

Recognize... Prevent... Resolve

ACADEMIC DISRUPTION

University of South Alabama

Defining Disruptive Academic Behavior

Disruptive academic behavior is defined as individual or group conduct that interrupts or interferes with any educational activity or environment, infringes upon the rights and privileges of others, results in or threatens the destruction of property, and/or is otherwise prejudicial to the maintenance of order in an academic environment. An academic environment is defined as a classroom, laboratory, library, study hall, field trip or similar setting in which formal learning is taking place. Though dependent upon the size and nature of the academic setting, **disruption refers to behavior a reasonable person would view as substantially or repeatedly interfering with the conduct of an activity.** Disruptive behavior may range from the mildly annoying (which should be tolerated as much as possible) to clearly disruptive, dangerous and/or violent behavior which should never be tolerated.

Common Disruptive Behavior

Common examples of disruptive student behavior include (in part from Gerald Amada "Coping with the Disruptive Student"):

- Threatening, stalking, intimidating, or harassing of anyone in an academic setting, such as another student, instructor, librarian, or other academic staff person in an attempt to address some grievance.
- The formation of close and sometimes erotic attachments to a professor resulting in shadowing or persistent and unwanted phone calls or letters.
- The badgering of an instructor with questions with the intent to interrupt lectures and gain attention (this problem is even more severe if related to alcohol or substance abuse).
- Sleeping in class.
- Routinely entering class late or departing early.
- Personal hygiene problems impacting others.
- Repeatedly talking in class without being recognized, talking while others are talking, or dominating class discussion.
- Loud keyboarding or playing computer games.
- Physical display of anger (such as throwing books or other items).
- The use of cell phones or pagers.
- Tampering with equipment, altering computer software or hardware, or damaging furnishings in any academic setting.
- Excessive noise in a quiet setting such as the library.

Faculty Rights and Responsibilities

The University of South Alabama respects the right of instructors to teach, and students to learn. Maintenance of these rights requires an academic environment that does not impede their exercise. To ensure these rights, faculty and staff members have the prerogative.

- To establish and implement academic standards.
- To establish and enforce reasonable behavior standards in each academic setting.
- To refer for disciplinary action those students whose behavior may be judged to be disruptive under the Code of Student Conduct (refer to USA policies in the student handbook *The Lowdown* for specifics).

Preventing Student Disruptions

Faculty should identify possible issues that may arise in the classroom or other academic settings and address them in the course syllabi. These could include - but are not limited to - the following:

- How to address faculty (Dr., Mr., Ms., etc.)
- Rules regarding attendance, punctuality, make up exams, etc.
- Policies regarding the use of cell phones, recording devices, computers, etc.
- How to be recognized in class.
- How to engage in civil classroom discussion, even if there are passionate disagreements.
- Academic integrity issues.

Use the first class to set the tone. Discuss your expectations regarding the class and **student behavior**. Develop ownership of standards during discussion with students.

Role model expected behavior. Avoid swearing, provocative statements and the public humiliation of your students. Keep your relationships with them friendly but professional.

Intervene early to discourage continuation of inappropriate behavior. Be aware that students within your class may be having difficulties with classmates. Let your class know that they may come to you when their educational experience is being hindered and that you will assist them in resolving classroom problems.

Discuss issues and concerns with your department chair and more seasoned colleagues. Be aware of campus resources and be prepared to make appropriate referrals such as counseling, health services, and disabled student services. Consult early with the appropriate staff members (listed on back page of this brochure) regarding problematic behavior and collectively develop strategies.

Dealing with Academic Disruptions

When the moment comes in which you must deal with a disruptive student:

- Remain calm and try to calm the student.
- Listen carefully and acknowledge the student's words and feelings.

- Remember always that you are the only person you can control in this situation.

You may remove a student from the environment (however, avoid any physical contact with the student unless absolutely necessary).

Ask the student to step outside the classroom with you:

- Assure the student of your concern and help him/her to identify possible options.
- Explain his/her options necessary for re admittance to class.

If you are unable to de-escalate the situation, you may need to state in class that the behavior is unacceptable. If necessary, dismiss the class or other academic activity.

If necessary call 511 for immediate assistance from the University police. Report the incident to your department head at the first opportune moment.

Documentation of Incidents

Document incident - however minor - "for the record." This may be important at a later date to show a pattern of behavior. Disruptions and questionable behavior should be documented utilizing the Classroom Disruption/Behavior Concern Report located in your department chairperson's office.

University Procedures for Dealing with Disruptive Behavior

Once an incident is documented, reports must be routed promptly. The instructor should provide a copy of any report to the appropriate administrator (i.e., Dean of Libraries) or academic department chairperson. The department chairperson (who may possess other reports filed against a particular student) will then choose one of the following three options:

- 1) If the faculty member and/or chairperson believe that the situation is salvageable, a conference between the faculty member and the student - possible involving others such as the department head, the Student Conduct Administrator, the University Police - may be held. The consequences of continued improper behavior and strategies for ending such behavior should be discussed at this meeting. If the student cannot do this, further action is necessary.
- 2) If the department cannot resolve the situation, the report should be forwarded to the Student Conduct Administrator and charges should be brought against the offending student. There must be a complainant for this to occur. The complainant may be the involved faculty member or academic staff person, the department head, a witness to the event, the campus police, or any other knowledgeable third party including students. The report, or a written statement by the complainant, must be given to the Student Conduct Administrator, who will then notify the accused student that he or she is being charged with violating the Code of Student Conduct. The Student Conduct Administrator will follow necessary procedures in dealing with the students as explained in the Code of Student Conduct section of *The Lowdown*. The Student Conduct Administrator may take unilateral action or the involved parties may be asked to appear before the University Disciplinary Committee, a group made up of students and faculty

charged with deliberating non-academic Code of Conduct violations and issuing appropriate sanctions.

- 3) If there is a perceived threat or act of violence, or if and when disruptive behavior violates federal or state laws, the report should be forwarded to the University Police who have arrest powers and may issue trespass warnings when appropriate. Once the University Police action or investigation is completed, they will share the report with the Student Conduct Administrator and Behavior Assessment Committee for additional action. The Student Conduct Administrator will forward all final decisions to the respective department heads, who will in turn notify the appropriate faculty members.

COMMON SENSE AND GOOD JUDGMENT
will often provide
the best resolution of the problem.

University Staff Available for Consultation and Assistance:

Deputy Chief, Derek Christian, University Police, Faculty Court South, Room 3,
460-6611, dchristian@usouthal.edu

Dr. John Smith, Vice President for Student Affairs, Student Center, Room 270,
460-6171, johnsmith@usouthal.edu

Andrea Agnew, Student Conduct Administrator, Student Center, Room 131
460-6452

Dr. B. Keith Harrison, Academic Affairs, Administration Building, Room 300
460-6261, kharriso@usouthal.edu

Dr. Robert Hanks, Counseling Services, Alpha Hall East, Room 326
460-7980, rbhanks@jaguar1.usouthal.edu

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Andrea Agnew, Special Student Services, Student Center, Room 270
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