

A Faculty and Staff Guide to Managing Disruptive Behavior in the Classroom

Do you have students in class who do the following:

- IM (Instant Message) friends or talk on cell phones?
- Sidebar conversation with classmates?
- Interrupt discussions or make inappropriate remarks?
- Write or mention ideas that cause concern for their mental state?
- Repeatedly arrive late or leave early?

If you consider any of these behaviors disruptive, you have the right to address such behavior. Annoying classroom behavior should not be tolerated and may become disruptive if it is ignored.

Preventive Measures Faculty Can Take

- Utilize your syllabus to include specific expectations for, and consequences of student behavior (e.g., no cell phones, no tardiness, etc.) during first day introduction and in your course format.
- Use the first class meeting to review what is and isn't appropriate.
- Confer with your colleagues on ways they prevent or respond to disruptive behavior.
- Model the behavior you expect of students.
- Become familiar with the *Faculty and Staff Guide* and consult the Office of Student Conduct and Community Standards.

Steps for Responding to Disruptive Behavior

- Immediately ask the student to stop the behavior in an appropriate manner.
- Speak with the student privately after class about his/her conduct.
- Document in writing the situation and your actions to your Academic Dean and consult with the Office of Student Conduct and Community Standards.

When you talk privately with the student, it is your judgment whether to have a colleague or Academic Dean present during this conversation

- Be specific about the behavior that is disruptive.
- Explain the affect the behavior has on your ability to teach and the classes ability to learn.
- Address what you observe about the behavior, e.g., communicate your concern.
- Allow the student to respond and listen carefully to his or her words.
- Restate your expectations for the student's future behavior.

If Disruptive Behavior Continues

If you suspect the disruptive behavior could be the result of psychological problems, contact the University Health and Counseling Services (UH&CS) for advice on how to respond and see the *Faculty and Staff Guide to Encountering Students in Distress or Personal Crisis*.

If you suspect the disruptive behavior could be the result of the student's disability, contact Disability Resources for advice on how to respond and see the *Faculty and Staff Guide to Encountering Students in Distress or Personal Crisis*.

Some disruptive behavior simply reflects bad manners and a lack of consideration of others and may cease after one warning. If such conduct persists, in a future class, inform the student you will report the behavior to the Office of Student Conduct and Community Standards. Behaving in disruptive ways in class and failing to comply with directions to stop are both violations of the student conduct policy. Again inform your Academic Dean and the Office of Student Conduct and Community Standards.

Your Rights as a Faculty Member

You have the right to direct students to cease disruptive classroom behavior immediately. If it becomes necessary, you can direct a student to leave your classroom for the rest of the class period. If they fail to comply with your directives to leave the classroom, promptly report their failure to do so to CWRU Security, and ask to remove the student from your classroom. Depending on the severity of the situation, an option may be to dismiss the class.

Threatening or Alarming Behavior

Sometimes behavior is more than just thoughtless or rude.

Signs of threatening/alarming behaviors include:

- Using derogatory or profane language in an angry manner.
- Appearing hostile, aggressive, or violent.
- Escalating behavior (e.g., louder voice, faster speech, pacing).
- Making statements such as "If I don't pass this course, someone will pay," "I better graduate or else," "I will take things into my own hands."
- Speaking incoherently with unconnected thoughts, garbled speech, or appearing to be under the influence.

If the student's behavior is alarming, escalating, or if you or others feel threatened:

- Contact the CWRU Police immediately, identify yourself and your location, describe the behavior, and request assistance.
- Consider dismissing the class immediately.
- Inform your Academic Dean and Office of Student Conduct and Community Standards, or Office of Student Affairs.

