-2150) or, if off campus, local law enforcement officers, and request that an officer be present in the area or on standby.**

Taking care of THEM:

- Listen carefully.
- Restate what you think is the student's concern. This will indicate to the student that you are listening and also will allow the student to restate the concern if you have misunderstood the nature of the problem.
- Know when to be sympathetic and when to set boundaries. Be understanding without taking abuse.
- Remember that it is possible for your feelings of stress or irritation to make matters worse. Avoid antagonizing, minimizing, judging, patronizing, arguing, provoking, embarrassing, and demeaning the student.
- If the situation warrants (for example, a spirited classroom discussion that has suddenly gotten a bit out of hand), you might try to de-escalate the conflict through humor, by changing the subject, or by ending the discussion.
- If the disruptive behavior occurs during the class, make an appointment to meet individually with the student after class. However, do this only if you believe it is safe to meet the student alone. If you believe it is risky to meet with the student alone, meet the student with an administrator, a representative of University Police, or a local law enforcement officer.
- For problem situations that appear more complex regarding disruption of the learning environment, you may have to consider initiating disciplinary proceedings. Contact the Office of Student Judicial Affairs (828-262-2704) to initiate this process.
- If the difficult student also confides in you about a disability or any other personal issues, be careful to respect this information as confidential. Advise the student that no accommodations may be made until he/she registers through the Office of Disability Services. However, it is your responsibility as a faculty or staff member to report the student's disruptive or inappropriate behavior to your department chair and the Office of Student Judicial Affairs. **All students must adhere to the Code of Student Conduct.** If a student threatens harm to self or others, this information should not be kept confidential. It should be shared with the Counseling Center and/or University Police. **If the student's inappropriate behavior leads you to act/speak unprofessionally, the student has exercised control over you. If this occurs in a classroom setting, the next class could be especially difficult. Find a way to address the issue and move forward.**

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Managing Conflict Situations

There is another old adage, "It's not what you say, but the way you say it." Here are some tips or reminders that may be helpful when you find yourself in situations in which you may feel uncomfortable. You will note that many of these points are about "body language."

When you are talking:

- Maintain eye contact.
- Reinforce messages nonverbally. This may be as simple as nodding your head to indicate agreement.
- Avoid information overload (if you are nervous, you may tend to talk more and more quickly). Talk slowly.
- Be comfortable with silence.
- Use "I" messages. For example, you might say, "I feel uncomfortable when you..."
- Repeat for clarification. For example, "If I am hearing you correctly, you did not understand..."
- Check for understanding.
- Use simple, clear vocabulary.

When you are listening:

- Maintain eye contact.
- Don't interrupt; wait until the student has finished talking. This can be useful if the student attempts to interrupt while you are talking. ("I did not interrupt while you were talking; please allow me to complete my thoughts as well.")
- Check back to clarify; restate to confirm. ("Help me to understand how you see this." Or "I'm trying to understand what the issue is here.")
- Avoid jumping to conclusions.
- Show interest nonverbally.
- Don't interject your own issues; focus on the student's concerns.
- If necessary, further the discussion by prompts such as "Tell me more," or "Talk a little more about this issue."

Some additional suggestions:

- Clarify the problem jointly.
- Brainstorm and explore all possible options. For example, review departmental requirements, technical standards, and performance standards as determined by the course and/or degree program.
- Determine your and the student's willingness to consider reasonable alternatives and jointly select the best options or combination of options.
- Ask for an "action plan" and follow-up.
- **Do not fall into the trap of making decisions for the student who is undecided and/or unable to make a decision. If something goes wrong, the student does not feel responsible for the choice and may blame you.**

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The “Bad” Class

Even experienced teachers sometimes have an entire class that is difficult to teach. Students may be inattentive, unwilling to participate, or disruptive in a variety of ways. Sometimes the problem is due to a misunderstanding, i.e. you assumed a background knowledge that the students do not have. For lack of a better term, sometimes teachers will talk about having a “bad class.”

