

# INDIANA UNIVERSITY

## Guidelines for Dealing with Disruptive Students in Academic Settings

*(By Action of the University Faculty Council: April 12, 2005)*

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### Introduction

All students are expected to be in compliance with Indiana University's Code of Student Rights, Responsibilities, and Conduct both within and outside the classroom. Disturbances which occur in a teaching/learning context are particularly troublesome, as they disrupt the primary function of the University. Part II, Section H (6) of the Code indicates that "obstructive and disruptive conduct which interferes with teaching, research, administration, other university or university-authorized activity" may result in disciplinary sanctions against students who commit such acts. When this behavior occurs in a learning environment, however, faculty and staff members must be prepared to cope with the immediacy of the problem as well as be involved in the procedures to be followed to hold the student accountable for his/her behavior. The following guidelines are designed to help faculty and staff deal with disruptive students in academic settings (as opposed to residential settings).

### Definitions

For purposes of these guidelines, the following definition should be noted:

"Disruption" is defined as any behavior that seriously interferes with other students' ability to engage in learning and /or the faculty or staff member's ability to provide instruction or service. These behaviors are considered personal misconduct as defined in the Code of Student Rights, Responsibilities and Conduct and should be appropriately addressed via these guidelines. These behaviors are not subject to penalties that can be imposed due to academic misconduct. Thus, disruption requires alternate methods of resolution. Note: any violation of the weapons policy of Indiana University is considered disruptive behavior.

"Academic Setting" is defined to be a classroom, office, laboratory, library, or field experience site where instruction, advising, or service occurs.

"Instructor" is defined to be any person in charge of instruction (e.g., faculty member, Associate Instructor, etc.).

It should be noted that ongoing behaviors or single behaviors that might be considered to be distracting are not the focus of these guidelines. Behaviors such as these (e.g., coming late to class, performing a repetitive act that is annoying-tapping fingers, chewing gum, or making a comment in a rude or crude manner, sleeping, reading a newspaper) can be addressed generally through conventional classroom management techniques and/or by speaking with a student privately after class. Cases in which such annoying behavior becomes excessive and the student

refuses to respond to general classroom management techniques can be referred to the Dean of Students and handled according to personal misconduct procedures in the Code.

## **I. Guidelines for In-Class Settings**

### **A. Prevention**

Each instructor should prepare his/her students, either via the course syllabus or verbally during the first class period or both, regarding the expectations he/she has regarding the standards for the course. This includes parameters on class decorum, how discussions will be conducted, etc. Furthermore, a statement should be made indicating that the Code's procedures will be followed if misconduct, both academic and personal, occurs within the class. Each academic unit should supplement these guidelines with specific preventive measures appropriate to the unit.

### **B. Disruption within Class Period**

If a student becomes disruptive (e.g., refuses to quit talking; blocks an entry way; throws things; uses profane, intimidating, or abusive language; repeatedly interrupts others' speech; moves within the classroom without authorization) an instructor should first request compliance from the student, and, if it is not received, he/she may dismiss the student for the remainder of the class period. The student is expected to accede to this request and may subsequently contest this action using procedures established within each unit. If the student fails to leave after being directed to do so, the instructor should enlist the support of other University personnel (faculty members, academic administrators, campus police) to help resolve the situation. Physical force, including touching, must be avoided, and the instructor must judge, based on the nature of the disruption, whether the class period can continue once the offending student departs.

### **C. Unit Response to the Disturbance**

1. Subsequent to the class period, the instructor should consult with his/her unit head regarding the circumstances of the removal of the student.
2. Written notification of the incident should be submitted to the Dean of Students immediately.
3. The unit head (or designee) should contact the student to arrange a meeting to determine whether or not the student, in the judgment of the unit head (or designee), is capable of returning to the classroom and conducting himself/herself within acceptable standards of behavior. This meeting may involve the instructor, if all parties agree. This meeting should occur, if possible, prior to the next class session.
4. If the unit head (or designee), perhaps in conjunction with other campus resources, can settle any dispute that exists between the instructor and the student as a result of the student's removal, this also should be done prior to the next class period, if possible.
5. If such meetings cannot take place prior to the next scheduled meeting of the class and the unit head believes the offense committed by the student warrants the student's removal from one or more future meetings of the class, the unit head shall notify the student that he or she is restricted from attending class until further notification.
6. If a decision to remove a student from a course due to disruptive behavior is made for any length of time, the unit head endorsing the decision is to notify the Dean of Students of such action. (See III, Dean of Students Response)

## **II. Guidelines for Other Academic Settings**

#### A. Prevention

Just as each instructor should prepare his/her students regarding expectations for student behavior, so, too, should personnel in other academic settings. Work areas such as libraries and offices, unlike classrooms, are frequented by the public. Hence, personnel in these areas may not have as much control over who enters their space as does an instructor teaching a class. Preventive measures rely, in part, on the protocol established within offices or other university facilities. These measures can include signage, literature regarding how a student may file a complaint, training on communication techniques for staff who initially come into contact with people entering the area, and procedures for office personnel to follow should a disruption occur. These procedures should include a referral to the appropriate unit head so that a potentially disruptive student has a resource to which he/she can be directed to address a concern.

