

Staff Guidelines for Responding to Disruptive or Threatening Student Behavior

February 2011
SUNY Fredonia Office of Student Affairs

Table of Contents

I. Opening Comments.....3
II. Identifying and Referring the Distressed Student.....4
III. Responding to Threatening or Potentially Violent Students.....4
IV. Meeting with a Threatening or Potentially Violent Student.....5
Appendix A: Resources for Consultation and Referral of Students

Colleagues:

SUNY Fredonia is committed to a safe and supportive learning and working environment for all students, staff, faculty, and visitors. In the attached *Guide for Staff*, you will find information about disruptive or threatening incidents as well as resources for assistance in responding to these types of concerns.

We hope you'll find the enclosed materials useful. For additional information and to schedule an information session for your department or unit, you may contact the Office of Student Affairs (x3271) or the Counseling Center (x3424).

Thank you for helping to keep SUNY Fredonia a safe and welcoming community.

Yours truly,

David E. Herman, Ph.D.
Vice President for Student Affairs

Identifying and Referring the Distressed Student

The college years can be very stressful for many. In the contemporary climate of competition and pressure, some students adequately cope with these stresses, but others find that stress becomes unmanageable and interferes with learning. In some cases, these students may even disrupt the learning of others. Many students initially seek assistance from faculty or staff members. See *Appendix A* for a chart illustrating resources for consultation and referral of students.

Below are guidelines for identifying students in distress:

- Dependency (e.g. the student who hangs around or makes excessive appointments during office hours)
- Listlessness or lack of energy
- Marked changes in personal hygiene
- Impaired speech and disjointed thoughts
- Repeated requests for special consideration (e.g. deadline extensions)
- Threats to others
- Expressed suicidal thoughts (e.g. referring to suicide as a current option)
- Excessive weight gain or loss
- Frequent or high levels of irritable, unruly, abrasive, or aggressive behavior
- Unable to make decisions despite your repeated efforts to clarify or encourage
- Bizarre behavior that is obviously inappropriate for the situation (e.g. talking to something/someone that is not present)
- Students who appear overly nervous, tense or tearful

Responding to Threatening or Potentially Violent Students

Each of us responds differently to the behaviors of others. Encounters with students that leave you frightened or in fear for your personal safety should be taken very seriously. Direct or implied threats of violence, challenges to fight, shoving, physical attacks, stalking, threatening phone calls, emails or other correspondence, acts of harassment and similar behaviors should be immediately discussed with your department chair. Your department director will provide advice and support and will ensure that the VP for Student Affairs and other appropriate officials are notified.

The University Police Department, 673-3333, will assist you in assessing the threat, determining the most appropriate steps to be taken and, if necessary, will dispatch law enforcement personnel. If the threat is immediate, call 673-3333 for immediate police response.

In instances where the reported conduct constitutes a violation of the *Student Conduct Code*, the Coordinator of Judicial Affairs, The VP or Assistant VP of Student Affairs or can assist you in filing an Incident Report.

Staff Guidelines for Responding to Disruptive or Threatening Student Behavior**Meeting with a Threatening or Potentially Violent Student**

Do NOT meet alone with an angry or hostile student. Arrange a specific appointment to meet with the student and have your Director and/or the Student Affairs VP's aware of/included with the meeting.

Precautions to take include:

- Have University Police “standby” or with you as circumstances dictate
- Consider establishing a code word to be used within the department. That word would serve as a signal to others to call for help outside your office
 - Create a code word or phrase, distribute it among the staff in your area, and be ready to respond. That word would serve as a signal to others to call for help outside your office. *For example, you could establish the name “Mr. Pitt” as a code word. If you are in the office and you find yourself confronted by a threatening student, you can call into another room or on an intercom and say “my next appointment is with Mr. Pitt – can you call and let him know I’m running late?”* This will act as a sign to whoever is within hearing distance to call University Police. It does not mean to come into the office or to double check the situation. It means CALL UNIVERSITY POLICE IMMEDIATELY.
- Keep the door of your meeting place open
- Position yourself so that you can exit the room quickly, if necessary. For example, keep yourself between the student and the door.
- Terminate the session immediately if your “gut” tells you something is wrong
- Avoid body language that appears challenging such as placing your hands on your hips, moving into the student’s own territory, or using aggressive facial expressions.
- Slow your rate of speech down and use a low pitch and volume to reduce the momentum of the situation
- Include your department director to help satisfy the agitated person’s need to feel heard
- As early in the meeting as possible, elicit the student’s goal for the meeting and state your goal. Negotiation of a common goals may be a useful approach to keeping the student focused
- Listen carefully by really paying attention to what is said. Let the student know that you will help within your ability to do so and within reason
- Ask questions to help regain control of the conversation and to understand the situation
- Neither agree with distorted statements nor attempt to argue
- Avoid defensiveness
- Terminate the meeting if the student remains belligerent and tell him/him that you will not continue until he/she calms down
- Never physically touch an outraged student or try to force them to leave
- If a weapon becomes evident, leave. If that is not possible, calmly ask the person to leave any weapon in a neutral position as you continue talking calmly (notify University Police as soon as you are able)
- Let the person know the consequences of any violent behavior
- Never agree to go to an unmonitored location with a potentially violent person.

**APPENDIX A:
SUNY FREDONIA RESOURCES FOR CONSULTATION AND REFERRAL OF STUDENTS**

	Faculty Member Meeting with Student	Department Chair/Dean	Student Affairs Office (Judicial Affairs)	University Police	Counseling Center	Substance Abuse & Violence Prevention (CEASE)	Disability Student Services	Office of Affirmative Action
CONTACT INFORMATION:			673-3271	673-3333	673-3424	673-3424	673-3550	673-3358
Working with a student exhibiting the following classroom behavior(s):	UNIVERSITY POLICE are available 24 hrs/day year-round. In case of emergency, call 673-3333.							
<i>Possesses an immediate threat to self or others</i>				1				
<i>Writes or verbalizes a direct threat to another person</i>			3	1	2			
<i>Displays anger or hostility inappropriately</i>	1	2	4	5	3			
<i>Sleeping in class</i>	1	2			3			
<i>Exhibits behavior that seems bizarre or out of touch with reality</i>	1		2	3	2			
<i>Continuously uses cell phone causing disruptions</i>	1	2	3					
<i>Shows signs of alcohol or drug abuse</i>	1		2		2	3		
<i>Seems overly emotional, e.g., aggressive, depressed, demanding, or suspicious</i>	1		2		2			
<i>Continuously disrupts class and refuses to stop</i>	1	2	3	4	3			
<i>Is the subject of complaints by other students regarding behaviors</i>	1	2	4		3			
<i>Comes to class drunk or high</i>	1		2		3	2		
Other Concerns:								
<i>Is a victim of sexual assault</i>	1		3	2	3	2		
<i>Talks about homicide or suicide</i>	1		3	2	3			
<i>Is a victim of violence, stalking, intimidation or domestic abuse</i>	1		3	2	3	2		
<i>Is having difficulty due to illness or death of a friend or family member</i>	1		3		2			
<i>May have a disability</i>	1						2	
<i>Reports sexual harassment or civil rights discrimination</i>	1		2	3	3	3		2
<i>Violates principles of community or commits a biased based behavior</i>	1		2	3				4
<i>Is a victim of a biased based behavior</i>	1		2	3	3	3		2

*CONTACT SHOULD BE BASED ON THE IMMEDIACY OF THE ISSUE