Suggested Strategies:

- Be frank with the students and discuss the situation with them. Let them know that you have noticed that the class isn't working well together and this troubles you. Often students will come forth with their own sense of what is going wrong. Ask for their suggestions in a variety of ways. Some may speak openly in class; others may want to speak with you privately; others may prefer to write their observations in class or in an e-mail.
- Once you have discovered what is problematic, be willing to change procedures, routines, and directions. Make changes in concert with the whole class, if possible.
- Some classes don't respond to strategies that may have worked in the past. When you find that you need to make changes in the way you are teaching or relating to the class, clearly explain the changes and any new expectations, and stick to them.
- Use a variety of teaching strategies. Vary the pace of the class.
- Observe nonverbal behavior carefully. Be sensitive to cues that students may be having difficulty and “shift gears,” if necessary.
- Ask for help from your chair, from colleagues, or from the Hubbard Center.
- The Hubbard Center is a helpful resource for researching teaching strategies. **Ask for feedback, suggestions, and ideas from students only if you really want them.**

TOP 10 WAYS TO RESOLVE SITUATIONS WITH DISRUPTIVE STUDENTS

10. Don't assume students know how to behave in your class. Tell them what you expect.
9. List all of your expectations in your course syllabus. Be as specific as possible and talk about it on the first day and later in the term. Remember: an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.
8. Tell students what will happen if they don't meet your expectations. Discuss consequences.
7. If students are engaging in (relatively) minor disruptions such as reading the newspaper, make a general announcement about how that is disruptive to your teaching and disrespectful.
6. If the disruption continues, ask to speak with individual students outside of class. Remain respectful even if the students aren't.
5. Follow up this discussion in writing. Summarize the key points that you made and the consequences for the student if they don't comply.
4. If you are ever concerned about your safety or that of other students in your class, don't hesitate to contact the Department of Public Safety.
3. If you can, try not to think of these students as "problems" or as "difficult". Instead, try and think of these students as students who are in need of assistance. Many times when we address these situations, we find that there are a variety of issues that can be contributing to the student's behavior. Most of the time, it is not the case that a student is intentionally trying to disrupt the class.
2. Don't be afraid to ask for help. This is not a sign of weakness or lack of classroom management skills. It is what the University expects of you. The more time you spend trying to address the one student who is causing problems, the less time you have to spend on the rest of the class. Consult with others. They may have already dealt with the situation.
1. Don't hesitate to call the Office of Student Life for advice. There is always a staff member on duty that has been trained to respond to a variety of classroom disruption issues who can talk you through a variety of ways to deal with your unique situation. They can be reached at 346-3216. Just ask for the staff member on duty.

RESOURCES

Dealing with Difficult Students

<http://tep.uoregon.edu/resources/faqs/veteranadvice/difficultstudents.html>

From the TEP site. Advice from some experienced instructors.

Responding to Disruptive or Inappropriate Student Behaviors: General Tips and Guidelines for University Personnel

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Dealing with Difficult Students

<http://www.wmich.edu/graduate/gatraining/TAd dealing.htm>

From Western Michigan University. Reprinted with permission from *Teaching at Stanford: An Introductory Handbook*, edited by Michelle Marinovich (The Center for Teaching and Learning, Stanford University, pp.32-34 ©1995 by the Board of Trustees of the Leland Stanford Jr. University.)

Classroom Incivilities by Bob Boice

http://www.colorado.edu/ftep/memos/protected_memos/classroomin.pdf

The classic *Research in Higher Education* article from 1996.

Reflections on Bob Boice's "Classroom Incivilities"

http://www.colorado.edu/ftep/memos/commentary/boice_commentary.html

Martha Hannah, Associate Professor, Department of History

From the Faculty Teaching Excellence Program at the University of Colorado-Boulder.

Dealing with Disruptive Students

<http://www.ucet.ufl.edu/newsletters/archives/innovator/summer98.pdf>

Comprehensive publication from the University of Florida's Center for Excellence in Teaching.

Teaching Tips: Dealing with Difficult Students

<http://www.columbia.edu/cu/tat/old/TEACHINGTIPSdifficultstudents.html>

From Columbia University. Suggestions about beginnings, grading, and classroom behavior,

Dealing with Disruptive Students

http://research.umbc.edu/~korenman/wmst/disruptive_students1.html

Dealing with Disruptive Students II

<http://research.umbc.edu/~korenman/wmst/disrupt3.html>

From a Women's Studies list serve archive.

Faculty Guide to a Healthy Learning & Positive Classroom Environment: A Guide for Classroom Instructors

<http://oregonstate.edu/admin/stucon/facultyguide.doc>

Publication from Oregon State University.

Help for Bad Manners in the Classroom

by Carolyn Lieberg

<http://www.uiowa.edu/~centeach/talk/volume1/bad-manners.html>

Insightful article from the University of Iowa's Center for Teaching.

Curbing Boorish Conduct in the Classroom

How can colleges stop disruptive classroom behavior by students?

