

CAMPUS GUIDELINES FOR RESPONDING TO DISRUPTIVE AND THREATENING STUDENTS

A growing number of Faculty have inquired about the protocol for dealing with disruptive and threatening students in their classrooms. While every situation may be different and there are no cookie-cutter menus, the Campus Threat Assessment Team has put together the following guidance to assist you in handling students who become disruptive and/or are threatening in your classrooms. Please refer to it as needed. Also, please refer to “Safety and Security” tab on the campus website home page or go to www.newark.rutgers.edu. We will also be distributing a desk guide shortly which will assist you in determining what to do in various situations involving students in distress or needing support services. **PLEASE NOTE -- if a student is expressing suicidal ideation or threats to kill, please call the campus police immediately at ext. 5581 or ext. 5111.**

The primary responsibility for managing the classroom environment rests with the faculty. Students who engage in any prohibited or unlawful behavior that result in disruption of a class may be directed by the faculty member to leave the class for the remainder of the class period. Longer suspensions from a class, or dismissal on disciplinary grounds, must be preceded by a Hearing or Disciplinary Conference, as set forth in the Code on Student Conduct (<http://polcomp.rutgers.edu/judaff/ucsc.shtml>). In all cases, you should notify and work with your administrative deans, including the submittal of a Threat Assessment Form where behavior threatens the safety of others.

IMPORTANT NUMBERS TO HAVE IN YOUR CELL PHONE:

Campus Police – 973-353-5111 (emergencies)

Campus Switchboard (between 9 – 4 pm) – 973-353-5581

Threat Assessment Team - Office of Chancellor 973-353-5541

Judicial Affairs – 973-353-5300

Counseling Center- 973-353-5805

Health Services – 973-353-5231

I. Responding to disruptive non-threatening behavior

Disruptive behavior is student behavior that is inappropriate, interferes with or interrupts the educational process of other students or the normal business functions of the University but is not necessarily threatening.

On occasion, you might have a student in your class who displays behaviors that are inappropriate and/or disruptive to the classroom, such as using cell phones, texting or eating in class. That's rude, detracts from the seriousness of the process, and should be immediately addressed.

The most effective method of dealing with disruptive behavior is prevention. Communicate to students through your syllabus and verbally during the first class of the semester the behavioral expectations you have regarding attendance, tardiness, use of cell phones, speaking in class, etc; Familiarize yourself with and reference the Student Code of Conduct policy. Explain the progressive steps of discipline that will be used (e.g., verbal warning, written warning, impact on grade, removal from the classroom, referral to the Dean of Student's office). Model for students the behavior that you expect of your students. Disruptive behavior may sometimes result when students believe they are being held to a higher standard than the instructor or staff member (e.g., being prompt and ready to start class in a timely manner).

Recommended Actions in response to Disruptive Behavior

1. Stay calm. Don't take students' behavior personally. Understand that they are coming into the classroom with their own personal history, issues and often a lack of awareness of the impact of their behavior or its inappropriateness. If they behave this way in your classroom, chances are they behave this way elsewhere as well. If possible, treat this as a "*teachable moment*".
2. Decide if the behavior warrants being dealt with immediately (e.g., offensive comments, repeated interruptions, antagonism) or if it can wait until after class (e.g., minor irritations, non-offensive interruptions). Where appropriate, you can address the issue generally so as to not single out a particular student in front of his/her peers and risk him/her becoming defensive (e.g., "there are too many side conversations going on ...") Alternatively, the class can be broken up into working groups or another student may be asked to

perform an exercise at the front of the class so that you can then discreetly approach the student in question. If these are not viable options for your particular circumstances you may either ask the student to step out into the hallway to speak with you privately or you may approach the student in the classroom and request that s/he stop the disruptive behavior. *If the problem persists, ask the student to leave the classroom.

3. If the behavior does not require an immediate response, ask the student to speak with you after class or to come to your office to speak privately. This may reduce defensiveness and/or "acting out" in response to being shamed in front of their peers.

4. Respect personal space, stand 2-3 feet away from the student as invading his/her personal space may be seen as threatening and escalate the situation.

5. Use "I statements" to reduce defensiveness (e.g., "I am concerned that ..." or "I would appreciate it if ...")

6. Clarify your behavioral expectations and then hold them to it. State your expectations clearly. Focus on behavior, not personality or labels. If the student challenges you, redirect the attention to the issue at hand.

7. Document your interaction with the student.

*A faculty member may ask a disruptive student to leave the class for one class meeting. The faculty member may not ban the student from further class sessions without following due process, unless there is a threat that requires immediate action, including an investigation. This due process usually involves requiring the student to meet with the dean of students, department chair or designees. Also, the student may be referred to the Dean of Students for the particular college that the student falls under who may decide to refer the student to judicial affairs for a disciplinary hearing under the Student Code of Conduct.

The general rule of thumb is that you do not have to teach in an unacceptable environment. Saying nothing to a disruptive student is a way of accepting the disruptive behavior and encouraging further disruptive behavior. You and the other students will not enjoy the class and teaching and learning cannot take

place efficiently if a student disrupts the process. It is your prerogative and responsibility to intervene.

