Policy on disruptive or threatening behavior in an instructional setting

The University seeks to promote a teaching and learning environment free from material and substantial classroom disruptions. Faculty members and teaching staff have the authority and responsibility to manage their classroom environments effectively. Instructors may determine the time and manner for student questions and expression of points of view in the instructional setting. Accordingly, instructors should establish, communicate and enforce reasonable rules of classroom behavior and decorum via the syllabus and classroom discussion. This policy is not intended to discourage appropriate classroom expression, discussion or disagreement, but to promote respectful interactions.

A. Instructional Rules and Decorum

Rules and expectations for the instructional setting should be established by the instructor and communicated to the students via the syllabus and classroom discussion at the outset of the course. Such rules may contain reasonable restrictions in light of the instructional setting, teaching method and learning objectives, and may vary depending upon the educational context. Instructional rules may include, but are not limited to, prohibitions on cell phone use, refusing to be seated, talking during lectures, sleeping, eating, newspaper reading, entering the classroom late or leaving early without authorization.

B. Prohibited Behavior

The information below about disruptive or threatening behavior by students has been provided by the Dean of Students Office. This information was updated by the university and the Board of Regents in April 2010.

Disruptive Behavior Is Prohibited. "Disruptive behavior" means conduct that materially and substantially interferes with or obstructs the teaching or learning process in the context of a classroom or educational setting. Disruptive behavior includes conduct that distracts or intimidates others in a manner that interferes with instructional activities, fails to adhere to an instructor's appropriate classroom rules or instructions, or interferes with the normal operations of the university.

Threatening Behavior Is Prohibited. “Threatening behavior” is any statement, communication, conduct or gesture, including those in written form, directed toward any member of the university community that causes a reasonable apprehension of physical harm to a person or property. This behavior involves encounters with students that leave you frightened and in fear for your personal safety, and should be taken very seriously. Threatening behavior includes, but is not limited to, direct or implied threats of violence, challenges to fight, shoving, physical attacks, stalking, threatening phone calls, emails, or other correspondence, acts of harassment and similar behaviors.
disruptive and threatening student behavior

DEAN OF STUDENTS OFFICE

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Guidelines for faculty and staff

Contacts:

Dean of Students Office. 621-7057
Counseling and Psychological Services. 621-6490
Police (non-emergency). 621-8273
Police (emergency). 9-1-1

General Overview
What is the difference between disruptive and threatening behavior? How does The University of Arizona define each one?

Disruptive Behavior is conduct that materially and substantially interferes with or obstructs the teaching or learning process in the context of a classroom or educational setting.

Threatening Behavior is any statement, communication, conduct or gesture, including those in written form, directed toward any member of the University community that causes a reasonable apprehension of physical harm to a person or property.
Disruptive Behavior

Disruptive behavior is detrimental to the academic community because it interferes with the learning process, inhibits the ability of instructors to teach effectively, diverts university energy and resources away from the educational mission and may indicate a significant level of personal problems or distress on the part of the disrupter.

Disruptive behavior IS:
- The student in your class who is persistently tardy or leaves early;
- The student who talks incessantly while you are delivering a lecture;
- The student who loudly and frequently interrupts the flow of class with questions or interjections; or
- The student who becomes belligerent when you confront his or her inappropriate behavior in class;
- Cell phones ringing in a classroom, text messaging, chatting online;
- Persistent and unreasonable demands for time and attention both in and out of the classroom.

Disruptive behavior is NOT:
- Cultural differences;
- Appropriate demonstrations of disagreements or differences of opinion;
- A clash of values or beliefs;
- Needing extra time or attention based on reasonable accommodation.

Preventing Disruptive Behavior
- Set clear expectations about classroom behavior and include these expectations in the syllabus;
- Review these expectations in class and develop agreements as a class during the first session;
- Talk to students or speak with students in private and immediately upon first disruptive incident;
- Model professional behavior. Respond to inappropriate remarks in a professional and mature manner. Put-downs or witty comebacks can potentially escalate a situation.

Appropriate Referrals for Disruptive Students and Students in Crisis
- Emotional issues/anger management: Please refer to CAPS, 621-6490.
- If a student has threatened you or someone else: Call police immediately (9-1-1).
- If you are concerned about a student and are not sure what the appropriate resource is, notify the Dean of Students Office: 621-7057.

What Do I Do? Recommendations For Intervention
Step #1
Ask the student to immediately and respectfully end the behavior by:
1. Asking the student to stay after class so that you can discuss why the behavior is inappropriate or disruptive (see Meeting with a Disruptive Student: Guidelines)
OR
2. Taking a break during class and ask the student to end the behavior.

NOTE: All of these verbal conversations should be followed up via an email to the student which summarizes the conversation.

