

DIVISION OF STUDENT LIFE
Dean of Students Office
University of Wisconsin-Madison

**Addressing Disruptive Classroom Behavior:
A Guide for Instructors**

Occasionally instructors may have a student who exhibits disruptive behavior in the classroom. Such disruptive behavior may persistently or grossly interfere with the academic learning environment, thereby making it difficult for other students to learn and instructors to teach (Amada, p. 8). The following guidelines are intended to assist instructors in dealing with these situations. They are not intended to provide information on classroom management or to tell instructors how to teach.

- Some disruptive students may have emotional or mental health disorders. While such students may be considered to have a disability, and thus fall under the protections of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, they are expected to meet the same standards of behavior as any student. Instructors should set standards for classroom behavior (including in the syllabus) and enforce them for all students, in accordance with principles of academic freedom.
- Some disruptive behavior can be dealt with by the instructor in an informal manner by speaking directly with the student and setting clear expectations for further conduct in the classroom. Instructors may wish to consult with their Department Chair and/or other colleagues for help and advice in such matters.
- Since there are a wide variety of disruptive behaviors possible, the instructor may want to discuss the student's behavior with a member of University Health Services (608-265-5600) and/or the Dean of Students Office (608-263-5700). These staff will assist the instructor in developing strategies for working with the student.
- If a student continues to be disruptive, the instructor should direct that student to leave the classroom. If they refuse to leave, the University police should be called to remove the student. For such cases of repeated, blatant, and clearly irresolvable disruptive behaviors, instructors should document the situation in detail (very important) and contact the drop-in staff member in the Dean of Students Office. The on-call dean will consult with appropriate staff and the instructor in determining an appropriate response, which may include initiating disciplinary proceedings.
- Any time a student's classroom behavior is threatening towards any person (including themselves), the University police should be called immediately.
- Students removed from a classroom may be permitted to return to the class after agreeing to the condition that there will be no further disruptive behavior in the class. Such students also may be sanctioned through the University non-academic misconduct procedures, with the Dean of Students Office acting as the investigating officer.
- The removal of a student from a class, voluntarily/involuntarily, and/or temporarily/ permanently; is a serious step, not to be taken lightly, and therefore must be handled utilizing whatever due process is appropriate.
- There may be situations occurring outside the classroom where instructors feel threatened or very uncomfortable with a student's behavior. Instructors should report these situations to the Dean of Students Office and/or the University police so appropriate interventions can happen before the matter escalates.

A good resource on disruptive students is [Coping with the Disruptive College Student: A Practical Model](#) by Gerald Amada, PhD. Nothing in these guidelines is intended to infringe upon the academic freedom of instructor or student. Two fundamental principles to observe:

- 1) Students have the right to express opinions germane to the subject matter of a course;
- 2) Instructors have the right to guide classroom discussion and to set reasonable limits on the classroom time made available to students for the expression of their opinions. The responsibility for striking a balance between these principles rests with instructors.