

Responding to Threatening or Disruptive Student Behavior

Utica College

This information may also be found at the following links:

<http://www.utica.edu/academic/facultyinfo/resources.cfm>

<http://www.utica.edu/academic/facultyinfo/adjunct.cfm>

<http://www.utica.edu/academic/adjuncts/iff.cfm>

What is Threatening or Disruptive Behavior?

While Utica College is committed to the fundamental principles of freedom of speech, including controversial positions taken in the classroom, all types of speech and behavior must be balanced with principles of appropriate classroom behavior. Utica College does not condone disruptive or threatening behavior in the classroom, in College offices, or elsewhere on the College campus.

Threatening Behavior

Threatening behavior is behavior that is perceived as constituting a threat to another individual's safety. It could take place in class, in an office, or elsewhere on campus. Threatening behavior might include

- Disputing authority and arguing with faculty and other students beyond the boundaries of normal class discussion
- Exhibiting erratic, irrational behavior
- Harassment
- Verbally insulting the faculty member or other students
- Physical disruptions or physical altercations
- Making physical threats to the faculty member and/or other students

Disruptive behavior

Disruptive behavior is any behavior that interferes with your ability to conduct the class, or the ability of other students to participate and learn in class. Such behavior may take various forms, and can be dependent upon many factors including class size, subject matter, and the relationship between faculty and students. Disruptive behavior is different from behavior that is merely irritating, which can often be addressed more easily after class, as disruptive conduct may substantially impede class progress and require immediate response.

Responding to Threatening Student Behavior

What to do at the time

- Direct the student to leave the class or your office.
- If the student refuses to leave, call Campus Safety (**ext. 3046 or 611**).
- If the student becomes physically abusive, and/or you believe your safety or the safety of other students in the classroom is at risk, adjourn the class, and contact Campus Safety immediately.
- If you need Campus Safety to respond immediately due to a perceived threat, clearly indicate this to the Campus Safety officer when you call.
- Tell Campus Safety what you want to have happen (students removed, presence of safety officers, escort to office or car, etc). Campus Safety may also determine additional action based on their assessment of the situation.
- Give pertinent information about the student, your observations of the student's behavior, and any other students who are witnesses to or involved in the behavior.

What to do afterwards

- Report the incident to the Office of Student Affairs either by calling the office (x3100) or by e-mailing either Ashleigh Wade (ajwade@utica.edu) or Alane Varga (avarga@utica.edu). Timely reporting of any incident that has occurred is imperative to the process.
- Your report should include:
 - Specifics regarding the incident (student name, behavior, location, time, etc.)
 - Your response to the incident
 - Any response by Campus Safety officers
- Consult with the Coordinator of Student Conduct Systems or Dean of Students about what you want to have happen.
- Follow through with any other reporting process that is appropriate or requested, such as contacting your area coordinator or school dean.

What you can expect from those who respond

- Immediate response from Campus Safety at the time that threatening behavior occurs.
- A Campus Safety response that will likely include isolating the student when they arrive and initiation of a threat assessment consultation with appropriate staff.
- Inclusion of reports of threatening behavior in the regular “Students of Concern” meeting which brings together Student Affairs, Residence Life, Health Center, Student Support Services, and Campus Safety.
- Interim action from the Coordinator of Student Conduct Systems or Dean of Students appropriate for the situation (such as restrictions on contact, being in class, or being on campus).
- Timely response to you from the Coordinator of Student Conduct Systems or Dean of Students in Student Affairs in order to talk about next steps and need for action
- Consultation with the Coordinator of Student Conduct Systems or Dean of Students in Student Affairs until the process is complete.

Responding To Disruptive Conduct In The Classroom

What constitutes disruptive conduct?

Generally, disruptive behavior is any behavior that interferes with your ability to conduct the class, or the ability of other students to participate and learn in class. Such behavior may take various forms, and can be dependent upon many factors including class size, subject matter, and the relationship between faculty and students. Disruptive behavior is different from behavior that is merely irritating, which can often be addressed more easily after class, as disruptive conduct may substantially impede class progress and require immediate response.

Examples of disruptive behavior may include the following:

- Inappropriate use of electronic devices, cell phones, or pagers (such as repeatedly allowing cell phones to ring or answering cell phones or allowing pagers to beep)

- Sleeping in class
- Entering class late or leaving early (without permission, if timeliness is an expectation)
- Repeatedly leaving and entering the classroom without appropriate rationale or authorization if such permission is required
- Eating/drinking in class when such behavior is not permitted
- Persistent speaking without being recognized, if being recognized in order to speak is the expectation for class
- Making loud and distracting noises

If you believe a student's behavior indicates that they are in some kind of emotional distress or is indicative of a disability, refer to information contained in the *Helping Students in Distress* brochure or contact the Office of Academic Support Services.