#### B. Disruption

If a student becomes disruptive (e.g., refuses to quit talking, blocks an entry way; throws things; uses profane, intimidating, or abusive language) in a non-instructional academic setting, the person dealing with the student should first request compliance from the student. If it is not received, he/she should ask the student to leave and return only when he/she can comport himself/herself. The student is expected to accede to this request. If the student fails to leave after being directed to do so, the individual should enlist the support of other University personnel (supervisor, academic administrator, campus police) to help resolve the situation. Physical force, including touching, must be avoided, and the individual must decide, based on the nature of the disruption, whether to stop service to others for a short period of time before resuming normal operations.

#### C. Unit Response to the Disturbance

1. Subsequent to the disruption, the individual should consult with his/her unit head (or designee) regarding the incident.
2. Written notification of the incident should be submitted to the Dean of Students immediately.
3. If possible, the unit head (or designee) should contact the student to arrange a meeting to determine whether or not the student, in the judgment of the unit head (or designee), is capable of returning to the academic setting and conducting himself/herself within acceptable standards of behavior. This meeting should occur as soon as possible.
4. If such a meeting cannot take place immediately and the unit head (or designee) believes the offense committed by the student warrants that the student be restricted from access to the services provided by the unit, the unit head shall notify the student that he or she is restricted from receiving services until further notification.
5. If a decision to restrict a student from service due to disruptive behavior is made for any length of time, the unit head endorsing the decision is to notify the Dean of Students of such action.

### **III. Dean of Students Response to Disruption in In-Class or in Other Academic Setting**

In cases in which a student has had services or instruction restricted, the Dean of Students will do the following:

1. The Dean of Student will convene a meeting of the unit head, any instructors or staff involved, the student's academic adviser (if appropriate), a staff member of the registrar's office (if

appropriate), a staff member from a counseling & psychological service office (if appropriate), and a staff member from the campus police (if appropriate). Other personnel, as determined by circumstance (e.g., personnel in charge of facilities if the academic course is taught in a facility of a different academic unit) may be included in this meeting.

2. This group will coordinate a plan to deal with the student's immediate needs (e.g., registration, possibility of moving to another section of a course) and/or long term needs (e.g., counseling, what to do if further disturbances occur, referral for disciplinary action) and will discuss any ramifications of possible actions, as well as any grade recommendation.

3. If it is determined that the student must withdraw from a course, the unit will be asked to issue the "W" or "F" grade just as in other course withdrawal situations.

4. If it is determined that the student should be suspended from the University or that the services to the student should be suspended or restricted, the Dean of Students will notify the student that such action is being taken.

5. The Dean of Students will be responsible for communicating relevant information to the student involved.

6. If disciplinary action is recommended, the Dean of Students will administer this process according to procedures in the Code of Student Rights, Responsibilities, and Conduct.

#### **IV. Tips for Responding to Disruptive Students**

1. Remain calm and request compliance from the student in concrete terms (e.g., "please lower your voice" or "please sit in your chair").

2. Ask the student to speak with you to discuss the concerns both may have. Acknowledge the emotions of the student ("I understand you are upset"). Do not engage the student in a debate. It is recommended that an observer be present when this meeting occurs.

3. Try to reach an agreement that is mutually satisfying; that is, you still have control of the academic setting and the student is not disgraced in front of his/her peers.

4. If the student refuses to comply, indicate that you will enlist the aid of others to stop the behavior and that the behavior is subject to disciplinary proceedings of the university.

5. If the student continues to refuse to comply, leave the academic setting to call for assistance or ask someone else in the vicinity to enlist the help of others. Be specific regarding whom you want called/contacted.

6. If a student is violent or threatening, remove yourself and instruct others to remove themselves from the situation and summon campus police as quickly as possible.

#### **V. Campus Resources**

Campuses should make available to faculty members contact information for the campus police, counseling and psychological services office, dean of students/vice chancellor for student affairs office, dean of faculties/vice chancellor for academic affairs office, disabilities support services office, and other appropriate advocacy offices.