Communicating in Problem Situations

If faculty are comfortable with meeting with a student outside of class that should be the preferred mode. The techniques below are for those situations where the need is immediate.

1. Remain calm and request compliance from the student in concrete terms, e.g. “no more out-bursts”; “please sit in the chair”.

2. If the student does not comply, give them some space to maneuver and ask if their issue is relevant enough to share with the class. Let the student know you are in control, but are subtly giving them a chance to not be embarrassed.

3. If the student escalates the matter, ask them to leave the classroom, noting that if they do not comply, campus police will be called.

4. Ask another student in the class to volunteer to go to the hallway and call campus police using their cell phone. The student will need the full number (765) 455-9363 and classroom location (room number).

5. If the potential for violence seems imminent, dismiss the class and remove yourself.

6. Report the incident to the dean of students. It is important to have a strategy in place to ready the student’s return to class.

Referrals to Professional Counseling

The Kokomo campus has a contract with Howard Regional Health Systems for personal and psychological counseling. All students are permitted 6 sessions for free. A student desiring to see a counselor should contact the Office of Student Services, Diana Goodnight, (765) 455-9214. The student’s enrollment status is verified and a referral form forwarded to mental health services; the student schedules their own appointment.

Faculty can at any time suggest to a student that they utilize the personal counseling services. In situations where a student is identified (and the situation is referred to SORT**) as displaying serious Level 2 or 3 symptoms, the student will likely have counseling mandated or at least an evaluation by a mental health professional.

If a student is in crisis in the classroom, faculty should call campus police at Ext. 363, (765) 455-9363.

**Personal observations are not confidential; it is not a FERPA violation to share this information.

Campus Police: (765) 455-9363

Dean of Students
Kelley Student Center, Room 234
Ext. 360, (765) 455-9360
jtharp@iuk.edu
Disruptive Classroom Behavior

Disruptive behavior in the classroom can take many forms. At a very low level some matters are merely basic decorum and can be handled by conventional classroom management techniques. Some behaviors require disciplinary steps through the office of the dean of students. Increasingly though, behaviors resulting from diagnosed mental conditions or other physical problems are exhibited in the instructional setting.

The suggestions presented herein are intended to help faculty characterize and separate student actions which rise to the level of threatening. These behaviors call into question whether a student could pose harm to him/herself and or the campus community. In contrast, there are particular behaviors, not typical, that are disruptive and fall under the Conduct Code as personal misconduct*. The former is safety and should be directed to SORT. The latter is discipline and can be directed to the dean of students.

SORT

SORT (Student Observation Response Team) is a 5-person group established to support and assist faculty and staff who are experiencing student behavior(s) that would be classified as erratic, unusual, or threatening. The overarching goal of SORT is to be proactive and manage problems before they advance and become a safety issue.

When a faculty member contacts SORT, he/she will be asked to meet with the SORT group. After review, a plan of action will be developed. It is expected that some incidents will be discipline and handled by the dean of students. If a determination is made that a student needs professional help, such as counseling, a short and long-term solution will be suggested.

Assessing the Situation

In an article on college student behavioral problems, a template has been put forth distinguishing the troubling student from the troubled (a student can be both). Typically the actions of a troubling student are a discipline matter, while the condition or actions of a troubled student represent a safety issue, either for the student or campus at-large. Faculty should try to frame their assessment of the presenting student behavior using these two spheres:

- Troubled/safety
- Troubling/discipline

It is acknowledged that a student may be both troubled and troubling adding a layer of complexity in discerning the root problem.

Recognizing Troubled Students

Most students will admit to being stressed at times; some will claim to be depressed. These periodic events are not of the nature where discernible changes in a student are evident. The following levels of behavior indicate relative severity of distress.

**Level 1** Although not disruptive to others, these behaviors may suggest that intervention is needed.

- Declining poor grades or change from consistently good to unexplained poor performance
- Satisfactory performance, but the student appears anxious and needs constant reassurance
- Excessive absences after demonstration of consistent work and attendance
- Unusual or marked change in pattern of interaction, e.g., totally avoiding discussion or seeking to dominate discussion
- Depressed mood, appearance of excessive crying
- Excessive activity and rapid speech; swollen red eyes
- Marked change in personal dress or hygiene
- Regularly falling asleep in class

**Appropriate intervention**—Ask the student to meet with you during regular office hours; determine if campus resources will help the student.

**Level 2** These behaviors may reflect significant emotional distress. Intervention is more likely, yet the student may not acknowledge the need for personal help.

- Repeated requests for special attention, such as extension of deadline, with the request(s) filled with emotion
- New or consistent behavior which pushes the limits of decorum and interferes with classroom management
- Unusual or exaggerated emotional response(s) inappropriate to the situation
- Visible dramatic weight loss (absent illness) in a short period of time
- Restlessness, easily agitated, constant arguing in class
- Classmates appear to avoid the student

**Appropriate intervention**—Ask the student to meet with you; determine if campus resources will help. Recommend counseling services if appropriate. Contact SORT. Inform the student that if disruptions continue, the matter will be turned over to the dean of students.

**Level 3** These behaviors usually suggest a student is in crisis and requires immediate attention.

- Highly disruptive behavior, hostile, aggressive, violent tendencies
- Inability to communicate clearly, garbled/slurred speech, disjointed thoughts
- Loss of contact with reality; beliefs or actions greatly at odds with norms
- Threatening others harm
- Overtly suicidal thoughts

**Appropriate intervention**—The prevailing judgment is a safety issue. Contact campus police. Contact SORT.

Recognizing Troubling Students

The Code of Students Rights, Responsibilities, and Conduct recognizes several personal misconduct violations that may play out in the classroom setting: disorderly/disruptive actions, obscene conduct, failure to comply with directions, refusal to vacate a facility, abusive verbal comments, and others. These behaviors or actions can be serious but often are linked to developmental age-stage. A student who whispers incessantly has a different issue than one who is regularly argumentative and aggressive. Below are some examples of classroom behavior that could fall under personal misconduct and the remedy is discipline through the dean of students office.

- Tries to manipulate and control
- Test limits in the classroom or in written assignments
- Aggravates other students in group projects
- Over reaction to minor problems; has low frustration tolerance
- Deliberately tries to be a distraction
- Does not respect property of others

**Appropriate intervention**—Action by the dean of students requires a formal written charge which does not improve the immediate classroom situation. Faculty must inform the student their behavior is inappropriate. The student response will likely dictate the ultimate resolution.

When in Doubt, Consult: If you have specific questions about a student or are unsure how to assess a developing problem, call the dean of students.

*Code of Student Rights, Responsibilities, and Conduct*  
[http://www.dsa.indiana.edu/Code/]