Dealing with Difficult Students

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Definition

- Disruptive Behavior: repeated, continuous, and/or multiple student behaviors that hamper the ability of instructors to teach and students to learn.

Tim McMahon & Chris Loschiavio, 2006
## Examples of Disruptive Behavior

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Extreme Examples</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eating in class</td>
<td>Use of cell phones in classroom</td>
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<td>Monopolizing classroom discussions</td>
<td>Inordinate or inappropriate demands for time and attention</td>
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<td>Failing to respect rights of other students</td>
<td>Poor personal hygiene</td>
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<td>Talking when the instructor or others are speaking</td>
<td>Verbal Abuse</td>
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<td>Overt inattentiveness</td>
<td>Harassment</td>
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<td>Entering class late or leaving early</td>
<td>Threats to harm oneself or others</td>
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Preventing Disruptions

- Create an environment in which it is unlikely to occur.
- Serve as a role model by demonstrating appropriate, respectful, and responsible behavior in all interactions with students.
- Use the class syllabus to inform students in writing of standards and expectations for classroom conduct and of possible consequences for disruptive behaviors.
- Devote time during the first class to review this information in the syllabus.
Tips for Dealing with Disruptive Students

- Decide what your limits of acceptable conduct are.
- Take a preventative approach by setting limits from the beginning.
- Be a role model for the behavior you require of your students.

University of Missouri at St. Louis, 2009
General Strategies

- Outlining what you consider appropriate behavior.
- Create a Contract on Classroom Behavior
- Provide early and regular feedback
- Discuss academic integrity
- Include a statement about disclosing a disability to you.

Delaney Kirk, 2009
Steps Toward Harmony

- Ask yourself if you have done anything to contribute to the conflict
- Confer with the student one-on-one
- Find a common ground
- Do not become defensive
- Confer with colleagues about similar situations and how they handled them
- Integrate problem solving and conflict resolution activities in regular lessons
Responding to Disruptive Behavior

- Never attribute malice
- See conflicts as educable moment
- Discuss in private
- Use I statements
- Stay calm
- Put yourself in students shoes
- Listen carefully

- Think win-win
- Defensible position
- Avoid side issues
- Write down issue
- Write down agreement
- Be consistent
- Offer option of next level
- Keep notes of conversation
# DANGEROUS Students

## Escalation of Situation
- Maintain safe distance
- Do not touch student or their belongings
- Use a calm, non-confrontational approach
- Do not mention disciplinary action or police intervention

## Threatens to harm
- Immediately dismiss class and call Campus Police
- Make contact with Counseling Center
- Once danger has passed contact Office of Judicial Affairs
Teaching a Large Class

- Be exciting and dynamic
- Make lectures relevant
- Be tolerant and treat students as adults
- Never lose your temper
- Treat a disruption as a question

E. Herteis, 1994

- Reduce anonymity
- Talk to students after class
- Practice creative listening
- Be a model of discipline
- Let students know it matters to attend class
- Stage debates
Managing Conflict Situations

“It is not what you say, it is how you say it”
References

- Counseling and Student Development Center, James Madison University
- Counseling Services, university of Missouri at St. Louis
- Office of Student Development, Appalachian State University
- Indiana University