

The Well Mannered Classroom- FAQs on Managing Classroom Decorum & Behavior

What is disruptive behavior?

A classroom disruption is any behavior a reasonable person would view as being likely to substantially or repeatedly interfere with the conduct of a class. Examples include: repeated, unauthorized use of cell phones, persistent speaking without being recognized, interrupting a speaker, or making direct or indirect physical threats.

How can disruptive behavior be discouraged?

State reasonable expectations in advance. If you want beepers and cell phones turned off in class, include this request in the syllabus and discuss it on the first day of class. Invite conversation about parameters of classroom conduct. Students are the strongest supporters of classroom decorum, and will be supportive of efforts to create a positive learning environment.

How should I respond to classroom disruptions?

You have broad authority to manage the classroom environment. If you observe inappropriate or disruptive behavior, a “word of caution” might be a good start. Refer to the syllabus and comment on the importance of maintaining a civil and respectful classroom learning environment. (e.g., “We have too many private conversations going on right now, so let’s all try to focus on the same topic.”)

If the behavior in question is irritating but not disruptive, consider speaking with the student after class. Many students are unaware of distracting mannerism or habits and have no intention to be offensive or disruptive.

Overall, key factors in responding to apparent disruptive or uncivil behavior are clarity in expectations, courtesy and fairness in response, and progressive engagement/discipline.

What should I do in the face of persistent disruption?

A student who persists in disrupting a class may be directed by an instructor to leave the classroom for the remainder of the class period. The student should be told the reason(s) for such action, and be given an opportunity to discuss the matter as soon as practicable. You should inform your DEO of the situation, and consider reporting the incident to the Office of the Dean of Students (<http://dos.uiowa.edu>).

What should I do if the disruption is serious and persistent?

Generally, very few instructors experience this type of situation. If a disruption is serious and persistent, and other measures have failed to contain the disruption (e.g., a warning has been given and ignored; the student will not leave the class), the class may be adjourned and University Police summoned (non-emergency: 335-5022 or for emergencies call 911 (dial 9-911 if using a campus phone). The Department of Public Safety should always be summoned when you believe there is any threat of violence or other unlawful behavior. Err on the side of caution.

Additional Resources

Department of Public Safety

<http://police.uiowa.edu>
335-5022

Office of the Dean of Students

<http://dos.uiowa.edu>
335-3557

Office of Academic Support & Retention

<http://uc.uiowa.edu/faculty>
335-1497

Threat Assessment Team

<http://hr.uiowa.edu/tat>
384-2787

University Counseling Service

[https://
counseling.studentlife.uiowa.edu](https://counseling.studentlife.uiowa.edu)
335-7294