



## BEHAVIOR CASES IMPEDING LEARNING PROCESS

No: SAAP 1-5

**Authority:** UWM Administration  
Wis. Admin. Code Chapter UWS 17

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**Initiator:** Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs  
Vice Chancellor of Finance & Administrative Affairs

April 1981

**Responsible Party:** Dean of Students

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### I. Purpose

Students and faculty share responsibility for maintaining a positive educational environment. This policy is intended to assist faculty and instructional staff handling behavior problems in the classroom. Student behavior is divided into two categories: disruptive and distressed. Disruptive behavior in the academic setting interferes with the teaching process and the student learning environment. Distressed behavior may be exhibited by students who appear to be in distress and may need supportive intervention and/or guidance but does not disrupt the teaching or learning environment.

### II. Definitions

#### Distressed behavior

Instructors may notice a change in student behavior that could be the result of a wide range of issues that can cause barriers to learning, such as strained relationships, increased anxiety, alcohol/drug problems, financial difficulties, depression, and difficulty concentrating and/or lack of motivation. These may be mental health issues or the results of stressful events that lead to diminished academic performance or reduce a student's ability to participate in daily activities.

#### Dissent

Dissent can include disagreement, protest, argument, or behavior which produces discussion but which does not seriously infringe on the teaching/learning process. The lawful expression of a disagreement with the instructor is not in itself disruptive behavior. Dissent may turn into disruptive behavior if the student interferes with other students expressing their viewpoints, becomes overly aggressive, or is exhibited through other behavior that blocks the teaching and/or learning process.

#### Disruption

Disruption is a serious impairment of and/or obstruction of the teaching and/or learning process. It usually involves behavior which makes it difficult or unlikely for normal classroom activity to

continue. Examples include, but are not limited to, speaking persistently without being recognized, repeatedly interrupting other speakers, verbal and other behavior that distracts the class from the subject, intimidation, physical threats, harassing behavior, personal insults, and refusal to comply with reasonable faculty direction.

Some disruptive students may have emotional, mental or physical disorders. Although such students may be diagnosed with disabilities and may have a VISA for classroom accommodation from the Accessibility Resource Center, they are held to the same standards of conduct as any other students.

### Eccentricity

Eccentricity can be thought of as non-normative behavior, odd, provocative, or "bizarre" behavior. Students displaying odd behaviors may cause others feelings of discomfort or annoyance, but generally are not disruptive. Some examples could include, but are not limited to, staring or avoiding eye contact, not picking up on social cues, talking about unrelated topics, or not understanding personal space boundaries.

### Uncivil or discourteous behaviors

Uncivil, rude, or discourteous behaviors may be annoying and distracting, but are not usually considered disruptive unless persistent and the student has not responded to reasonable and clear requests to stop such behavior. It may occur in class, during office hours, and/or in electronic communication. The behaviors may include, but are not limited to, coming late to or leaving early from class, tapping fingers, chewing gum, reading a newspaper, and using electronic devices without authorization.

Student Support Team (SST). Multidisciplinary team lead by the Dean of Students. SST provides support and guidance in matters where students experience personal, financial, or emotional distress, including mental health challenges.

Campus Assessment, Response, and Education (CARE) Team. Multidisciplinary team co-lead by Dean of Students and UWM Police Department. CARE intervenes when there are behaviors that threaten the health or safety of others or campus.

## **III. Policy**

Faculty and instructional staff (collectively "instructors") have a responsibility to treat students with understanding, dignity and respect. Instructors have the right and the authority to guide classroom discussion and to set reasonable limits on the manner in which students express opinions. Students who fail to adhere to such reasonable limits shall be subject to disciplinary action(s). Students are required to adhere to the standards listed in the UWM Student Code of Conduct and Wisconsin Administrative Code Chapter UWS 17 and to refrain from disrupting classes and other University activities.

#### IV. Procedures

**If the observed behavior is dangerous and poses an imminent threat, contact the UWM Police by calling 9-911 from a campus phone or 414-229-9911 from a cell phone.**

Instructors should be proactive and set clear about expectations for classroom behavior. This includes writing expectations for student behavior into the syllabus. Starting the semester with a brief discussion of appropriate classroom behavior (e.g., the appropriate use of cell phones) sets expectations right from the beginning. Engage students in a discussion on what they expect from the course, from you, and from their classmates. For courses with online components, it is recommended that expectations regarding electronic communications be included. Confront minor disruptions right away to demonstrate to the students that classroom expectations are being upheld and enforced.

Students displaying eccentric, uncivil or discourteous behaviors can usually be addressed effectively through conventional classroom management techniques that include addressing behavior expectations in the syllabus and during the first class period, in-class intervention, and speaking to a student after class and close in time to when the behavior occurred.

Deescalating inappropriate behavior:

- Address behavior in a manner that is minimally disruptive with the goal to maintain a productive learning environment.
- Maintain a calm, soft voice to encourage the student to become quieter to hear you.
- If possible, do not confront the student in front of peers. Embarrassment might fuel them to challenge you.
- Consider having the class take a break so you can talk to the student.
- Ask the student to see you after class or during office hours.

When faculty or instructional staff experience students who exhibit disruptive or distressed behavior they should follow the steps outlined below. The procedures are divided into two categories: one for disruptive behavior and one for distressed behavior.

