

## DEALING WITH DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIORS IN THE CLASSROOM

At a CAS Chairs' Council Meeting on March 20, 2010, Clarence McNeill, Office of Conflict Resolution and Civic Responsibility; Aran Mull, University Police Department; and John Murphy, Office of Student Success, spoke about classroom decorum. The following is a summary of their presentation taken from the council minutes.

In the classroom, **disruptive behavior** can include:

- monopolizing a discussion
- side conversations
- hostile remarks
- repeatedly arriving late or leaving early
- sleeping
- cell phone use
- other behaviors that interrupt the educational process.

**Seven strategies** to prevent and respond to disruptive behavior:

- Clarify standards in course syllabus and verbally. Resolve ambiguous policies and communicate expectations with clarity and consistently. Faculty have the right to determine appropriate behavior in their classroom.
- Serve as a role model for the conduct you expect.
- Consider a general word of caution rather than warning a particular student.
- If behavior is irritating but not disruptive, speak to a student privately.
- When confronting a student use a firm and friendly manner. Avoid public arguments or harsh words.
- If a student's disruptive behaviors persists the student may be directed to leave the classroom. Whenever possible, prior consultation should take place with your supervisor and Clay McNeill, 442-5501. Be clear, "I am directing you to leave the classroom."
- If disruption is serious, and other reasonable measures have failed, campus police should be called at **442-3131** (it's a good idea to have this number programmed into your cell phone); or at **911** from a campus phone; or from the **red phones** in lecture centers.

Staff must not use force or threats of force except in immediate self defense. It is important to engage the support resources available on campus.

**Threatening or violent behavior** may occur if a student:

- violates your personal space and or raises his/her voice
- implies or makes a direct threat to harm themselves or others
- displays or possesses a firearm or weapon
- physically confronts/attacks or stalks another student or faculty
- sends threatening emails, letters or other correspondence

**Stalking** is defined as the act or crime of willfully and repeatedly following or harassing another person in circumstances that would cause a reasonable person to fear injury or death especially because of express or implied threats.

A **mental disorder or mental illness** is a psychological or behavioral pattern that occurs in an individual and is thought to cause distress or disability that is not expected as part of normal development of culture.

**Protocols** to consider when dealing with an emotionally disturbed person:

DO

- Isolate the person from peers and other onlookers
- Focus – exclude distractions
- Listen – attend to the person
- Maintain a calm approach – if you appear out of control the situation may escalate. Other students will be looking to the faculty member to set the tone. Remain in control and in charge.
- Be clear and direct
- Use paraphrasing and restatement
- Give the person an opportunity to vent – conversations may reveal need for accommodations
- Be respectful
- Use non-threatening posture
- Set firm limits
- Repeat direction/questions as often as needed
- Allow the person to save face
- Slow down

DON'T

- Make promises you can't keep
- Argue, give order or disagree
- Placate
- Become sarcastic or condescending
- Attempt to reason with a person who is intoxicated
- Join with the person's hallucinations or delusions

**Helpful Hints for Conflict Resolution**

- Stay calm in the face of adversity
- Be friendly, firm and fair when conveying a clear message about classroom policy
- Team up with a colleague if you prefer
- The use of cell phones and texting should be limited or restricted to breaks

- Talking in a group or on a cell phone is considered disruptive to the educational environment

**Responding to Students in Crisis** – The link below will take you to an online reporting mechanism.  
[http://www.albany.edu/studentaffairs/faculty/albany\\_only/](http://www.albany.edu/studentaffairs/faculty/albany_only/).

Written accounts of any incidents must be reported. A sample incident report can be found at  
<http://www.albany.edu/judicial/classroomsafety/samplereport.html>.

In addition, you may also send an email directly to the Counseling Center  
[consultation@uamail.albany.edu](mailto:consultation@uamail.albany.edu)

### **Crisis Response Teams:**

*BRisk - Behavior Risk Assessment Committee:* In the Spring of 2008, President George Phillip appointed a Behavior Risk Assessment Committee (called BRisk); a critical decision-making and advisory group responsible for ensuring that the necessary risk assessment policies and programs are in place for the campus community. The membership of this group extends across the Divisions of Student Success and Academic Affairs and is chaired by Associate Vice President for Student Success, John Murphy. The responsibilities of BRisk are critical to ensuring that our University community takes every step possible to prevent violence on our campus and adequately prepares to handle emergency situations effectively.

*CUBIT - College/University Behavior Intervention Team:* was developed in the Spring of 2008 as an ad hoc supplement to the BRisk Team. CUBIT is an early intervention team of six who meet regularly to “track” red flag behaviors with the intent on providing skilled threat assessment and intervention. CUBIT and its membership operate within the legal parameters of New York State law (HIPAA and FERPA) and University policy.