

PREVENTING AND DEALING WITH CLASSROOM DISRUPTION

Michael B. Brown, PhD

Associate Dean, Harriot College of Arts and Sciences

Include Critical Information in Your Course Syllabus

- A statement that indicates your expectations about following the University's principles of academic integrity along with a reference to the online Student Handbook. The Student Handbook outlines the student code of conduct including the academic integrity policy and procedures (<http://www.ecu.edu/studenthandbook/>). The Office of Student Rights and Responsibilities is the office that handles student conduct and discipline who suggests including a paragraph in your syllabus:

Academic integrity is a fundamental value of higher education and East Carolina University; therefore, I will not tolerate acts of cheating, plagiarism, falsification or attempts to cheat, plagiarize or falsify. Should I determine that an academic integrity violation has taken place, I reserve the right either to assign a grade penalty or to refer the case to the Office of Student Rights and Responsibilities for an Academic Integrity Board hearing. The minimum grade penalty that I will assign is an F for the assignment/course. Should it come to my attention that you have had a prior academic integrity violation, or if there are other aggravating circumstances, I will refer the case directly to the Office of Student Rights and Responsibilities. Should the Academic Integrity Board determine that you committed an academic integrity violation, you may be assigned a grade penalty and/or any other sanction allowed in the student Code of Conduct, up to and including suspension from the University.

- Your attendance policy, including any penalties or bonuses for attendance. Be specific, as this is what you will be able to enforce if issues arise later. The Faculty Senate approved new student attendance regulations in Spring, 2006:

Students are expected to attend punctually all lecture and laboratory sessions and field experiences and to participate in course assignments and activities as described in the course syllabus. Absences are counted from the first class meeting, and, at the discretion of the instructor, absences because of late registration may not be automatically excused.

- A statement about your expectations for civil and respectful behavior in the classroom. Here is an example adapted from <http://ic.ucsc.edu/CTE/teaching/tips-civility.html#sample>:

To create and preserve a classroom atmosphere that optimizes teaching and learning, all participants share a responsibility in creating a civil and non-disruptive forum. Students are expected to conduct themselves at all times in this classroom in a manner that does not disrupt teaching or learning. Behavior which disrupts the learning process may lead to disciplinary action and/or removal from class.

- *Be on time to class. Class starts promptly at x. You should be in your seat and ready to begin class at this time. Class ends at x. Packing up your things early is disruptive to others around you and to the instructor.*

- *Classroom participation is a part of your grade in this course. To participate you must attend class having prepared the materials for the day. Questions and comments must be relevant to the topic at hand.*
- *Classroom discussion should be civilized and respectful to everyone and relevant to the topic we are discussing. Classroom discussion is meant to allow us to hear a variety of viewpoints. This can only happen if we respect each other and our differences.*
- *Any discussion from class that continues on any listserv or class discussion list should adhere to these same rules and expectations.*
- *Electronic devices such as cell phones and pagers must be turned off during class.*
- *A schedule of course activities and assignments either weekly or by class meeting. Include detailed information about assignments and the requirements for completing them.*

Develop Positive Relationships with Your Students

Positive faculty-student relationships encourage greater student learning during the semester and also reduces the likelihood of conflict. Developing positive working relationships with your students is an excellent instructional technique that will enhance student learning without lowering your standards or your requirements for the course. It can also avoid many disagreements that are often derivative of negative feelings between students and faculty members. Here are some ways to encourage a positive relationship with your students:

- Come a little early for class and talk with students as they arrive for class.
- Explain your expectations and provide examples of what high quality work looks like. Talk with students about the importance and impact of what you are teaching on their lives, on scholarship, and on the rest of the world.
- Show enthusiasm for your subject area. Even when you are teaching a difficult class students respect instructors who are enthusiastic about their material.
- Provide encouragement for students who are doing poorly. Spend some time talking with students about effective study techniques, time management, etc.
- Give students feedback in a constructive fashion and talk positively about scholarship. Although it is frustrating when students don't put in the necessary work or have difficulty understanding your material, avoid demeaning students.
- Keep your office hours as posted and encourage students to come by and talk about their performance in class. It is often helpful to go over exams with students to help them identify patterns of difficulty and better understand how to learn the material.
- Be familiar with the resources available to students having personal or academic difficulties and refer students to appropriate resources (tutors, Academic Support, Counseling and

Student Development, etc). A listing of many resources is available at <http://www.ecu.edu/studenthandbook/solutions.htm>

Promoting Civility in the Classroom

Faculty members across the nation have noticed that there has been a decline in the standards of classroom behavior. Disruptive behavior might include talking, reading papers or email, treating others disrespectfully, coming to class late, etc. Civility is a core value of higher education, and faculty members may have to teach this to our students. Here are some strategies to use that may promote civility in the classroom:

- Include a description of your expectations for civility and classroom behavior in your syllabus. Discuss them periodically during the semester.
- Model civil behavior yourself. Come to class on time and end class on time. Treat students respectfully, even if you disagree with them. Respond to problems firmly but not in a hostile or demeaning manner.
- Reduce anonymity in the classroom. Get to know students' names, have some small group discussions in class, have a Blackboard discussion page, and occasionally visit laboratory sections of your course.
- Be approachable, and encourage students to come talk with you about their concerns about learning, the course material, and the classroom.
- Help students to connect what they are learning to their lives on- and off-campus. Many students who come to college have been "trained" as concrete learners in high school and faculty members tend to use teaching methods that emphasize abstract learning. Use examples, small group learning, discussion questions and other pedagogical techniques that move students toward greater personalization of the material in your class.
- Deal with problems early rather than ignore them and hope they go away. The first strategy is to announce the expectation in a general way first ("Please wait until class is over to gather your things as it disrupts our learning"). If that doesn't work then talk with the student(s) individually after class is over. Keep documentation on the problems and your attempts at resolution for students who are chronically troublesome. If a student is too disruptive then don't hesitate to report the student to the Office of Student Conflict Resolution for disciplinary action.
- Seek out consultation from others if you need assistance in managing classroom behavior (see the resources at the end of this handbook).

