

OFFICE OF THE DEAN OF STUDENTS

North Carolina Central University

Division of Student Affairs

“A Legacy of Leadership”

DEALING WITH DISRUPTIVE STUDENTS

In an effort to uphold the academic expectations of the university, this brochure was developed. This brochure was developed to provide the NCCU faculty with appropriate, effective, and legally sound principles for dealing with disruptive student behavior, especially that which occurs in the classroom.

On college campuses, the term “disruptive behavior” is most commonly associated with large-scale demonstrations and protests. There is another form of misconduct on campus which is seldom reported by the media but causes individual faculty members considerable personal turmoil: disruptive behavior in the classroom.

The climate of higher education has changed over the past few decades, and faculty are now faced with serious issues of classroom behavior that were previously of little concern. Unfortunately, instructors frequently fail to address the disruptive behavior of students because they (1) may be unsure how to handle the situation, (2) fear legal or physical retaliation from the students, and /or (3) conclude that reporting the disruptive behavior will cause emotional pain to an already fragile or unstable person. However, failure to address disruptive behavior is likely to encourage further disruption. In addition, it sends the message that such behavior is not problematic and that university personnel are indifferent to it.

The information and recommendations that follow are consistent with, and supported by the NCCU Student Code of Conduct. The goal is to help you to (confidently, fairly and safely address incidents of disruption in a confident, fair, and safe manner that discourages such behavior in the future while retaining the decorum of the classroom environment).

Examples of Disruptive Behavior

Disruptive behavior is defined as repeated, continuous, and/or multiple student behaviors that hamper the ability of instructors to teach and students to learn. Common examples of disruptive behaviors include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Eating in class
- Monopolizing classroom discussions
- Failing to respect the rights of other students to express their viewpoints
- Talking when the instructor or others are speaking
- Constant questions or interruptions which interfere with the instructor’s presentation
- Overt inattentiveness (i.e., sleeping or reading the paper in class)

- Creating excessive noise with paper, book bags, etc.
- Entering class late or leaving early
- Use of pagers or cell phones in the classroom
- Inordinate or inappropriate demands for time and attention

More Extreme examples of disruptive behavior include, but are not limited to,

- Use of profanity or pejorative language
- Intoxication
- Verbal abuse (i.e., taunting, badgering, intimidation)
- Harassment (i.e., use of fighting words,” stalking)
- Threats to harm oneself or others
- Physical violence (i.e., shoving, grabbing, assault, use of weapons)

It is important to remember that conditions attributed to physical or psychological disabilities are not considered a legitimate excuse for disruptive behavior.

GUIDELINES

For Dealing with Disruptive Students

An Ounce of Prevention.....

The best thing faculty and staff can do to address disruptive students behavior is to create an environment in which it is unlikely to occur. For example, an instructor should:

- ❖ Serve as a model by demonstrating appropriate, respectful and responsible behavior in all interactions with students.
- ❖ Use the class syllabus to inform students in writing of standards and expectations for classroom conduct and of possible consequences for disruptive behavior.
- ❖ Devote time during the first class to review this information in the syllabus.
- ❖ Invite the Office of the Dean of Students and/or Counseling Center to departmental meetings to talk about dealing with difficult students in the classroom.
- ❖ Consult with the Office of the Dean of Students as situations occur to discuss potential options and referrals, only after meeting with the department chair.

Responding to Disruptive Behavior

Some general suggestions for dealing with disruptive student behavior include:

- ❖ A general word of caution directed to the class rather than at an identified student may effectively deter the disruptive behavior.
- ❖ Deal with the disruptive behavior immediately. Ignoring behavior will likely cause it to increase.
- ❖ Work against the human tendency to take the disruptive behavior personally. The behavior usually has little to do with you, and you are simply the unfortunate target.

“What do you mean I can’t talk on my cell phone during a physics lecture?”