Suggestions for addressing disruptive conduct

While your response will vary based on your personal style and the student with whom you are interacting, here are some general suggestions for addressing disruptive behavior:

- If potentially disruptive behavior is occurring, a general word of caution to the class rather than directing this at a particular student may be effective in deterring a problem.
- When a particular student persists in being potentially disruptive or, in fact, has interfered with a controlled discussion or impeded the educational process of the class, address the problem as early and as privately as possible. To confront the behavior in front of the student's peers may cause the student to feel a greater need to defend the behavior.
- When necessary, deal with the student's behavior during class firmly but politely, and ask the student to wait after class to discuss the matter further.
- On rare occasions, if the disruptive behavior continues, it may be necessary to direct the student to leave the class immediately.
- If the student refuses to leave, you have the authority to choose to adjourn the class.
- Document the behavior and your response in some way via written communication to your director, dean, or appropriate others.

Whom should I contact for advice in dealing with disruptive students?

There are multiple sources for you to consult if you are seeking help and guidance. While many of these individuals or offices may work together in addressing the behavior of a particular student, no one person on this campus is solely responsible for coordinating responses to disruptive or threatening students. Depending on the perceived nature of the student's behavior, you might contact any of the following individuals or offices:

- Your department chair
- Your school dean
- The Provost or the Associate Provost for Academic Affairs
- The Office of Academic Support Services or the Office for Student Success
- The Dean of Students or the Coordinator of Student Conduct Systems
- The Office of Campus Safety

- The Office of Graduate and Extended Studies

Once one or more of these offices or individuals are consulted, they will work with you, each other, and any other appropriate offices or individuals to both assist you and assess the level of threat posed by the student's behavior. Any resulting plan of action will take into account that threat assessment.

What kinds of options for resolving instances of disruptive behavior are possible?

School Deans, administrators in the Office of Academic Affairs, and staff members in the Offices of Academic Support Services, Student Success, Student Affairs, and Campus Safety have been very successful in working with faculty and students to resolve anticipated or actual incidents of classroom disruption. Some strategies used effectively include:

- Direct discussion with the faculty member regarding the student and class concerns, leading to quiet resolution through advice and strategic planning;
- Direct intervention and discussion with the student whose behavior has raised concerns. This discussion would include definition of the problem and potential consequences of non-compliance with the faculty member or other college officials;
- Direct intervention through a joint discussion with the student of concern, the classroom instructor and a third party (such as a staff member from Academic Support Services, the dean of the school, etc.);
- Negotiation of a behavioral contract outlining expectations for behavior if the student is to be allowed to remain in class. Such a contract would usually be constructed with the assistance of staff from Academic Support Services or Student Affairs;
- Negotiation of a change in sections of a particular class for the student, creating a new opportunity for learning under a different instructor and with different classmates;
- Negotiation of a change of class schedule for the student, preferably with the student's consent (e.g. dropping the course in question and adding another, or simply dropping the course);
- Interim restrictions imposed by the Coordinator of Student Conduct Systems or Dean of Students (which may include no-contact restrictions, a ban from one or more classes, or a suspension and ban from campus) and/or a hearing through the student conduct process, which could result in the imposition of conduct sanctions as described in the Utica College Student Handbook.

Additional Resources

There are a number of other pieces of information that might be helpful for you in dealing with these and similar issues. Those handouts include:

- Helping Students in Distress: A Guide for Faculty and Staff (available through Academic Support Services and soon to be available on the Utica College website)
- Free downloadable resources from PaperClip Communications, such as "Talking With Students About Campus Violence" and "Am I Safe On Campus" (available at <http://www.paper-clip.com/ME2/Default.asp>)

- “Red flags, warning signs and indicators” from the Report of the Virginia Tech Review Panel (available at <http://www.governor.virginia.gov/TempContent/techPanelReport.cfm>)
- Please contact the Coordinator of Student Conduct Systems or the Assistant Provost for Academic Affairs for additional copies of this document, to suggest revisions, or to request clarification.

Responding to Threatening Student Behavior

- **Call Campus Safety (611 or ext. 3046).**
- **Indicate that an IMMEDIATE response is needed.**
- **Identify your location.**
- **Define the situation (verbal, physical, weapons.....).**
- **Identify the student(s) of concern (male/female, hair color, clothing, name.....).**
- **Identify how many other individuals (students or otherwise) are involved, if any.**
- **Identify the action you would like to see taken (students removed, presence of safety officers, escort to office or car, etc). Campus Safety may also determine additional action based on their assessment of the situation.**
- **Report the incident to the Office of Student Affairs either by calling the office (x 3100) or by e-mailing either Ashleigh Wade (ajwade@utica.edu) or Alane Varga (avarga@utica.edu).**