

Dealing with Disruptive Behavior in the UW River Falls Classroom

The easiest strategy is to prevent disruptive behavior before it occurs. Although, classroom behavior is not always in your control, the following strategies should help set up a conducive classroom environment and clarify your expectations for acceptable classroom behavior.

- Determine your expectations for matters such as the use of cell phones or other electronic devices, eating, sleeping, reading materials, talking, arriving late and any other disruptive behaviors you find counterproductive to the learning process. Discuss your expectations regarding behavior in labs and studios as well. Clarify your expectations verbally on the first day of class and include them in your syllabus so that there is no confusion later. Specify consequences for such behaviors, such as referral to the department chair, Dean's office or Student Affairs for disciplinary action.
- Spend some time during one of the first class periods facilitating a discussion related to expectations. What do they expect of other students, what do they expect of you, what do they think you expect of students? Consider creating a learning community contract with these expectations that all students sign.
- Clarify your expectations regarding class participation. Do students need to raise their hands and be recognized before they speak? Is there a limit on how much one student may speak during a given class period? Are comments to be directed to content specific discussion items?

Calming Down a Disruption

If a student does become disruptive, some of the following strategies may help to de-escalate the situation.

- Maintain control with a calm, soft voice. When you use a quieter voice, the disrupter will need to become quieter in order to hear you. Your "being in control" may diffuse the situation.
- Unless your safety is threatened or the safety of other students, walk around and stand closer to the disrupter. If necessary, you may want to whisper a warning into his/her ear.
- You may need to directly tell a student that they have contributed enough for that day and you need to hear from some other students.
- If possible, shift the topic and/or activity. When a student is "worked up" about one topic, moving to another may calm the situation or at least catch the student off guard.
- Do not challenge or belittle the disruptive student. Your goal at this point is to de-escalate the situation. You can always follow up with the student later.

When Things Do Not Calm Down

If a student will not stop being disruptive, you have a responsibility to maintain the environment for all of the other students. In this case, consider these options:

- You have the right to ask the disruptive student to leave the class that day. (Any longer of a class suspension will need to come via the campus misconduct process).
- If a student will not leave after you have asked, you may call 911 and have the police remove a disruptive student.
- If a student is making threats of harm to self or others, call 911 immediately.
- "Disruptive or obstructing a university-run or university-authorized activity" is in violation of the code of conduct and you may refer the student for disciplinary action by calling Gregg Heinselman, Associate Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs at 425-4444 Ext 114.

While countless resources exist to help students adjust to college life and the additional stress, students may still find themselves at risk, without an awareness of available resources. Faculty may also find themselves seeking resources to help manage classroom behavior. One of the ways in which Student Affairs has chosen to address these issues is through the development of a Behavior Intervention Team. The BIT is in the process of creating several new helpful handouts that we hope faculty and staff embrace and utilize.