II. Responding to a potentially threatening disruptive or angry student

Threatening behavior is defined as an expressed or implied threat to interfere with an individual's health or safety, or with the property of the university, or property on university premises belonging to others, which causes a reasonable apprehension or fear that such harm or injury is about to occur.

Often, these students perceive that they are being mistreated and are apt to lodge complaints. They may make direct or indirect threats ("You'll be sorry," or tend to be tense, cautious, and mistrustful. They often interpret a minor oversight as a personal slight or a sign of prejudice against them, and they overreact to insignificant occurrences. They see themselves as the focal point of everyone's behavior, and everything that happens has a special meaning for them. Often they are preoccupied with fairness and being treated equally. Disavowing responsibility for their own behavior, they often blame others for their difficulties. Underneath, they may feel inadequate and even worthless.

The reasons for such behavior might be due to substance abuse, psychological disturbances, personal crises or simply a lack of awareness that their behavior is inappropriate.

Recommended Actions in response to Threats or Threatening Behavior in classroom

1. Firmly request that the student leave the classroom. Call the police immediately if you feel that you or the class is in imminent danger. Otherwise, suggest that the student meet with you or call you at a later time to discuss the behavior.

Recommended actions when meeting with a student who becomes hostile or threatening

1. If you are meeting with the student in your office, keep the door open or move to an outside area. Make sure others know when and where you will be having the meeting
2. Respect personal space, stand 2-3 feet away from the student as invading his/her personal space may be seen as threatening and escalate the situation.
3. Be non-defensive in your demeanor, convey your interest in their being successful in your class and express your concern to the student. Express concern but do not be overly friendly.
4. Focus on the student's educational aspirations by asking questions about their goals. Let them know that you want to see them do well in your class.
5. Be specific about the inappropriate behavior the student has exhibited, and explain why it was inappropriate. Focus on the behavior not the person.
6. Use "I statements" to reduce defensiveness (e.g., "I am concerned that ..." or "I would appreciate it if you...")
7. Conclude by summarizing the problem and what you expect in the future in terms of their threatening behavior in class. You should memorialize the meeting in writing and provide a copy to the dean or department chair.
8. If the student becomes threatening at any point, end the meeting and immediately call the police. The matter is now out of your hands.
9. End the meeting and call the police if the student becomes threatening at any point during the meeting.
10. Complete the Threat Assessment Team (TAT) Referral Form found at <http://www.newark.rutgers.edu/campusstatus/threatreferral.pdf> and forward to

Marcia Brown, Vice Chancellor, Office of the Chancellor and/or Michael Lattimore, Chief of Rutgers University Police Dept.

III. Dealing with a Violent Situation

Your most important advantage in any potentially violent situation is your own best judgment. Using your judgment, and when appropriate, the guidelines below, you may be able to reduce your personal risk, and increase the likelihood that your reactions to potential violence in the classroom or the workplace will appropriately resolve the situation without harm to anyone. *The following guidelines are only meant to suggest possible courses of action that you may take and to educate you as to possible courses of action.*

First and foremost, contact the campus police immediately (973-353-5581) if you sense a violent confrontation or to report a *student, staff or stranger* who appears to be in a troubling situation, and wait for their response. If necessary end class early and allow your students to leave, or close the office and allow staff to leave.

Second, be sensitive to the mutterings and whispers of potential confrontation. Ask the person to leave the class or the office. Call Police immediately (973-353-5581) if you believe that something may erupt. No faculty or staff member should confront such a situation alone.

Third, if practical, it is advisable to leave doors to the hallway or to your office open.

IV. What Should I do if I receive harassing/threatening emails from a student?

- Copy all emails and be sure to include the internet headers in the email.
- If you receive email death threats or other threats of violence, you are strongly urged to contact the Campus Police immediately by calling x5111. The campus police will generally provide you with good ideas on how to protect yourself and will assess the level of risk. They will also work with the campus IT office to track down the sender of the email if at all possible. Often, if the email was sent anonymously, it may not always be possible to determine the identity

of the sender; however the campus police will investigate to the fullest extent possible, including filing criminal charges.

- You should also notify and discuss with your College Dean of Students about ways to respond, including class discussions, or filing a report with judicial affairs and/or with the Campus Threat Assessment Team.
- If the identity of the student is known, and if there is a prior history that may be relevant to disclose, it may be appropriate to complete a threat assessment form, which you may access at www.newark.rutgers.edu/campusstatus/threatreferral.pdf or by clicking on the “safety and security” icon on the campus home web page, and then clicking on “refer a threat on campus” button to the right. The form should be forwarded to TAT members Vice Chancellor Marcia Brown or Asst Chancellor Gerald Massenburg via fax (973-353-1048) or through campus mail.
- If you feel comfortable to do so, send the harasser a firm but polite message telling him or her to refrain from sending you email of the kind you find offensive. Be specific. Make sure to send a copy of this email to yourself. You need to document as much as possible.
- If there is a reply or more emails, the Threat Assessment Team will work with the Campus Police and follow up immediately.

Tips for Defusing a Crisis

- *Do stay calm and control your emotions.*
- *Establish ground rules; take breaks to calm the person down.*
- *Focus on positive outcomes and the consequences of violent actions.*
- *Uncover what the student wants; repeat what is requested.*
- *Speak slowly, confidently, quietly, be an active listener.*
- *Encourage person to consider other alternatives; offer support.*