Step #2
(Behavior Continues)
1. Let the student know that he/she needs to meet with you as soon as possible about his/her continued behavior in order to return to class (see Meeting with a Disruptive Student: Guidelines).
2. Follow up in writing to the student via email outlining the behavior, the rules that were violated and future expectations for class participation through a written warning.
3. The warning should also include notice that any subsequent violation of the classroom rules or this policy will result in the instructor filing a Student Code of Conduct Complaint with the Dean of Students Office for failure to comply with this policy.

NOTE: Faculty member should keep a log describing disruptive behavior and documenting the meetings and conversations that have occurred with the student. These documents should be kept on file.

Step #3
1. If the student has not changed his/her behavior, the case must be referred to the Dean of Students Office (621-7057) and a Student Code of Conduct Complaint must be completed.
2. Submit all related documentation including but not limited to an official complaint form, any written documentation for prior incidents, names of witnesses and incidents describing disruptive behavior to the Dean of Students Office.
3. The instructor must also notify her/his Department Head or Dean of the matter as well.

Meeting with a Disruptive Student: Guidelines
The meeting is an opportunity for the student to understand the inappropriateness of his or her behavior and to develop strategies for continuing successfully in the class.

During the meeting:
1. **Remain calm.** This may be difficult if the student is agitated or confrontational, but your calm and reasoned response will best control the meeting.

2. **Do not take behavior or remarks personally.** Disruptive behavior usually results from other life problems or a general academic frustration.

3. **Be specific** and identify the inappropriate behavior the student has exhibited. Describe the behavior, don’t focus on the person. Explain why the behavior is a problem.

4. **Review the classroom rules and this policy.**

5. **Ask questions** and summarize what you hear the student saying.

6. **Focus on areas of agreement** between you and the student. Conclude by summarizing any resolution and articulating expectations and the behavior that is required for the future.

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**Threatening Student Behavior**

WHENEVER THERE IS A THREAT TO THE SAFETY OF ANY PERSON, YOU SHOULD ALWAYS CONTACT THE POLICE IMMEDIATELY!

Each of us responds differently to the behaviors of others. Encounters with students that leave you frightened and in fear for your personal safety should be taken very seriously. Direct or implied threats of violence, challenges to fight, shoving, physical attacks, stalking, threatening phone calls, emails, or other correspondence, acts of harassment and similar behaviors should be immediately discussed with your department chair or supervisor, the University of Arizona police, and the Dean of Students Office. If the threat is immediate, dial **9-1-1** for immediate police response. It is required that you notify the **Dean of Students Office, at 621-7057**, whenever the police have been requested to intervene. In instances where the reported conduct constitutes a violation of the Student Code of Conduct, the Dean of Students Office can also assist you in filing a code of conduct complaint form.

**Direct Threats From Students Should Not Be Tolerated**

“You are going to be sorry you did that!”,
“I know where you live” or “just wait, I’ll get you!”

**What Do I Do? Procedures For Mandatory Reporting**

If threatened by any student’s conduct to the point of reasonable fear of immediate physical harm to self, others or property:

1. **Leave the area immediately**
2. **Call the police by dialing 9-1-1** to request that an officer come to the location. Inform the police if it is a repeat occurrence.
3. **Anyone who observes what appears to be threatening behavior must report it to the Dean of Students Office and in the appropriate case, file a Student Code of Conduct Complaint.**
4. University employees who observe what appears to be threatening behavior must also report it to their supervisor or Department Head, who should report it to their Dean.

**NOTE:** Threatening behavior requires mandatory reporting to the police, the Dean of Students Office, and the Department Head or Dean.

**Meeting with a Threatening or Potentially Violent Student**
Faculty often encounter a troubled student when they have arranged a meeting with that student, but staff are more often on the front lines and may not be expecting to encounter an angry or hostile student. Therefore, it is essential that staff develop a strategy for encountering a difficult student.

**Precautions to take:**
- Consider *establishing a code word or phrase* to be used within your department. That word would serve as a signal to others to call for help outside your office. Example: “Can you please hold all my calls?” “My next appointment is with President Shelton, can you call him to let him know I will be late?”
- Consider *installing a panic button*.
- Terminate any conversation immediately if you feel something is wrong.
- *Leave your door open* during a meeting with a student.
- *Avoid body language that appears challenging,* such as placing your hands on your hips, moving into the student’s territory, or using aggressive facial expressions.
- *Slow your rate of speech* down and use a low pitch and volume to reduce the momentum of the situation.
- *Ask to consult your supervisor,* a department head, or the Dean of Students Office to help satisfy the agitated person’s need to feel heard.
- *Listen carefully* by really paying attention to what is said. Let the student know you will help within your ability to do so and within reason.
- *Ask questions* to regain control of the conversation and to understand the situation.
- *Neither agree with distorted statements nor attempt to argue.* Avoid defensiveness.
The University of Arizona Student Code of Conduct Complaint Form

Name: ___________________________________________ Date: ____________

Address: ______________________________________________________________________

Phone: ___________________________ email: ___________ Circle One: student staff faculty

