

DEALING WITH **Disruptive Behaviour** A GUIDE FOR TEACHING STAFF

Remember, you can use the Walksafer or Ridesafer services at night to get safely to any campus location, including parking lots and transit stops.

Single Occurrence of Non-Violent Disruptive Behaviour

When a student disrupts to the extent that the class cannot continue, you might call a pause in the class, and attempt to restore order by talking privately with the student or you might ask the student to stop, saying “Please see me after class”.

If the situation is not resolved with this approach, you may have to cancel the rest of the class. You should then take the actions as described below.

Disruptive or Intimidating Behaviour Gradually Emerging Over Several Class Meetings

If a student repeatedly disrupts the normal flow of activities in your classroom or laboratory despite your attempts to maintain order, you are advised to do the following:

Document the incident(s) right away, noting day, time, place, who and what are involved, and particularly what was said and any significant behaviour the student exhibited.

Discuss the situation with the head of your academic program (Dean, Chair, Principal or Director).

During this discussion, application of the Code of Student Conduct should be explored. If you suspect the disruption arises from an emotional problem, and if you would like the advice of a professional counselor, contact the Counselling and Learning Skills Service (416-978-7970) to discuss the incident with them.

If you feel it is appropriate and if you feel safe and comfortable doing so, arrange to meet the student, either before or after class, or during a class break. This meeting will give you the opportunity to review your expectations of students in your class, and indicate how the student’s behaviour is being disruptive. Give the student the opportunity to explain her or his actions; if it seems appropriate, indicate that there are various counseling services for students available on campus and that you are prepared to arrange for the student to discuss the situation with an adviser. Document this conversation as well.

Most cases are successfully resolved by this approach: the student modifies the disruptive behaviour, or responds to your offer of assistance.

If you do not feel comfortable meeting with the student on your own, arrange with your academic supervisor to have someone else present. You could also choose to meet the student on your own, but have someone “check-in” on you during the course of this meeting.

If the student persists in the disruptive behaviour, and refuses to leave the class at your request, send for the Campus Police right away (St. George Campus – 416-978-2222; Erindale Campus 905-569-4333; Scarborough Campus 416-287-7333) to assist in removing the student. You should keep your Dean, Chair, Principal or Director closely informed if the situation should reach this stage. You and your Chair or Director should arrange to meet as soon as possible with a representative of the Dean’s Office. The Dean may include other individuals in this meeting. Again, the possible application of the Code should be explored at his meeting, or, as appropriate, possibilities under the Grading Practices Policy section on disruption.

Emergency Situations

In any potentially dangerous situations, for instance, if a student is acting violently, carrying any sort of weapon or threatening someone, call the Campus Police at once or ask a student in the class to do so. Often times a student will have with them a cell phone and can make the call for you.

Harassment or Intimidation Outside the Classroom

Harassment outside the classroom by one of your students, including during office hours, will be treated in the same general way outlined above. The Code will generally apply on campus or off campus in the course of a University-related activity. If the student’s behaviour becomes extremely agitated, or if you felt threatened or intimidated by a student’s behaviour, get a colleague to join you, and call the Campus Police right away.

Resources at the University

Campus Police - Emergency Phone Numbers

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| St. George Campus | 416-978-2222 |
| Scarborough Campus | 416-287-7333 |
| Erindale Campus | 905-569-4333 |
| Community Safety Coordinator’s Office | 416-978-1485 |

Office of Student Affairs
University of Toronto
214 College Street, Room 307
Toronto, Ontario M5T 2Z9
Phone: 416-978-5536
Fax: 416-971-2037

Community Safety Coordinator’s Office
University of Toronto
21 Sussex Avenue, 2nd floor
Toronto, Ontario M5S 1J6
Phone: 416-978-1485
Fax: to be announced

Dealing with Disruptive or Intimidating Behaviour

It is essential that instructors be able to conduct classes without disruption and that students are able to attend classes without disruption and intimidation. The University administration will fully support all the steps necessary to ensure that this is the case.

Disruptive behaviour in a classroom setting is now a specific offence in the Code of Student Conduct. The Code provides that “No person shall cause by action, threat or otherwise, a disturbance, which the member knows obstructs any activity organized by the University of Toronto or by any of its divisions, or the right of another member or members to carry on their legitimate activities, to speak or to associate with others.”

When confronted with a disruptive individual, who does not respond to your requests to stop or directions to leave, it is advisable to seek help and advice. Recognizing and dealing with such problems are important parts of your teaching responsibility. This student may be causing difficulty in other classroom settings your role in bringing this behaviour to the attention of the relevant University authorities is critical.

Class Conduct

It is good practice to set your expectations of student conduct in your class at the beginning of term, when you are making the usual announcements of evaluation procedures, assignments, etc. For instance, you might say “I will conduct this class as a series of lectures but please feel free to raise your hand when you have a question”, or “I will allow ten minutes for questions at the end of each hour, please save your questions until then.”

Students rightfully expect to have some opportunities to ask questions or make comments, as part of the normal give-and-take of the university setting. You may occasionally encounter a student who goes beyond the bounds of what you have defined as acceptable. Below is some guidance and advice on how to handle disruptive and intimidating students.

Assessing Your Teaching Space: How Will You Get Help?

Assess your physical teaching environment (classroom, lab, seminar room) prior to your first class, tutorial or demonstration. Ask yourself:

Where is the nearest telephone? If it is a University telephone on the Centrex system (that is, if it begins with ‘978’ or ‘946’ on the St. George Campus, ‘287’ on the Scarborough Campus, or ‘828’ on the Erindale Campus), the campus police will automatically be able to locate the telephone you are using.

If you will be calling from a telephone not on the University system (a payphone or an outside telephone), what location will you give the police?

How can you avoid being trapped in your classroom or lab by a disruptive or threatening student?

A Five-Step Approach to Setting Effective Limits

1. Explain To The Individual Exactly Which Behavior Is Inappropriate
2. Explain Why The Behaviour Is Inappropriate
3. Give Reasonable Choices or Consequences
4. Allow Time
5. Enforce Consequences