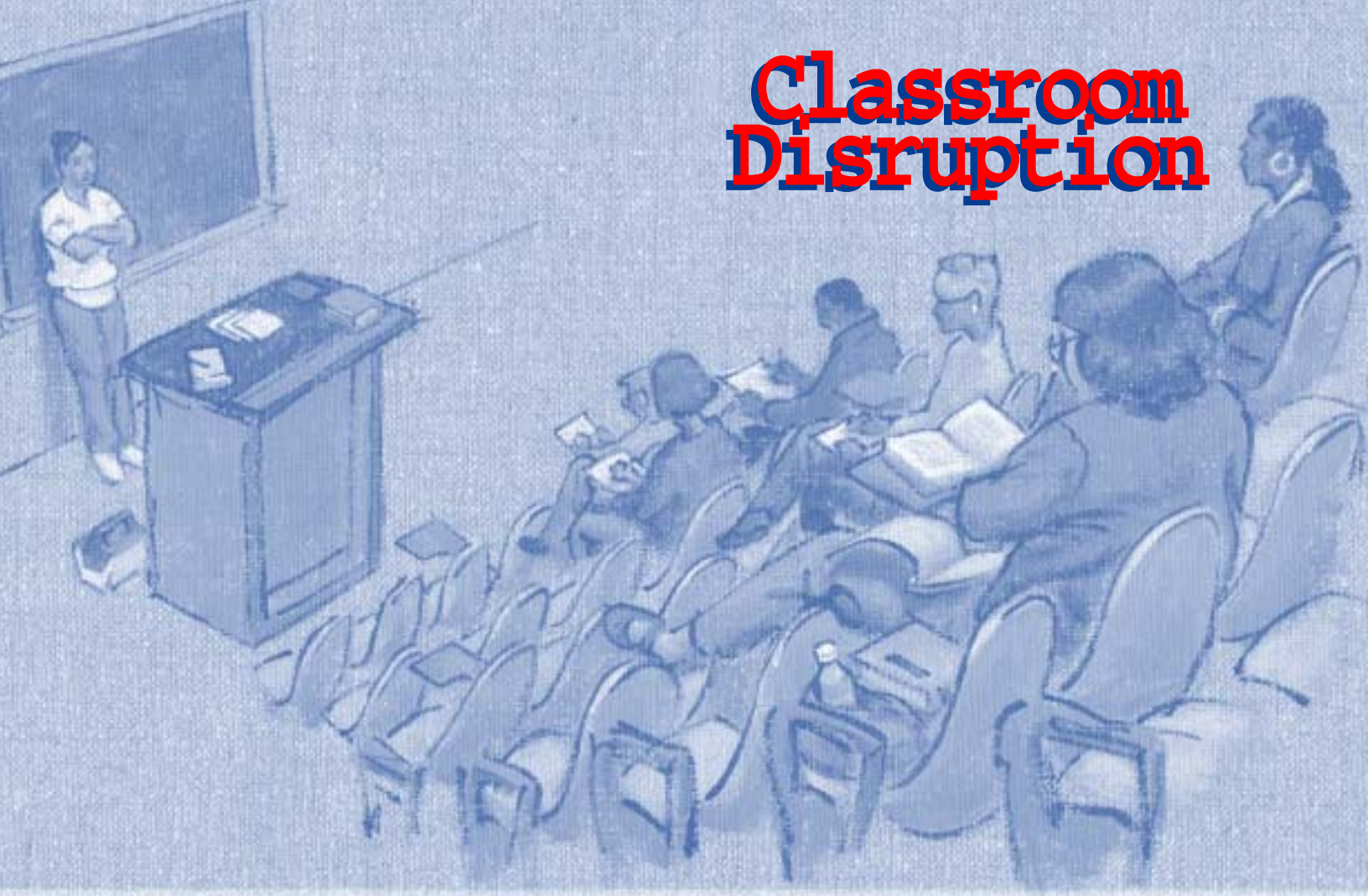


# Classroom Disruption



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was developed by the  
**Office of  
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Disruption  
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# Prevention and Resolution

University of West Florida

# Defining disruptive behavior

Disruptive behavior is defined in the UWF Code of Student Conduct as "individual or group conduct of a nature that interrupts or interferes with educational activities, infringes upon the rights and privileges of others, results in the destruction of property, or is otherwise prejudicial to the maintenance of order." Although classroom behaviors considered to be disruptive may vary depending on the size and nature of the class, classroom disruption generally refers to behavior a reasonable person would view as substantially or repeatedly interfering with the conduct of a class. Disruptive behaviors may be viewed on a continuum ranging from the isolated incident of mildly annoying or irritating behavior (which should probably be tolerated as well as possible) to the more clearly disruptive, dangerous and/or violent behaviors which should not be tolerated. Fortunately, the latter incidents are most uncommon at UWF.

## Most common disruptive behaviors

The most common disruptive behaviors experienced in college and universities today according to Gerald Amada in *Coping with the Disruptive College Student* involve:

- Students who take umbrage with professors over a low grade and may stalk, intimidate or harass in an attempt to redress their grievance.
- Students who form close and sometimes erotic attachments to professors or teaching

student fails to comply with this directive, the vice president or associate vice president for student affairs may immediately suspend the student for a maximum of 10 calendar days, pending a conduct hearing.