A. Procedures for disruptive behavior:

- 1) The instructor should immediately address any behavior that is inappropriate before it escalates. First, ask student(s) causing the disruption to stop the behavior. If the disruption does not cease, the instructor should ask the student(s) to leave the classroom and inform those involved that the failure to do so may subject the student(s) to disciplinary action and/or police involvement. Removal of a student from a classroom should occur only when the teaching and/or learning process cannot continue unless the student is removed. When a student is removed from a classroom for misconduct, such a removal applies only to that specific class session. The student may attend future class sessions unless disciplinary action, which restricts them from attending class, is imposed by the Dean of Students Office.

When students exhibit disruptive behavior which cannot be deescalated, do the following:

- Shift your focus from maintaining a productive learning environment to one that ensures the safety of other students and yourself.
  - Do not engage the student in back-and-forth conversation.
  - Instruct the student to leave the class for the day. (Longer suspensions must result from the nonacademic misconduct process through the Dean of Students Office).
  - If a student refuses to leave, call 414-229-4627 and ask University Police to remove the disruptive student.
  - If a student makes direct threats to self or others, call 9-911 immediately.
  - Notify the Dean of Students Office of the incident as soon as possible via the online form at <http://uwm.edu/reportit> or [dos@uwm.edu](mailto:dos@uwm.edu).
- 2) Follow up with the student(s) regarding the situation. When possible, this should be done after class and in the privacy of the faculty member's office. Sometimes it is helpful to have another person, such as a faculty or staff member, or the department chair, present at a meeting or for any conversation. During the discussion with the student, clarify the expectations for classroom conduct and seek the student's cooperation in meeting those expectations. Indicate that further incidents may result in the student being referred to the Dean of Students Office for disciplinary action.
  - 3) Always contact the Dean of Students Office when a student was asked to leave a class session or if steps 1 and 2 occurred and the behavior has not improved. Instructors should document the dates, times, witnesses, details of the disruptive incidents and the impact the disruption had on those present. The Dean of Students Office can take informal action, such as talking with the student(s) about changing behavior, or formal action in accordance with the student nonacademic misconduct guidelines. Formal disciplinary action by the Dean of Students Office is required to prohibit a student's class attendance or move them to a different section.
  - 4) Should formal disciplinary action be sought in response to a disruption or other acts of nonacademic misconduct, a written complaint describing the incident(s) of misconduct should be sent to the Dean of Students Office. In accordance with Chapter UWS 17, a dean will investigate the matter and determine the appropriate sanction(s), if any. Instructors can file a complaint using the nonacademic misconduct reporting form located at: <http://uwm.edu/reportit> or send or email to [dos@uwm.edu](mailto:dos@uwm.edu).
  - 5) The Dean of Students may also refer the matter to the SST and/or CARE Team for further consultation or intervention.

B. Procedures for distressed behavior:

- 1) When there is a concern regarding a student's wellbeing, instructors should reach out to the student privately to find out if they need some support or assistance. Sometimes instructors are reluctant to engage students because they do not want to say the wrong thing. But, for many students, simply knowing someone cares can make all the difference. Your ability to be empathetic and express concern may be a critical factor in helping a student get help or resolve their problems.

Tips for addressing distressed behavior:

- a) Talk to the student - if possible after class or in an office.
- b) Genuinely listen.
- c) Acknowledge the student's concerns and avoid judgment.
- d) If the behavior is approaching disruption, set limits and expectations and be firm.
- e) If you are worried about suicide, ask the student direct questions to assess their intentions.
  - Are you thinking about suicide?
  - What have you thought about doing?
  - What resources/friends/organizations have you utilized for support?

You may tell students that you will respect their privacy (FERPA); however, do not promise confidentiality (threats to self and others, sexual violence, and child abuse must be reported).

- 2) A student may need to be referred for counseling, medical help, or academic assistance. Instructors can seek consultation to help sort out the best approach for assisting a student by contacting the Norris Health Center at 414-229-4716 or reviewing the resources on their website: <https://uwm.edu/norris/counseling/>.
- 3) Instructors should also notify the Dean of Students Office of the concern. Instructors can use the reporting form located at: <http://uwm.edu/reportit> or send an email to [dos@uwm.edu](mailto:dos@uwm.edu).

Some examples of behavioral concerns instructors may want to report:

- significant change in mood
  - being continually confused, irritated, or depressed
  - noticeable change in quality of work
  - changes in appearance or hygiene
  - inappropriate outburst
  - persistent unwanted contact
  - inappropriate use of violent themes/subjects
  - bizarre verbal or written statements
  - self-report of mental health issues or crime victimization (e.g., domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking)
  - suspected or reported alcohol or drug abuse
  - thoughts of violence toward self or others
  - unusual patterns of coming late to class or leaving early
  - difficulty due to illness or death in the family
- 4) In order to determine the extent of the problem, the Dean of Students Office may consult with other faculty or staff involved with the student. Consultations may also involve other university personnel (e.g., Norris Health Center staff, academic adviser, University Housing, etc.). Solutions such as counseling referral and academic changes (e.g., dropping the class or withdrawal from school) will be explored.

**V. Contact Information**

Dean of Students  
Student Union 345  
Voice: 414 229-4632  
Facsimile: 414 229-6793  
Electronic: dos@uwm.edu

**VI. Forms**

Individuals who wish to file a complaints regarding student misconduct may use the reporting form located at: <http://uwm.edu/reportit>.