

## Disruptive and Aggressive Behaviors

Disruptive behaviors are those that interfere with or even prevent instruction of learning activities in the classroom. These behaviors may range from mild distractions to serious threats or violence.

Students may act out or become verbally abusive when they encounter frustrating situations, which they believe are out of their control. They may also displace their anger and frustration from those situations onto a nearby target.

Each professor may use their **own** discretion in determining what constitutes disruptive behavior and how to respond.

### Establish Classroom Expectations

Lay the groundwork for a positive classroom experience by taking time to provide expectations.

- Directly state reasonable and clear expectations at the start of the semester (e.g., no cell phone use)
- Define behavior standards and discuss rules of etiquette in class and in the syllabus (e.g., derogatory language and intimidating behavior is not acceptable)
- Explain reasons for classroom expectations and invite student comments.
- Be a role model by keeping your relationship with students professional and helpful.

## Responding to Disruptive Behavior:

If disruptive behavior occurs, the following are possible options:

- Caution the entire class rather than singling out the identified student.
- Calmly indicate the problem and state that the class will not continue until the behavior stops (e.g., no cell phone use or e-mailing in class).
- Before resuming the class, enlist the support of others by reminding the group that disruptive behaviors take valuable time away from class (e.g., warn that consequences may include exam material not covered in class).
- Exercise authority with compassion and self-restraint. Correct innocent mistakes and minor offenses gently without ridiculing student remarks.
- Speak to individuals about disruptive behavior after class and in a discrete manner. If the situation requires an immediate response, courteously ask the student to stop the behavior and speak with you after class or during office hours. (e.g., if a student becomes verbally aggressive do not respond in a threatening, hostile, or punitive manner).

If verbal aggression occurs, the following are guidelines to help the situation:

- Be careful not to press the student for an explanation of their behavior.
- Be careful not to ignore the situation.
- Be careful not to become hostile or punitive.
- If needed, get help.
- Directly address and acknowledge the student's anger or frustration (e.g., "I hear how angry you are" or "It appears you are upset").
- A student should be asked to leave class when he/she engages in behavior that impedes your ability to teach class productively. Remind students that continued disruption may result in a permanent removal from class.

### Get a Consultation

If you have concerns about a particular student and want assistance, call the Counseling Center to speak with the on-call counselor (401-254-3124). Identify yourself as faculty or staff and tell the receptionist that you have a student concern. **Indicate if the situation is an emergency and requires immediate attention.**

## Reminders

- ◆ If you feel threatened or uneasy do not meet with the student alone and seek consultation from a Staff and/or Faculty as needed.
- ◆ Use your resources. You are not expected to provide counseling or make decisions alone.
- ◆ Respond to distressing work because early intervention and referral can prevent more serious problems.

## Emergencies

- ◆ To reach the on-call counselor during daytime hours, call 401-254-3124. **If the situation calls for immediate response ask the receptionist to interrupt the counselor.**
- ◆ After hours or weekends, call Public Safety (401-254-HELP) and they will appropriately assist your concern. If a counselor needs to be reached, Public Safety will assist you in the process.

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# Managing Disruptive Behavior: A Guide for Faculty/Staff

Roger Williams University

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and  
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