

Managing Disruptive Behavior in the Classroom *for the Faculty of William and Mary*

The Dean of Students Office
The College of
William and Mary
Campus Center Room 109
(757) 221-2510
<http://www.wm.edu/deanofstudents>

MANAGING CLASSROOM DISRUPTIONS

This brochure has been designed by the Dean of Students (DOS) office to help you, the faculty member, assess problem student behavior in your classroom and determine appropriate courses of action. Most inappropriate behaviors can be handled by you at the time of the disruption. However, some may require consultation, College judicial action, or immediate emergency response.

WHAT IS DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOR?

The definition of disruptive conduct contained within the *Student Handbook* includes “conduct which obstructs or disrupts a normal function.” Therefore, generally, if a student is disrupting your class to the point that you find it difficult to teach or students are finding it reasonably difficult to learn, then disruptive behavior may be occurring.

Examples of disruptive behavior:

- ◆ Making loud and distracting noises.
- ◆ Repeatedly answering cellular phones or allowing pagers to beep.
- ◆ Exhibiting erratic, irrational behavior.
- ◆ Persisting in speaking without being recognized.
- ◆ Repeatedly leaving and entering the classroom without authorization.
- ◆ Making physical threats or verbal insults to the faculty member or other students.

PREVENTION

Remember that as a faculty member, you have the prerogative to create and enforce reasonable behavioral standards for each of your classes. By establishing clear expectations at the beginning of the semester, you may be saving yourself and your class the trouble of dealing with disruptions down the road.

Keep these suggestions in mind:

- ◆ Include course and behavioral norms and expectations for you and your students in the course syllabus (the DOS office can assist with this.) Articulate clear rules regarding attendance, tardiness, active class participation, and appropriate conduct. Specify consequences in a fair and consistent manner.
- ◆ On the first day of class, ask your students what they think the behavioral norms and expectations should be, and add their suggestions to your list. You will find that students are often the strongest supporters of classroom decorum.
- ◆ Discuss these norms and expectations with your students, so they can gain an in-depth understanding of how they should act in your class.
- ◆ Draw up a “contract” on classroom behavior, including academic integrity, and ask students to read and sign it sometime during the first week of class.
- ◆ Lastly, be sure to serve as a role model and exhibit the type of behavior you expect from your students. Responding “in-kind” with sarcasm or disrespect usually only escalates the situation.

RESPONSE

Unfortunately, every class at one time or another may experience a disruption. The following suggestions are intended to help you minimize the negative impact of disruptions and to address them in a professional, developmental and appropriate manner.

- ◆ In some cases, disruptive students do not realize they are bothering others. One suggestion is to move closer to the inattentive students, pause until everyone quiets down, and make direct eye contact. Then use general statements like “We have too many private conversations going on at this time; let’s focus on the same topic.”
- ◆ If the disruptive behavior does not cease, you may ask a particular student to refrain from the disruptive behavior and ask that he/she come to see you after class. When you meet with the student, explain why you consider this type of behavior inappropriate, stress your behavioral expectations of students, and warn the student that further occurrences of disruptive behavior may result in disciplinary action. Use “I” statements such as, “When I see you ____, I feel ____, and I need the activity to stop.”
- ◆ If the disruptive behavior persists, you may ask the student to leave the class; refer him/her to the DOS office (by submitting a Campus/Community Incident Report form that can be downloaded from <http://www.wm.edu/judicial>), and/or call College police to remove the student, if necessary.
- ◆ If you are seeing a pattern of odd behavior and are concerned by it, consult your department chair, the Dean of Undergraduate Studies, the Counseling Center, or the DOS office for consultation.
- ◆ If a student is posing a threat to the safety of himself/ herself or others or if the student becomes physically or verbally abusive, College police (221-4596) should be contacted immediately and a Campus/Community Incident Report form should be submitted to the DOS office. Always err on the side of safety.
- ◆ The fact that a disruptive student may have a disability should not inhibit you from acting on the inappropriate behavior. Students with or without identified disabilities are governed by the same behavioral rules. For more information, please contact the DOS office.

PRIVACY

Any information you learn while speaking privately with the disruptive student should be handled in a confidential manner. You may only discuss the case with campus officials who have a legitimate educational interest, such as your department chair or the DOS office. The privacy of a student’s educational record (e.g., grades, reports of misconduct) is protected under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974. For more information, please contact the DOS office.

JUDICIAL PROCESS

Upon the receipt of a report, the accused student will be contacted by the DOS office and asked to set up an initial meeting with the Assistant Dean of Students for Judicial Affairs.

During this meeting, the accused student will have an opportunity to present his/her version of the events and will be advised of his/her rights and the judicial process. The student will be able to choose if he/she wants to resolve the matter in an informal setting, an administrative hearing, or a panel hearing. Should a case go to a hearing, you will be asked to be present and provide information in addition to the report already submitted.

For more information about this process, please refer to the Administration of Student Life Policies section contained within the *Student Handbook*.

SUGGESTIONS FOR YOUR SYLLABUS

You may want to include specific expectations that you have of your students in your course syllabus. Be specific and outline consequences. Review these with students and refer to them as needed. Possible expectations include the following:

1. Classroom attendance is a necessary part of this course. You are allowed no more than x number of unexcused absences. More than x unexcused absences will result in a grade penalty of ____.

2. Classroom participation is also a part of your grade in this course. To participate you must arrive to class on time having prepared the materials for the day. Questions and comments must be appropriate, relevant to the topic at hand and must not disrupt the class.
3. Classroom discussion should be civilized and respectful to everyone and relevant to the topic we are discussing. Everyone is entitled to their opinion. Classroom discussion is intended to allow us to hear and learn from a variety of viewpoints. This can only be achieved if we respect one another and our differences.

Any discussion from class that continues on any listserv or class discussion list should adhere to these same rules and expectations.

4. Side conversations that disrupt the class, my ability to teach, or students' ability to learn will not be tolerated.
5. In order to allow everyone to be heard, you must raise your hand to be recognized.
6. All students are expected to be on time. Class starts promptly at x. You should be in your seat and ready to begin class at this time. Class ends at x. Packing up your things early is disruptive to others around you and to myself.
7. Any continued disruption of class will not be tolerated. I reserve the right to ask you to leave the classroom if your behavior is disrupting the class. Disruptive behavior will also be reported to the Dean of Students office.

CAMPUS RESOURCES

Dean of Students Office

Campus Center 109
221-2510

<http://www.wm.edu/deanofstudents>

Dean of Undergraduate Studies

Ewell Hall 124
221-2469

<http://www.wm.edu/FAS/ugradoffice.php>

Counseling Center

Blow Hall 240
221-3620

<http://www.wm.edu/OSA/counsel/index.php>

William and Mary Police

221-4596

<http://www.wm.edu/WMPD>

Campus/ Community Incident Report

<http://www.wm.edu/judicial>

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