- ❖ If the student’s behavior is irritating, but not particularly disruptive, consider talking with the student privately after class.
- ❖ If you feel unsafe being alone with the student for some reason, request that a colleague or your department chair attend the meeting
- ❖ If it is necessary to deal with a student’s behavior during class, you should calmly inform the student that the behavior is disruptive and ask that it be stopped. Example: “Your use of your cell phone is disruptive to the class. Please end your conversation now and refrain from in-class phone calls in the future.”
- ❖ If the disruptive behavior continues during either the present or some future class meet with the student in private to discuss that the continued behavior may result in student disciplinary action. Example: “I’ve previously warned you about talking when I am speaking to the class. If you disrupt the class again in this matter, you will be referred to the Office of the Dean of Students.” Document the incident and any conversations with the student in writing and forward the documentation to the Office of the Dean of Students.
- ❖ If the student continues the disruptive behavior despite this warning, the student should be informed that she/he will be referred for disciplinary action and should then be instructed to leave the classroom. Following the class, the instructor should contact the Office of the Dean of Students (ext.6311) and provide pertinent information about the student’ behavior.
- ❖ If the student refused to leave the classroom after being instructed to do so, she/he should be informed that this refusal is a separated instance of disruptive behavior subject to additional judicial actions.

- ❖ If the student continues to refuse to leave the classroom, the instructor may choose to adjourn class for the day or contact university police.
- ❖ Keep a log of the date, time and nature of all incidents of disruptive behavior and any meetings you have with the student. Document incidents and meetings immediately while specifics and details are still fresh in your memory.
- ❖ Keep your department chair informed as situations develop. Ask for guidance and support from fellow colleagues.

If the Student Seems Dangerous.....

If you sense that a disruptive situation is escalating and that a student may pose a physical threat to you or other students, follow these guidelines:

- ❖ Maintain a safe distance and do not turn your back to the student.
- ❖ Unless you are under physical attack, do not touch the student or the student's belongings. Initiating physical touch may be interpreted by an agitated student as an assault.
- ❖ Use a calm, non-confrontational approach to defuse the situation. ***Example:*** "Please lower your voice. We can't continue to talk if you threaten me."
- ❖ If a threat of harm is present, do not mention disciplinary action or police intervention. If you have already mentioned these, work to refocus the student's attention away from the future consequences of her/his behavior. ***Example:*** "You've raised some important issues. I need to consult with my department chair to see what we can do."

If the disruptive student threatens to harm you, other students, or themselves, follow these guidelines:

- ❖ Immediately dismiss the class and contact University Police (6106). The police will investigate the threats, warn intended victims if necessary, and determine whether the student may have committed a crime.
- ❖ After the danger has passed, consult with the Office of the Dean of Students regarding the judicial process and determine the appropriate process to be initiated.
- ❖ If a student's behavior is disruptive to the point there is a faculty request to administratively withdraw him/her from the class, the case will be reviewed by the Dean of the appropriate College and Office of the Dean of Students to determine the outcome. An outcome of the judicial process could provide a recommendation of withdrawal from a class and other sanctions.

***Possible Sanctions
For Disruptive Student Behavior***

The Student Code of Conduct specifies the minimum level of conduct expected of every NCCU student. These standards are higher than those imposed on all citizens by civil and criminal law and serve to foster an environment in which learning and scholarship can flourish. Students who violate this Code through their disruptive behavior will face disciplinary sanctions including, but not limited to, the following penalties:

- ❖ Oral Reprimand
- ❖ Written Reprimand
- ❖ Disciplinary Probation
- ❖ Interim Suspension
- ❖ Indefinite Suspension
- ❖ Expulsion

Campus Resources
To Help You Deal With Disruptive Students

University Police Department (Extension 6106)

While not typically involved in most situations of disruptive student behavior, the University Police and Public Safety is often the primary source of immediate support when the disruptive student engages in threats or actions to harm her/himself or someone else.

Office of the Dean of Students (Extension 6311)

The Office of the Dean of Students administers sanctions to students whose disruptive behavior violates the *Student Code of Conduct*. The procedure and sanctions are designed to guide and correct behavior while protecting the rights of all faculty, staff and students in the university community.

University Counseling Center (Extension 7646 or 5286)

The Counseling Center staff provides consultation and support for faculty/staff who are dealing with a disruptive and/or emotionally disturbed student. Psychologists and counselors can aid in the development of a more comprehensive understanding of the student's problem behavior and in the design of effective intervention strategies.

Acknowledgements

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