<http://chronicle.com/colloquy/live/2003/08/disruptive/>

Transcript of a live, online discussion (8/6/2003) about this topic with Gary Pavela from the University of Maryland. From *The Chronicle of Higher Education*.

When New Teachers Meet the Classroom Terrorist: Cognitive Process for Dealing with Troublesome Students

by Virleen M. Carlson

<http://www.clt.cornell.edu/campus/teach/grad/carlson/terrorist.html>

From the Center for Learning and Teaching at Cornell University.

Contract on Classroom Behavior

<http://www.msu.edu/unit/ombud/Contract.html>

Reprinted with permission of Delaney R. Kirk, professor of management, Drake University.
A proposed set of rules for classroom behavior.

Dealing with the Difficult Patient

<http://www.pitt.edu/~cjm6/w96diff.html>

By Carol Mulvihill, R.N.,C., Editor. Advice about things to remember in conversations with difficult students.

Dealing With Nasty Students

<http://chronicle.com/jobs/2003/03/2003033101c.htm>

By Jill Carroll, from *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Careers Corner column dated Monday, March 31, 2003

Dealing With Nasty Students: the Sequel

<http://chronicle.com/jobs/2003/04/2003042801c.htm>

By Jill Carroll, from *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, The Adjunct Track/Career Network column dated April 28, 2003

A Directory for Dealing with Difficult Students & Sensitive Classroom Issues

http://www.isd.uga.edu/teaching_resources/resources/student_issues.html

From the University of Georgia. An interesting idea that we will recreate for the UO.

IV. Leading and Facilitating Discussion—Dealing with Difficult Students

<http://www.princeton.edu/~aiteachs/handbook/facilitating.html#dealing>

From Princeton University.

Constructing a Classroom Presence: Dealing with Issues of Control, Power, and Authority in the College Classroom

by Virleen M. Carlson, Ph.D.

<http://www.clt.cornell.edu/campus/teach/grad/carlson/presence.html>

From the Center for Learning and Teaching at Cornell University.

Reducing Incivility in the University/College Classroom

<http://www.ucalgary.ca/~iejll/volume5/morrissette.html>

By Patrick J. Morrissette from Brandon University.

Article from the *International Electronic Journal For Leadership in Learning*. Volume 5, Number 4. May 14, 2001.

Missed Expectations: Incivility in the Classroom

<http://www.nea.org/he/advo00/advo0003/feature.html>

The Age of Incivility

<http://www.aahebulletin.com/public/archive/incivility.asp>

By Virginia Gonzalez and Estela Lopez

Classroom Management

<http://www.crlt.umich.edu/tstrategies/tscm.html>

Incivility in the College Classroom: Bibliography of Print Resources

http://www.crlt.umich.edu/tstrategies/Incivility_bibliography.doc.pdf

From the Center for Research on Learning and Teaching at the University of Michigan.

Reaching Out to the "Abandoned Generation"

<http://mtprof.msun.edu/Win1999/Ptrt.html>

By Paul Trout, English, Montana State University-Bozeman
From *The Montana Professor*, Vol.9, No.1, Winter 1999

Understanding Faculty-Student Conflict: Student Perceptions of Precipitating Events and Faculty Responses

http://www.leaonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1207/S15328023TOP2903_03?cookieSet=1

by Stacey Tantleff-Dunn, Michael E. Dunn, and Jessica L. Gokee from the University of Central Florida.
From the *Teaching of Psychology*, Vol. 29, No. 3, 2002. pp. 197-202.

Responding to Disruptive or Threatening Student Behavior: A Guide for Faculty

http://www.csun.edu/studentaffairs/studentconduct/guideline_disruptive.pdf

Prepared by William Watkins, California State University, Northridge.

A Faculty Guide to Dealing with Troubled and Disruptive Students

<http://www.fiu.edu/~sccr/Disruptive%20Stud.%20Broc.%20for%20Faculty%20rev.%2010-28-04.doc>

Developed by Karen A. Dlhosh and Dr. Heidi von Harscher, Florida International University.

Disruption in Class

<http://sja.ucdavis.edu/files/disrupt.pdf>

One page informational flyer from UC-Davis.

Dealing with Disruptive Students

<http://www.uncw.edu/stuaff/DOSO/documents/Disruptive.Students.pdf>

Publication from the Office of the Dean of Students at the University of North Carolina-Wilmington.

Guide to Classroom Management: The Emotionally Troubled Student

http://studentaffairs.humboldt.edu/download/disruptive_students.pdf

Publication from Counseling and Psychological Services at Humboldt State University.