ACADEMIC DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOR POLICY

There is a new academic policy approved in 2007 that provides faculty members with an additional tool for dealing with students who present a chronic disruption to the classroom and need to be **removed from the course**. This is not a substitute for situations in which immediate action is necessary to prevent harm to people or property (in which case the ECU Police Department should be called immediately) nor is it meant to address students with more typical student conduct issues (which should be addressed through the Office of Student Rights and Responsibilities). This also does not prevent an instructor from asking a student to leave an individual class session if the individual is disruptive.

Policy

East Carolina University is committed to providing each student with a rich, distinctive educational experience. To this end, students who do not follow reasonable standards of behavior in the classroom or other academic setting may be removed from the course by the instructor following appropriate notice. Students removed from a course under this policy will receive a grade of “drop” according to university policy and are eligible for tuition refund as specified in the current tuition refund policy.

Disruptive academic behavior is any behavior likely to substantially or repeatedly interfere with the normal conduct of instructional activities, including meetings with instructors outside of class. Examples of such behavior include, but are not limited to, making loud or distracting noises; using cell phones and other electronic devices without prior approval; repeatedly speaking without being recognized; frequently arriving late to class; and making threats or personal insults. A verbal expression of a disagreement with the instructor or other students on an academic subject matter discussed within the course, during times when the instructor permits discussion, is not in itself disruptive academic behavior.

The course instructor has original purview over his/her class and may deny a student who is unduly disruptive the right to attend the class. A student who does not follow reasonable standards of academic decorum should receive a private verbal warning from the faculty member. The instructor should describe the behavior of concern to the student, explain that it is inappropriate, and ask the student to stop the behavior. If the behavior continues, the instructor should give the student a written warning indicating that the student will be removed from the course if the behavior does not cease. If the behavior persists, the instructor should discuss the situation with his/her department chair. If it is decided to remove the student from the course then the instructor should schedule a meeting with his/her department chair and the student to inform the student that s/he is being removed from the course. This decision must be communicated in writing to the student with a copy promptly forwarded to the Office of Student Rights and Responsibilities. The department chair must promptly communicate the decision in writing to the Office of the Registrar so that the student’s schedule will be adjusted accordingly.

If the behavior is threatening in nature or is likely to result in immediate harm, the faculty member should contact the East Carolina University Police Department for assistance.

The student may appeal the decision of the instructor and department chair to the academic dean of the college in which the course is located. The appeal must be received by the dean, in writing, within three working days of the date of the decision to remove the student from the course. The dean or dean's designee will review the appeal and the documentation, will discuss the appeal with the faculty member and, after discussion with the student and instructor, can affirm, reverse or modify the decision made by the instructor and department chair. The student, instructor and department chair will be notified of the appeal decision no later than three working days after receiving the appeal. The dean will provide written notification of the appeal decision to the Office of Student Rights and Responsibilities, and also, if the original decision is overturned, to the Registrar's Office. If the decision is made that the student is to return to the course then the student will be allowed to immediately return to the classroom without academic penalty and the chair will work with the student and instructor to facilitate the completion of any missed work. The dean's decision is final.

This policy does not restrict the instructor's prerogative to ask a disruptive student to leave an individual class session where appropriate or to refer the student to the Office of Student Rights and Responsibilities for violation of the Student Code of Conduct.

(ECU Faculty Manual, Part V. Academic Information, Section I.Y.)

Suggested Procedures

Issue: Student exhibits threatening or dangerous behavior.

Action:

Call ECU Police.

Issue: Student is disruptive in a single class session

Action:

1. Ask student to cease disruption.
2. If continues, ask student to leave class for the single class session.
3. Talk privately with student if behavior continues.
4. File a Student Code of Conduct violation through the Office of Student Rights and Responsibilities.

Issue: Student is continuously disruptive in more than one class session.

Action:

1. Ask student to cease disruption.
2. If student behavior does not improve then remove student from the course following the Academic Disruptive Behavior Policy described above.

Additional Campus Resources for Assistance

There is a number of persons on-campus who can provide assistance to you in resolving student-faculty disagreements. The first person to talk with is your department chairperson. Most of the College Deans have an associate dean who deals with student affairs issues who may also be a useful resource to you. Other helpful resources include:

For academic advising issues, tutoring and academic support:

Academic Advising and Support Center
328-6001 <http://www.ecu.edu/aasc/>

For general university problems and issues:

Dr. Lynn Roeder Dean of Students
328-9297 <http://www.ecu.edu/studentlife/dos/>

For student conduct or academic integrity issues:

Dr. Margaret Olszewska
Office of Student Rights and Responsibilities
328-6824 <http://www.ecu.edu/cs-studentlife/scr/>

For counseling and psychological issues:

Center for Counseling and Student Development
328-6661 <http://www.ecu.edu/cs-studentlife/counselingcenter/>

For appeal of suspension, probation, or readmission issues:

Student Academic Appellate Committee
Appeals made through the Office of the Registrar.
328-6747 <http://www.ecu.edu/registrar/>

For Student Records and Confidentiality Questions (FERPA):

Ms. Amanda Fleming Office of the Registrar.
328-6748 <http://www.ecu.edu/cs-acad/registrar/FERPA.cfm>

Online Student Handbook/Code of Conduct:

<http://www.ecu.edu/studenthandbook/>

Where to Go for Solutions Online Resources List:

<http://www.ecu.edu/studenthandbook/solutions.htm>