

Dealing With Disruptive Classroom Behavior

Please contact Vice President Manzano @ ombudsperson@lavc.edu

Disruptive classroom behavior by students has become an issue of concern to faculty throughout higher education. Unfortunately, more and more students believe it is appropriate to engage in behavior that is disruptive and/or threatening.

The Office of the Vice President of Student Services offers several options for dealing with these issues, including disciplinary referrals, mediation, and informal discussions. In order to assist faculty, the following guidelines have been developed to help faculty respond to these situations.

1. In order to foster a campus culture that promotes respect and civility, it is important that faculty recognize their responsibility for management of the classroom environment. Faculty members encounter fewer problems with student behavior when they clearly state their expectations about the importance of demonstrating respect in the classroom. If students are engaging in behavior that is not conducive to teaching or learning, faculty members should act by setting boundaries with these type of students.
2. The **LACCD Code of Student Conduct** is printed in the schedule of classes, catalog and student handbook. It supports faculty in this endeavor by acknowledging that the nature of the educational process must be protected through the implementation and enforcement of appropriate policy surrounding due process rights. Faculty is encouraged to refer to the Code in their course syllabus. Examples of disruptive behavior which could be interpreted as violations of the Code include, but are not limited to: making loud or distracting noises, persisting in speaking without being recognized, or resorting to insults or threats of violence.
3. Both students and faculty members have some measure of academic freedom. As you know college policies on classroom disruption cannot be utilized to punish appropriate classroom dissent. A simple expression of disagreement with a faculty member is not in itself considered disruptive behavior.
4. Faculty members are encouraged to deal with instances of rudeness by classroom example and through private discussion rather than open confrontation in the classroom. Rudeness can become disruption when it is repetitive, especially after a warning has been given.
5. Strategies to prevent and respond to disruptive behavior include the following:
 - a. Clarify standards for the conduct of your class. For example, if you want students to raise their hands for permission to speak, say so, using reminders as needed.
 - b. If you believe that inappropriate behavior is occurring, consider a general word of caution rather than warning a particular student (e.g. "We have too many conversations in the room right now. Can we please all concentrate on the same subject?")
 - c. If a student's behavior is irritating, but not disruptive, try speaking with the student after class. It is possible that the student is unaware of distracting habits or mannerisms, and does not have the intent to be offensive or disruptive.
 - d. There may be rare circumstances when it is necessary to speak to the student during class about his or her behavior. Try to do so in a friendly but firm manner, indicating that further discussion can occur after class. Public arguments and harsh language must be avoided at all times. Try to separate the person from the behavior, using appropriate "I" statements rather than accusatory "you" statements (e.g. "I am finding it difficult to continue presenting the subject material when you continually engage in side conversations. Could you please discontinue those conversations until after class?")
 - e. A student who persists in disrupting a class may be directed by the faculty to leave the classroom. The student discipline policy allows for the removal of disruptive students for the remainder of the class period and the following class period. Whenever possible, prior consultation should be undertaken with both the department chairperson and the Office of the Ombudsperson. If a disruption is serious, and other reasonable measures have failed, the class may be adjourned and a security officer summoned. Once the security officers arrive, it is important that the faculty member write a detailed account of the incident. Identify witnesses for Campus Sheriffs, as needed.

6. The Ombudsperson can assist by reviewing College policy with you, and meeting with students formally or informally. It's better to report disruptive incidents promptly. A preferred strategy is to meet with a student in a non-disciplinary situation to develop a behavioral agreement, so that the student has clear guidelines about what behavior is expected of her or him. In more serious cases, the Vice President will consider removing the student from your class. Remember, only the administration can remove students who are discipline problems. **Never tell a student that you are dropping them from class for their behavior - this is a violation of our board rules. Never downgrade a student for his/her disruptive behavior – this is a violation of our board rules.**

Summary of Guidelines: Dealing With Disruptive Behavior

1. State clear behavioral expectations in the beginning of the semester, and establish control over the classroom environment.
2. Cite the Student Conduct Code as a means of interpretation and enforcement.
3. Recognize the difference between disruption and academic freedom.
4. Deal with rudeness privately and calmly.
5. Attempt informal, non-public resolutions whenever possible.
6. When you must confront behavior publicly, separate the person from the behavior and confront the situation firmly but calmly.
7. When removing a student from the class for inappropriate behavior, do so only for the remainder of that class period and the following class period. Report the matter to the Office of the Ombudsperson or Dr. Yasmin Delahoussaye. The Office of the Vice President will engage the student in the campus discipline process. If the behavior warrants removal, the Vice President will impose an interim suspension pending the outcome of due process.
8. Consult with your department chair and the Office of the Ombudsperson whenever disruptions occur. No action need be taken immediately, but it is helpful to have all incidents recorded.
9. In the event of serious disruptions, contact Campus Security and provide a full written account of the incident.
10. Remember that the Office of the Vice President's has several different methods of dealing with disruptive behavior, depending on the seriousness of the situation and your own preferences.
11. The Ombudsperson is willing to provide informational sessions on this and other subject areas such as dealing with students who have mental health issues to your department by request.
12. Contact Vice President Manzano with any questions or concerns.