In addition, disruptive behavior which violates federal or state laws will be handled through the UWF Police Department and may result in arrest and the issuance of trespass warnings as appropriate.

A student who poses a threat of immediate and imminent danger to him/herself or others may be hospitalized under the Baker Act.

Sometimes, however, an infusion of common sense and good judgment will provide a better resolution of the problem than automatically invoking the conduct code.

## University staff available for consultation and assistance

### Non-teaching staff available to assist:

**Deborah Ford**, Vice President for Student Affairs; Ext. 2214, [dford@uwf.edu](mailto:dford@uwf.edu)

**Douglas Pearson**, Associate Vice President for Student Affairs; Ext. 2384, [dpearson@uwf.edu](mailto:dpearson@uwf.edu)

**Jim Holmes**, Director of Counseling Center; Ext. 2420, [jholmes@uwf.edu](mailto:jholmes@uwf.edu)

**Gary Howard**, University Teaching Center, Ext. 2883, [goward@uwf.edu](mailto:goward@uwf.edu)

**University Police**, Ext. 2415

# Documentation of incidents

- Document when it took place—time, date and location.
- Indicate what occurred and what was said—specific chronology of events.
- Identify persons involved including witnesses.
- Note whether there have been previous encounters with the student.
- Write in objective terms; be specific and thorough.
- Exclude judgmental or diagnostic language.
- Provide this information to your department chair, Student Affairs and the Police when appropriate.

# University procedures for dealing with disruptive behavior

The university may bring charges of misconduct against a student for disruptive behavior. In this instance, charges will be brought by the Office of Student Affairs for adjudication in accordance with the procedures outlined in the Code of Student Conduct. A conduct hearing will be scheduled before a designated administrative official or the University Conduct Committee. Additionally, a student may be ordered by the vice president or associate vice president for students affairs to cease and desist from any activity adjudged disruptive to the university. If the

assistants and then may shadow them or pursue with persistent phone calls or letters.

- Students who may badger the professor with questions to interrupt lectures and gain attention. This acting out may also be related to alcohol or substance abuse.

Although not an exhaustive listing, other examples include:

- ▼ Sleeping in class (with or without loud snoring);
- ▼ Entering class late or departing early (routinely);
- ▼ Personal hygiene problems impacting fellow students;
- ▼ Repeatedly talking in class without being recognized, talking while others are talking, dominating class discussion;
- ▼ Physical display of anger (throwing books, returned exams);
- ▼ Threatening faculty or fellow students;
- ▼ Verbal abuse of faculty, staff member or student.

# Faculty rights and responsibilities

The University of West Florida respects the right of instructors to teach and students to learn. Maintenance of these rights require classroom conditions which do not impede their exercise. To ensure these rights, faculty members have the prerogative:

- To establish and implement academic standards;
- To establish and enforce reasonable behavior standards in each class; and
- To refer for disciplinary action those students whose behavior may be judged to be disruptive under the Code of Student Conduct.

# Preventing classroom disruptions

■ Identify possible issues that may arise in class and address them in the course syllabi.

These include:

- ▼ How to address faculty (Dr., Mr./Ms., etc.)
- ▼ “Rules” regarding attendance, punctuality, make up exams, etc.
- ▼ How to be recognized in class (e.g. please raise your hand and be recognized)
- ▼ How to engage in civil classroom discussion, even if there are passionate disagreements, (e.g. when we disagree on issues, we will be civil and respectful to one another at all times)
- ▼ Academic integrity issues (e.g. cheating, plagiarism, etc.)

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

■ Role model expected behavior. Faculty members who routinely swear in class should not be shocked when students follow that example. Avoid provocative statements and the public humiliation of students. Keep your relationships with students friendly and professional.

■ Be aware of campus resources and be prepared to make appropriate referrals (counseling, health services, drug and alcohol counseling, disabled student services). Consult early on with counseling/student affairs staff about your concerns, the problematic behavior observed, and collectively develop strategies.

■ Be aware of classroom strategies that may interrupt or diminish minor

inappropriate behaviors such as talking or passing notes (assigned seating, better spacing of students, physical position in class while lecturing, etc.).

■ Document incidents “for the record” even if minor. This may be important at a later date to show a pattern of behavior.

■ Discuss issues with your department chair, more seasoned colleagues or the staff of the University Teaching Center.

# Dealing with classroom disruptions

When dealing with disruptive behavior in the classroom:

■ Remain calm and try to calm the student. Listen carefully to what is being said and acknowledge the individual's feelings (e.g., I can see you are angry about \_\_\_\_.)

**Remember: *The only person in any situation you can control is you.***

■ Attempt to remove the student from the crisis--suggest a meeting after class. Ask the student to step outside the classroom with you. Assure the student that you are concerned for him/her. Help the student to identify possible options for future problem solving.

■ If the situation does not rapidly de-escalate, you may need to state in class that the student's behavior is not acceptable. Do not let the behavior continue, dismiss the class if necessary.

■ Immediately report the incident to your department head, the Office of Student Affairs, and the Campus Police. If necessary, call 2911 and request immediate assistance from the Police. Document incident in writing while it is still fresh in your mind, noting the names of other witnesses.