



Responding to Disruptions in the Classroom

National trends and recent incidents at several universities show an increase in disrespectful, disruptive, and even violent student behavior on campuses. This can create challenges for faculty and staff as they maintain a learning environment that is safe and caring. Although some inappropriate behavior can be easily and directly dealt with, faculty and staff members are encouraged to consult early and often with resources on campus that address student disruption and distress. This brochure can help faculty and staff members identify problem behavior and be aware of available resources.



STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK
Center for Prevention and Outreach
216 Stony Brook Union
Stony Brook, New York 11794-3200

RESPONDING TO DISRUPTIONS IN THE CLASSROOM

A GUIDE FOR
CLASSROOM INSTRUCTORS

OFFICE OF THE PROVOST
OFFICE OF THE VICE PRESIDENT FOR STUDENT AFFAIRS



■ What is Disruptive Behavior?

DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOR INTERFERES with academic or administrative activities. Such behavior actively inhibits students' ability to learn, instructors' ability to teach, or the regular operation of the campus. Disruptive behavior may even threaten or endanger the physical or psychological health, safety, or welfare of others.

Multiple factors, including emotional distress, can contribute to disruptive behavior. However, as a faculty member or TA, you do not have to know how to identify the underlying causes of disruption. Clear communication of behavioral expectations for students, early consultation and communication with mental health professionals and/or University Police and Judicial Affairs, and written documentation of disruptive behavior have proven to be key elements in effective prevention and early intervention. These actions are often enough to prevent a situation from escalating into a larger crisis, for the student exhibiting disruptive behavior and the faculty/staff member involved.

■ Prevention

TO FOSTER A CAMPUS CULTURE OF CIVILITY AND RESPECT, it is important to articulate expectations, encourage discussion, and respond to problems consistently. Faculty members encounter fewer problems with student behavior when they clearly state their expectations about the importance of respectful classroom behavior.

The following statement can be used by faculty members in their course materials and early class discussions:

"The University at Stony Brook expects students to maintain standards of personal integrity that are in harmony with the educational goals of the institution; to observe national, state, and local laws and University regulations; and to respect the rights, privileges, and property of other people."

While the University is a place where the free exchange of ideas and concepts allows for debate and disagreement, all classroom behavior and discourse should reflect the values of respect and civility. Both students and course instructors share responsibility for maintaining an appropriate learning environment that reflects these values. Students have the right to learn and the responsibility to participate in and respect the learning process.

■ Consultation and Early Reporting

IF STUDENT BEHAVIOR FEELS INTIMIDATING OR DISTURBING, IT IS WISE TO CONSULT EARLY on, before the conduct becomes an emergency. Many faculty and staff members find it helpful to first consult with Judicial Affairs on specific situations, to discuss the behavior and possible methods of response. During early consultation, the Director of Judicial Affairs can check disciplinary records to determine whether there is a prior pattern of problem behaviors. This information is useful in determining how to handle the problem and whether to initiate the judicial process. (This is also why it is important for faculty to copy the Student Judiciary when handling problem behaviors internally.) In summary, if faculty and staff members have any concerns or questions about how to handle a particular situation, they should consult Judicial Affairs.

Faculty are required to report to Judicial Affairs any disruptive behavior that interrupts their ability to teach, the safety of the learning environment, and/or students' ability to learn.

To request consultation or report disruptive behavior, contact the Director of Judicial Affairs by telephone at (631) 632-6705. Written documentation of the problem behavior is required. The student is entitled to see this documentation, so make sure it contains only factual, descriptive information. If the student interferes with the orderly functioning of a classroom or office, instructors' ability to teach, or the safety or welfare of others, the student may be prohibited from returning to the classroom or office pending disciplinary hearing. In addition, directives can be issued to prohibit contact with specific individuals. Such directives can be issued by Judicial Affairs.

The purpose of the disciplinary hearing is to review the facts in the case, hear the student's perspective, and if the student is found to be responsible for the disruption, determine an appropriate disciplinary response, ranging from a warning to expulsion from the University. In addition, administrative action, such as referral for a medical or psychological evaluation, may be an option. Disciplinary decisions take into consideration both the needs of the campus community and the rights of the accused student.

■ When to Contact University Police

WHEN A SERIOUS INCIDENT OF DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOR OCCURS IN THE CLASSROOM, ANY ACADEMIC BUILDING, OR ON THE CAMPUS, University Police should be contacted immediately by calling 911 or 333 from on-campus phones, and 632-3333 from off-campus and cellular phones.

Classroom disruption by students constitutes a serious breach of University behavioral expectations described in the University Student Conduct Code. If there is any immediate threat to the safety of any person, the University Police should be summoned.

Blue light phones, restricted campus phones, and conventional academic building office phones throughout the campus can be used as emergency telephones. The average University Police emergency response time to on-campus locations is under two minutes. The University Police emergency dispatcher will contact other services, such as ambulances, if needed. If you are unable to make the call yourself, designate a specific person to do it. When making a call to University Police, provide as much information as possible about the nature of the problem.

■ Important Phone Numbers and Web Sites

University Police

(on-campus phones) **911**

(off-campus/cellular phones) **632-3333**

Judicial Affairs

347 Administration Building **632-6705**

University Counseling Center

Second floor, Infirmary Building **632-6720**

Center for Prevention and Outreach

216 Stony Brook Union **632-2748**

Ombuds Office

114 Humanities **632-9200**

Student Conduct Code

<http://studentaffairs.stonybrook.edu/judiciary/conduct>