

AN ADVISORY ON CLASSROOM DISRUPTION AND THREATENING BEHAVIOR BY STUDENTS

From the Vice Provost's Office for Undergraduate Education and the Vice President's Office for Student Success, University at Albany

All student conduct at the University at Albany is governed by the policies outlined in the handbook entitled Community Rights and Responsibilities (CRR). This handbook is available on the web at <http://www.albany.edu/judicial/standardsofconduct.html>. Classroom disruption and threatening behavior by students is a rarity at UAlbany but when it happens it is important to know how to deal with it. The following advice is offered to assist classroom instructors and staff members who are looking for guidance in dealing with a disruptive or threatening student.

1. Classroom instructors are responsible for the management of their classroom environment, including the Web environment. It is suggested that behavioral standards, tolerances, and expectations be clearly defined to students at the beginning of each semester through a course syllabus and reinforced through verbal explanation. Instructors should also be cognizant of the written behaviors of students if utilizing the web as part of the teaching environment. Any behavior that would not be seen as appropriate in the traditional classroom is not appropriate in the web environment and may lead to disciplinary action. It is suggested that open web discussions, such as bulletin boards, be monitored for inappropriate behavior/use.

Remember, both classroom instructors and students 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.

2. Examples of classroom disruption that should be viewed as a disciplinary offense as defined by Community Rights and Responsibilities, UAlbany'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:** refusal to comply with reasonable faculty directions, repeatedly leaving and entering the classroom without authorization, making loud or distracting noises, posting inappropriate messages electronically, persisting in speaking without being recognized, repeatedly interrupting others, audio or video recording of classroom activities or the use of electronic devices (cell phones and beepers) without the permission of the instructor, or resorting to physical/verbal threats or personal insults or insulting gestures. Classroom instructors are urged to promote civility in the classroom environment and to include in their course syllabus their expectations with respect to the use of cell phones and beepers as well as reminding students to report perceived problems with classmates in the classroom. If a student is behaving in a way described above and does not heed the warning of the classroom instructor the student should be directed to leave pending a meeting with the Office of Conflict Resolution & Civic Responsibility.

3. The Office of Conflict Resolution & Civic Responsibility can help by reviewing university disciplinary regulations with you, and meeting with accused students formally, or informally. It's

better to report disruptive incidents 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. At times, the University Counseling Center will coordinate a case conference involving faculty and staff who are concerned about a student's behavior. The purpose of the case conference is in part to share information, determine the degree of potential risk the student may represent to self and/or others and to develop a strategic intervention as appropriate. In the most serious cases, we can suspend students temporarily, pending disciplinary proceedings or medical evaluation (CRR, page 11, VIII, # 1).

STRATEGIES TO PREVENT AND RESPOND TO DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOR

A.	Clarify standards for the conduct of your class in a syllabus and/or verbally.
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, Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education (2-3950) and the Director of Conflict Resolution & Civic Responsibility (2-5501).
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 (a sample incident report may be found on the web at http://www.albany.edu/judicial/classroomsafety/samplereport.html). Identify witnesses for the Campus Police or the Office of Conflict Resolution & Civic Responsibility, as needed.
H.	If it is suspected that an incident of classroom disruption is either associated with or is a result of a mental health condition or alcohol or other substance abuse, you are encouraged to contact the University Counseling Center (2-5800) for consultation.

STRATEGIES FOR REPORTING OF THREATENING AND ABUSIVE BEHAVIOR

A.	If possible, leave the area immediately.
B.	Call the University Police by dialing 9-1-1 from any campus phone or 442-3131 from any cell phone to request that an officer come to the location. Inform the Police if it is a repeat occurrence.
C.	Anyone who observes what appears to be threatening behavior should report it to the University Police and in appropriate cases file a student <u>incident report</u> with the Office of Conflict Resolution & Civic Responsibility.
D.	University employees who observe what appears to be threatening behavior should also report it to their supervisor or Department Head, who should report it to the University Police and/or the Office of Conflict Resolution & Civic Responsibility.

This information was compiled and reviewed by members of the Classroom Safety Task Force, an entity of the University's Task Force on Campus Safety. The Classroom Safety Committee wish to thank the following Universities whose existing policies on classroom disruption and threatening behavior served as a guide in the development of this resource: University of Maryland - College Park, University of Arizona, Auburn University and Colorado University.

Resources : A Quick Reference

University Police Department

Emergency.....442-3131 or 911*

Non-Emergency.....442-3132

5-Quad Volunteer Ambulance (on campus 24 hours/day)...442-3131 or 911*

University Counseling Center.....442-5800

Office of Conflict Resolution & Civic Responsibility.....442-5501

Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education.....442-3950

*When dialing 911 from any campus phone on the uptown and downtown campuses your call will be directed to the University Police Department for response. If you are located on the East Campus your call will be directed to the East Greenbush Police Department. If you are calling from a phone located in CTG (187 Wolf Road) your call will be directed to Colonie Police. If you are calling from the Stress Disorder Clinic (1535 Western Ave.) your call will be directed to Guilderland Police.

When dialing 911 from a cell phone your call is directed to the nearest State Police agency who then redirects your call to the University Police Department for dispatching.

Helpful Tips:

Familiarize yourself with the University's guide to student code of conduct, Community Rights and Responsibilities (<http://www.albany.edu/judicial/standardsconduct.html>).

Hard copies of this handbook are available in the Office of Conflict Resolution & Civic Responsibility, Campus Center 357.

Know the nearest location of an Emergency Call Device

Emergency call devices can be found in the form of Blue Light Telephones, red wall mount phones in some women's restrooms or red phones located in Lecture Center lecterns. Emergency phone calls may also be placed from most elevators located throughout campus. Blue Light Telephones are located all around the University grounds. They can be found in parking lots, residence halls, on the academic podium, and along roadways. They are easily recognized by the blue light just above the phone box. In an emergency, all a person has to do is open the phone box, pick up the phone, and talk to the University Police Dispatcher on the line. Along with the 911 Emergency System, the Blue Lights give any person immediate phone access to police, fire, and emergency medical services.

Familiarize yourself with the University Building Evacuation Guide

The University's Department of Environmental Health and Safety provides and maintains information regarding building evacuation procedures. The University's building evacuation guide may be found on the web at http://www.albany.edu/ehs/fire_evacuation.html. This guide provides insight on what to do if an incident is discovered, what to do if a building alarm is activated, how to handle disabled occupant evacuation, and what to do in the event of an evening evacuation.

How to identify a student with potential mental health issues

Mental health issues and concerns may manifest themselves in a number of ways within the classroom environment. To learn more about resources that might assist in addressing mental health situations and associated behaviors that may occur in the classroom, please consult http://www.albany.edu/counseling_center/faculty_staff/ or contact the University Counseling Center for consultation at 2-5800.

