

MANAGING CLASSROOM DISRUPTION

HIGHLIGHTS

- Limit disruptive behaviors pro-actively. Set limits on disruptive behavior early. Review expectations and standards early and place them in your syllabus.
- Keep confidentiality and respect in mind as you address an issue of concern. Whenever possible, speak privately with a student, not in front of a classroom of peers.
- Disabilities are not excuses for disruptive or inappropriate behaviors. All students must be ‘otherwise qualified’ to participate.
- If a student exhibits bizarre, peculiar, or disruptive behavior, which you believe poses a danger to self or others, dismiss class by stating “Let’s take a break for 10 minutes.” Then notify OTC’s Safety & Security with a description of the individual along with any other pertinent information.
- Don’t escalate the situation. Avoid public, threatening, humiliating, and intimidating responses to comments and questions.
- Safety first. Safety of the students, staff, and campus community are top priority. Act when there is concern.
- Listen and watch. Distressed students need to be seen, heard, and helped, and may have trouble sharing their thoughts and feelings
- Ask. Don’t be afraid to ask students directly if they are under the influence of drugs or alcohol, feel confused, or have thoughts of harming themselves or others.
- Trust your gut. If you feel uneasy about a student, talk with your immediate supervisor and/or appropriate Dean about the situation. Seek consultation from supervisors and report concerns, if warranted. Follow-up by completing the online incident report at otc.edu/otccares.
- Work as a team. Share information with designated referrals. Serious, persistent trends of inappropriate behavior should always be reported. Always follow-up your concerns by completing the online incident report at otc.edu/otccares.

Q & A for FACULTY

Q: How should disruptive behavior in the classroom be defined?

A: Classroom disruption is behavior a reasonable person would view as being likely to substantially or repeatedly interfere with the conduct of a class. Examples may include repeated, unauthorized use of cell phones in the classroom; persistent speaking without being recognized; making physical threats; offensive remarks when talking about sensitive topics; belittling or bullying behavior towards other students.

Q: What are some general examples of how I can address minor disruptive behaviors in the classroom?

- It's best to correct innocent mistakes and minor first offenses gently.
- If you believe inappropriate behavior is occurring, consider a general word of caution, rather than warning or embarrassing a particular student (e.g. a good approach is to say "we have too many private conversations going on at the moment; let's all focus on the same topic").
- If the behavior in question is irritating, but not disruptive, try speaking with the student after class. Most students are unaware of distracting habits or mannerisms, and have no intent to be offensive or disruptive.
- There may be rare circumstances when it is necessary to speak to a student during class about his or her behavior. Correct the student in a courteous manner, indicating that further discussion can occur after class.
- Use "I" statements when talking to a student to help decrease defensiveness and allow the student to contain his/her behavior so that class can continue (e.g. "I need to continue this topic so that we can complete the learning objective for today. I can talk to you after class about this in more detail").
- Overall, key factors in responding to apparent disruptive or uncivil behavior include the following:
 - ✓ clarity in expectations
 - ✓ courtesy and fairness in responses (making sure students have an opportunity to discuss the incident with you in a timely manner)
 - ✓ progressive discipline, in which students (in less serious cases) are given an opportunity to learn from the consequences of their misbehavior, and to remain in the class.

Q: Should I act immediately or wait for a pattern of misbehavior to occur?

A: It is often a mistake to assume disruptive behavior will stop on its own. A fundamental tenet of progressive discipline is to document and respond to "small" incidents sooner rather than later. Generally instructors who state reasonable expectations early and enforce them consistently, help students avoid the harsher consequences that flow from more serious infractions later.

Q: What should I do in the face of persistent disruption?

A: A student who persists in disrupting a class may be directed by the faculty member to leave the classroom for the remainder of the class period. Depending on the nature and severity of the disruption, a student can be referred to the Department Chair, the Academic Dean, and/or the Dean of Students for conduct action. The student should be told the reason(s) for such action, and be given an opportunity to discuss the matter with the faculty member as soon as possible. Prompt consultation should also be undertaken with your supervisor and the Dean of Students. Instructors should not feel alone when dealing with disruptions. They should discuss the disruption with their immediate supervisor or Dean to gain support and guidance if necessary. Classroom disruption should also be reported through the online Incident Report Form at otc.edu/otccares.

Q: When should I call 911?

A: You should call 9-911 or OTC's Safety & Security (6-911) whenever you believe there is any threat of violence, concern that the student is impaired by drugs or alcohol, or other unlawful behavior including a student's refusal to leave a class after being told to do so. Any threat of violence should be taken seriously. Err on the side of caution and notify 9-911 or OTC's Safety & Security as soon as you can.

Q: What if a disruptive student claims the disruptive behavior is the result of a disability?

A: The fact that a student may have a disability should not inhibit you from notifying appropriate authorities about disruptive behavior. Students with or without disabilities need to know they must adhere to reasonable behavioral standards. Disability claims and accommodation requests should be discussed with a member of OTC's Disability Support Services department. There is an established procedure students should follow if they have a disability and seek a reasonable accommodation. Federal agencies and the courts have made it clear that an institution of higher education does not have to tolerate or excuse violent, dangerous, or disruptive behavior, especially when that behavior interferes with the educational opportunities of other students. Colleges and universities may discipline a student with a disability for engaging in misconduct if they would impose the same discipline on a student without a disability.

Q: What confidentiality standards should I follow?

A: The College will take appropriate disciplinary action in cases of proven classroom disruption. Consequently, you should discuss allegations against named or identifiable students only with individuals who have some role in the disciplinary process. Examples of people who usually have such a role include your department chair, your Dean, OTC's Safety & Security, and the Dean of Students in the Division of Student Affairs. A general rule to keep in mind is that you should refrain from sharing any personally identifiable information from student education records (like grades or reports of misconduct) with any person (including a colleague) who has no educational interest in the information.