

Handling Disruptive Behavior

What is disruptive behavior?

Essentially, determining what constitutes disruptive activity lies at the discretion of each instructor. Behaviors such as routine tardiness, speaking without being recognized, harassing instructors through e-mail, and overt acts of violence are all examples of the range of unacceptable classroom behaviors. According to University policies, “disruptive activity” is behavior in a classroom or instructional program that interferes with the instructor’s ability to conduct the class or the ability of others to profit from it (See sections 5.10 and 5.18 of the Student Code of Conduct in the *Carolina Community*).

Why don’t faculty members report disruptive behavior?

Research suggests that instructors do not report disruptions because they hope for a spontaneous resolution, they fear they will not be supported by the administration, they fear it will reflect poorly on their abilities, and/or they fear retaliation. Since there has been an increase in the reporting of problems, and in many cases, in the severity of the problems, we would like to remind all faculty and instructors that the academic and student affairs staff are committed to ensuring that your decision will be met with support and expeditious resolution.

How do I handle disruptive activity?

Include on your syllabus:

- Guidelines and consequences regarding behaviors, attendance and punctuality
- Repercussions for academic dishonesty

On the first day of class:

- Clearly state behavioral expectations and consequences
- Discuss protocols for discussions/debates, including how to be recognized
- State (or negotiate) what you will allow in class (gum, hats, snacks, etc.)
- Role modeling of expected behaviors
- Assign seating

Other alternatives:

- Discuss student rights and responsibilities with more experienced colleagues or with the Office of Student Judicial Programs (OSJP)

When it occurs:

- Remain calm and in control
- Identify and acknowledge the issue
- Offer a solution or recommend a continuation of the discussion after class or during office hours
- Document the incident
- Follow-up with the student verbally and in writing

If the situation escalates:

- Dismiss the student from class or dismiss the class entirely
- Document the incident with the Department Chair or Dean, and OSJP
- Notify the proper authorities (including the USC Police Department)

Remember to never: Raise your voice, argue with the student, threaten the student, get too close to the student, touch the student, use abusive language toward the student, or put yourself in danger!

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