

Preventing and Responding to Disruptive Behavior in Class

Strategies

- **Model the civility that you expect from students.**
- **Clarify your standards of conduct in class. For example, if you would like students to raise their hands before speaking, let them know.**
- **If inappropriate interactions occur, caution the class rather than singling out a particular student: “Too many people are talking at once. Let’s listen and take turns responding.”**
- **If a student’s behavior is irritating, but not disruptive, try speaking with the student after class. He or she may be unaware of causing offense.**
- **If it is necessary to address disruptive behavior in class, do so in a firm and friendly manner; be available after class to clarify your concerns.**
- **You may direct a very disruptive student to leave your class. State your reason(s) privately to the student. Consult your Department Chair promptly. Suspension of a student for more than one class meeting requires formal disciplinary action and referral to Judicial Affairs.**
- **If a disruption is serious and your effort to manage it fails, you may adjourn class and summon campus police.**

Concepts

Faculty members are responsible for class management. Like judges, teachers focus on issues, set time limits, assess the quality and relevance of statements, and ensure that multiple perspectives are heard. Like judges, teachers must balance authority with fairness.

Students as well as teachers have academic freedom. University policies on classroom disruption may not be used to punish lawful classroom dissent. Disagreement is not in itself disruptive.

Rudeness and disruptiveness, though related, are distinct. Don’t be provoked by a student’s rudeness. Warn the student politely and privately (if possible) that you consider a specific behavior unacceptable. If the behavior persists, consider it disruptive.