Distressed or Disruptive Students: How do I handle them? Under FERPA, who can I tell?

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Agenda

• Scenarios
• Suggestions
• Resources
• More scenarios
• Final comments and questions
Scenario

• A student is constantly disruptive but in a low key, not always obvious way—sneering when he answers your questions, rolling his eyes, making disrespectful comments under his breath...

• What do you do?
Setting Ground Rules

On the syllabus

- Statement of expectations: From Texas Tech

“Students are expected to assist in maintaining a classroom environment that is conducive to learning. In order to assure that all students have the opportunity to gain from time spent in class, unless otherwise approved by the instructor, students are prohibited from engaging in any form of distraction. Inappropriate behavior in the classroom shall result, minimally, in a request to leave class.”

- Excused/unexcused absences
- Late arrivals
- Late assignments
- Honor Code
- Cell phones
- Food/drinks
- What else?
1st day of class

- Brainstorm rules of the class for posting
  + Listen attentively
  + Active participant in class
  + Respect each member of this learning community
  + Be on time
  What else?

- Post it exercise: 3-5 class rules, themes

- Big classes use small group exercise and then thumbs up/down
Limiting Opportunities for Disruption

- Role model appropriate behavior
- Give specific guidelines for class discussion, discussion boards, etc.
- Have an activity during the first two minutes of class
- When possible, use small group activities; Assign groups
- Keep the class actively engaged
Scenario

Ben and Beatrice are very lively, outgoing students. They are both strong students. However, despite repeated warnings and separating them in class, they continue to side talk to their classmates and text message. What do you do?
Talking and inattention

- Make direct eye contact
- Stop talking or stop the person who has the floor and hold
- Physically move to that part of classroom
- Vary methods of presenting content
- Remind group of class rules formed by consensus. Ask what happens when students choose to break those rules.
- Speak to the student(s) privately
Scenario

A person in your class is continually asking for special assistance with deadlines, assignments, and attendance. She said it is a personal issue she doesn’t want to share. When she does come to class, she is a strong student. What do you do?
Not prepared, missed deadlines, fraudulent excuse making

• Design syllabus so that there are logical consequences to this behavior. Follow through, be consistent, don’t enable.

• Require evidence of preparation for class (2 min. on the spot reflection; call on students by name for input; group grade/survivor)

• Role model being prepared and on time

• Clearly state policy about absences, missed exams, make up exams, etc.

• If the student has an accommodation letter, call Disability Resource Center for insight.
Lateness and lack of attendance

- Establish policy and expectations.
- Start class on time and finish on time.
- Have a ritual at the beginning of class (something students would hate to miss or be embarrassed to miss or counts toward grade).
- Speak privately to chronically late students.
- Make sure content is covered and learning activities are crucial.
- Don’t re-teach class. Student is responsible for missed materials.
Scenario

A person in your class just doesn’t make sense. Every time you try to explain your position, he twists what you have said. He dominates the class but doesn’t stay on topic. What do you do?
Assessing Volatile Situations

- Assess the situation
  + Are you and the people around you safe?
  + Is this a class or individual issue?
  + Are there unnecessary bystanders?
  + Is there immediacy to the issue or would a time-out be beneficial?
Scenario

A student approaches you after class and relates that Cody spent the entire class period looking at gun sites on his laptop. He is a rather bizarre student. What do you do?
Overt Hostility

1. Talk to student privately in neutral setting. Consider support person. Address behavior and expectations. Listen for concerns. Attempt to clarify.

2. Make direct eye contact. Speak slowly in a soft tone of voice.

3. Address raised voice, interruptions, etc. “We must work effectively together in order to resolve this issue. Let’s try talking respectfully to each other. If you continue to yell, we will have to make an appointment to discuss this later.”

4. If in private, allow the student to “vent” as long as it is done respectfully. Recognize feelings. “I can see that you are very upset.”
5. Reflect back what you are hearing. “What I hear you saying is that you are upset because…”

6. If you can come to some type of resolution or agreement, put it in writing. If some questions need to be answered, note those down and assign who is going to find those answers.

7. Notify the Dean of Students Office of the encounter and outcome.

8. DON’T:
   + Get in an argument, be defensive, or condescending.
   + Press for an explanation of behavior. “Why are you acting like this?”
   + Walk away from the person without explaining that an appointment will need to be made for later until tempers cool.
   + Involve other students in the situation.
   + Issue ultimatums, curse, physically touch a student, continue if you are losing your own temper.
Sources of Support

Dean of Students Office-
+ consultation, support, policies
+ conduct process
+ central depository for trouble
+ work closely with students in distress

Counseling and Wellness Center- general consultation about mental illness and behavior

Disability Resource Center- if letter, excellent consultation

Campus Police- emergencies, safety concerns

And of course…
Department Heads, College administration, etc.
Scenario

You ask the students to do a reflection exercise during the mid point in the semester and one student writes “I need to die. I dream of it often.” What do you do?
Helping students in distress…

- Reach out
- Actively listen
- Brainstorm options
- Refer to resources
- Have high expectations but be flexible when you can
- Consult! (and notify)
Scenario

A student in your class with whom you are close asks you to keep something confidential. She then tells you that she was sexually assaulted over the weekend but doesn’t want to report it. What do you do?
Scenario

You are worried about Sam failing your class. He is a famous student athlete. His dad, an attorney, calls and demands to know what his grades are and says he’ll be calling the Dean’s office next. What do you do?
FERPA and Confidentiality

- FERPA protects educational records (not personal observations)
- You cannot be sued under FERPA
- FERPA is not something to be afraid of - use common sense in the best interest of the student and UF
- What can you share with parents?
- Colleagues?
- Your supervisor?
- Your TAs?
- The Dean of Students?
- The press?
- An attorney representing your student?
- The parents of your student?
Reminder: Key Resources

• Consult with your supervisor/chair/College administration
• Consult with Counseling and Wellness
• Notify/consult with Dean of Students Office
• University Police including Victims Advocates
• Ombuds
• Academic advisors
• Student Medical Services
• Housing
• Many others…
Questions? Comments? Suggestions?
Congratulations to our newest Gators!

University of Florida  Division of Student Affairs