I have reasonable cause to believe the following named student(s) has violated the Code of Conduct

Name of Accused: ___________________________ DOB ____________

Address: ______________________________________________________________________

Phone: __________________________

Other Identifying Information: ______________________________________________________________________

Date of Violation: ________________ Time of Violation __________________________

Location of Violation: ______________________________________________________________________

Describe What Happened:
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

Names/Address/Phones of Probable Witness: ______________________________________________________________________

Complainant Name __________________________________________
(Please Print)

Complainant Signature _______________________________________

Date ________________
Further advice for handling unruly or threatening students
From a presentation by UAPD Commander Brian Seastone
to the math school faculty and staff 8/21/02

Key Points:
While being loud and rude is not a criminal offense, Seastone says, students can cross the line into violating Arizona statutes for trespassing, threatening and intimidating, or disrupting an educational institution. (Any criminal offense is an automatic violation of the Student Code of Conduct.)

Every threat must be reported, such as: "You haven't heard the end of this," or "I'm coming back and you're going to be sorry."

The Code of Conduct is one of the best resources the university community has, because students can be required to receive a variety of services that could prevent a problem from recurring.

(If there is a problem with unruly or unreasonable employees, HR can be of assistance.)

A key recommendation from Seastone was to develop code words throughout the office, so that office staff or faculty may signal others that they need help. His suggestions:

Has anyone seen the purple file? (Translation: I need help or backup with this student; please come to my side.)

Does anybody know where the red notebook is? (Translation: Call 911.)

In the first scenario, a second person coming to the side of a staff or faculty member can by itself go a long way toward diffusing a situation with an angry student. Often when a student hears the same information (e.g., that class is closed) from a second person, they will accept the information and leave quietly.

Also, Seastone advises, indicate that the second person you have called over has some authority.

Other Recommendations:

- Stand an arm's length away from an angry person. Place one foot in front of the other. (With feet side by side, you can be knocked off balance if the person makes a movement toward you.)

- Be firm. "I cannot help you with this if you are going to be so angry."

- Don’t to say the same thing over and over. Find new ways to phrase the point.

- Avoid speaking in administrator-ese to an angry student or other person. Use plainspeak.

- Arrange your office so that you cannot be trapped behind your desk with no way to leave
if a threatening student is on the other side. Arrange the furniture so that a student does not have the door behind them, blocking your route out.

- If a discussion with a student is heating up, take the student to another room where you can control your exit and where others can see or slightly overhear you and the student, or bring a third party into your office.

- Avoid closing the door with a threatening student. If a disruptive student seeks confidentiality, for example because of a failing grade, let a third party know you will be closing your door. (You might also ask the third party to knock after five minutes if you believe the student might direct her/his anger at you.)

- Program speed dial on your phone to a colleague's office. Tell the student you are going to see if colleague can provide more information. Then when they are on the phone, use the code: "Would you please bring me the purple folder," or "Please bring me the red notebook right away."

- Program the speed dial on your phone to 911. Just put the phone down on the desk if you cannot explain the situation to the police. With 911 calls, UAPD automatically gets the building and room number from the call. Seastone says campus response time is three minutes to 911 calls.

- Don't tell or threaten students you are going to call the police.

- Signs to look for that a student is losing control: clenching fists, sweating profusely, tightening lips, staring at you. Seastone says you shouldn't stick around if you see a person doing these things. If you see the person's fists clenching, take a step back and figure out how to stop the meeting. The angry person is making a decision about flight or fight. Nervous twitching and shaking out one's hands are good signs, but the death stare and clenched fists are bad.

- When someone gets out of hand, don't stay and argue or fight; end the meeting.

- You control your office. You can tell a student or other person, "I'm not going to talk to you anymore. This is my office. It's time for you to leave now." If a person does not leave at that point, they can be charged with trespassing.

- Don't be concerned about giving student names to police, Seastone says. There are no confidentiality rules that would prohibit this. Also, UAPD can initiate Code of Conduct action.

- If a student is drunk in your office or classroom and they are under age 21, they can be arrested for a minor in possession. You can also report others, i.e., over 21, as the UA is an alcohol-, drug-free workplace. (This point came after a professor asked what he should have done about an obviously drunk student in a night class last year.)
Arizona Board of Regents Affirmation of Zero Tolerance

Following serious incidents at Penn State, the Arizona Board of Regents on Dec. 1, 2011, issued a resolution reaffirming its zero-tolerance policy toward acts of abuse and violence on campuses in the Arizona University System:

*In the wake of the incidents at Penn State, The Arizona Board of Regents reaffirms its commitment to safety on our campuses. Our policies prohibit intimidation, harassment, threats, and acts of violence. All incidents and allegations of violent or threatening conduct must be immediately reported to law enforcement. We are resolved that there will be zero tolerance of abusive and violent conduct at Arizona’s Universities.*