

disruptive and threatening student behavior

**guidelines
for faculty and staff**



UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND
EASTERN SHORE

Office of Institutional Equity and Compliance

General Overview

What is the difference between **disruptive** and **threatening** behavior? How does the University of Maryland Eastern Shore define each one?

Disruptive Behavior

Disruptive behavior is detrimental to the academic community because it interferes with the learning process, inhibits the ability of instructors to teach effectively, diverts university energy and resources away from the education mission and may indicate a significant level of personal problems or distress on the part of the disrupter.

Disruptive Behavior IS:

- The student in your class who is *persistently tardy* or *leaves early*;
- The student who *talks incessantly* while you are delivering a lecture;
- The student who loudly and *frequently interrupts* the flow of class with questions or interjections; or
- The student who *becomes belligerent* when you confront their inappropriate behavior in class;
- *Cell phones* ringing in a classroom, text messaging, chatting online;
- Persistent and *unreasonable demands* for time and attention both in and out of the classroom.

Disruptive Behavior is NOT:

- Cultural differences;
- Appropriate demonstrations of disagreements or differences of opinion;
- A class of values or beliefs;
- Needing extra time or attention based on reasonable accommodation

Disruptive Behavior is conduct that materially and substantially interferes with or obstructs the teaching or learning process in the context of a classroom or educational setting.

Threatening Behavior is any statement, communication, conduct, or gesture, including those in written form, directed toward any member of the University community that causes a reasonable apprehension of physical harm to a person or property.

Preventing Disruptive Behavior

- Set clear expectations about classroom behavior and include those expectations in the syllabus;
- Review these expectations in class and develop agreements as a class during the first session;
- Speak with students in private and immediately upon first disruptive incident;
- Model professional behavior. Respond to inappropriate remarks in a professional and mature manner. Put-downs or witty comebacks can potentially escalate a situation.

Appropriate Referrals for Disruptive Students and Students In Crisis

- Emotional issues/anger management
Please refer to Counseling Services **410-651-6449**
- If a student has threatened you or someone else:
Call police immediately **410-651-3300**
- If you are concerned about a student and are not sure what the appropriate resource is, notify the Office of Institutional Equity and Compliance, **410-651-6135**

What Do I Do?

Recommendations For Intervention

Step #1

Ask the student to immediately and respectfully end the behavior by:

1. Asking the student to stay after class so that you can discuss why the behavior is inappropriate or disruptive (see Meeting with a Disruptive Student: Guidelines, page 5),

OR

2. Taking a break during class and asking the student to end the behavior

NOTE: All of these verbal conversations should be followed up with an email to the student which summarizes the conversation.

Step #2

(Behavior Continues)

1. Let the student know that they need to meet with you as soon as possible about their continued behavior in order to return to class (see Meeting with a Disruptive Student: Guidelines, page 5)
2. Follow up in writing to the student via email outlining the behavior, the rules that were violated, and future expectations for class participation through a written warning.
3. The warning should also include notice that any subsequent violation for the classroom rules or this policy will result in the instructor filing a Student Code of Conduct Complaint with the Director for Student Conduct and Community Standards for failure to comply with this policy.

NOTE: Faculty members should keep a log describing disruptive behavior and documenting the meetings and conversations that have occurred with the student. These documents should be kept on file.

Step #3

1. If the student has not changed their behavior, the case must be referred to the Office of Institutional Equity and Compliance (410-651-6135) and a Student Code of Conduct Complaint must be submitted online.
2. Any additional documentation must be hand-delivered or emailed (equity@umes.edu) to the Campus Compliance Officer.
3. The instructor must also notify their Department Head or Dean of the matter as well.

Meeting with a Disruptive Student: Guidelines

The meeting is an opportunity for the student to understand the inappropriateness of their behavior and to develop strategies for continuing successfully in the class.

During the meeting:

1. *Remain calm.* This may be difficult if the student is agitated or confrontational, but your calm and reasoned response will best control the meeting.
2. *Do not take behavior or remarks personally.* Disruptive behavior usually results from other life problems or a general academic frustration.
3. *Be specific* and identify the inappropriate behavior the student has exhibited. Describe the behavior, do not focus on the person. Explain why the behavior is a problem.
4. *Review the classroom rules* and *this* policy.
5. *Ask questions* and summarize what you hear the student saying.
6. Focus on *areas of agreement* between you and the student. Conclude by summarizing any resolution and articulating expectations and the behavior that is required for the future.

Threatening Student Behavior

Each of us responds differently to the behaviors of others. Encounters with students that leave you frightened and in fear of your personal safety should be taken very seriously. Direct or implied threats of violence, challenges to fight, shoving, physical attacks, stalking, threatening phone calls, emails, or other such correspondence, acts of harassment and similar behaviors should be immediately discussed with your department chair or supervisor, Campus Police, and the Office of Institutional Equity and Compliance. If the threat is immediate, dial **410-651-3300** for immediate police response.

It is required that you notify the Office of Institutional Equity and Compliance, at **410-651-6135**, whenever the police have been requested to intervene. In instances where the reported conduct constitutes a violation of the Student Code of Conduct, the Office of Institutional Equity and Compliance can also assist you in filing a Code of Conduct complaint form.

Direct Threats From Students Should Not Be Tolerated

"You are going to be sorry you did that!",
"I know where you live" or "Just wait, I'll get you!"

What Do I Do?

Procedures For Mandatory Reporting

If threatened by any student's conduct to the point of reasonable fear of immediate physical harm to self, others, or property:

1. Leave the area immediately.
2. Call the police by dialing 410-651-3300 to request that an officer come to the location. Inform the police if it is a repeat occurrence.
3. Anyone who observes what appears to be threatening behavior must report it to the Office of Institutional Equity and Compliance and in the appropriate case, file a Student Code of Conduct Complaint.
4. University employees who observe what appears to be threatening behavior must also report it to their supervisor or Department Head, who should report it to their Dean.

Meeting with a Threatening or Potentially Violent Student

Faculty often encounter a troubled student when they have arranged a meeting with that student, but staff are more often on the front lines and may not be expecting to encounter an angry or hostile student. Therefore, it is essential that faculty and staff develop a strategy or "plan" for times when difficult students are encountered.

Precautions to take:

- Consider establishing a *code word or phrase* to be used within your department. That word would serve as a signal to others to call for help outside your office. Example, "Can you please hold all my calls?" "My next appointment is with President Shelton, can you call him to let him know I will be late?"
- Consider *installing a panic button*.
- Terminate any conversation immediately if you feel something is wrong.
- *Leave your door open* during a meeting with a student.
- *Avoid body language that appears challenging*, such as placing your hands on your hips, moving into the student's territory, or using aggressive facial expressions.
- *Slow your rate of speech* down and use a low pitch and volume to reduce the momentum of the situation.
- *Ask to consult your supervisor*, a Department Head, or the Office of Institutional Equity and Compliance to help satisfy the agitated person's need to feel heard.
- *Listen carefully* by really paying attention to what is said. Let the student know that you will help within your ability to do so and within reason.
- *Ask questions* to regain control of the conversation and to understand the situation.
- *Neither agree with distorted statements nor attempt to argue*. Avoid defensiveness.

Contacts:

Office of Institutional Equity and Compliance.....	410-651-6135
Counseling Services.....	410-651-6449
Police (non-emergency).....	410-651-6590
Police (emergency).....	410-651-3300

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