

*Managing  
Inappropriate  
Student Behavior*

*A Guide  
For  
Faculty and Staff*

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**U**niversity faculty and staff members may be faced with inappropriate student behavior which complicates the maintenance of an effective learning environment. Various student services exist to support faculty and staff members when these situations arise. The staff noted in the departments listed in this brochure are available, through consultation or student referral, to provide assistance.

If you are unsure about which action to take, just talking with another professional may provide clarity and help you determine the most appropriate manner in which to handle an incident. If at any time you are concerned about a student's behavior, you should always feel free to contact one of the resources listed in this brochure.

In evaluating student behavior, it is important to distinguish between behavior that is **disturbing** as opposed to **disruptive**. Many times students demonstrate behavior that is disturbing, but does not violate the Code of Student Conduct. Disruptive behavior is a violation of the Code of Student Conduct and may result in formal or informal university action.

### IDENTIFYING DISTURBING BEHAVIOR

**Disturbing behavior** usually causes us to feel concerned, alarmed, afraid or frustrated. Disturbing behavior may mean that there is a negative impact on other students, a professor's ability to teach, or a staff member's ability to perform professional responsibilities. Furthermore, it may also indicate that a particular student is having difficulties that affect his/her academic performance.

### Specific examples of disturbing behavior include:

- A student who discloses that his/her parent has a terminal illness.
- A student who works harder than most students but cannot pass an exam.
- A student who appears to be losing significant weight and/or speaks with pride about how little he/she eats.
- A student whose writing appears disjointed and fragmented as though he/she cannot maintain a logical sequence of thought.
- A student who talks to himself/herself.
- A student who jokes in class about killing himself/herself.

### INTERVENTIONS FOR DISTURBING BEHAVIOR

Clearly, faculty and staff members have options for responding to student behavior that they find **disturbing**. They can initiate a private conversation with the student about the behavior and/or they could consult with other professionals on campus. Faculty and staff members can learn techniques for defusing hostile or emotional situations by consulting with professionals in the *Counseling and Wellness Services* or *Student Judicial Services offices*.

### IDENTIFYING DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOR

**Disruptive behavior** is an action or combination of actions by an individual that unreasonably interferes with, hinders, obstructs, or prevents the right of others to freely participate in its activity, program, or service, including behavior that may prevent faculty and staff members from carrying out their professional responsibilities.

## Wright State University Code of Student Conduct Statement of Purpose

As part of its educational mission, Wright State University establishes the Code of Student Conduct and student discipline system. The Code and related system serves to educate students as to their civic and social responsibilities as members of the campus community as well to provide students with the opportunities for service and leadership; to resolve disputes in a cooperative, educational, and non-adversarial manner; to facilitate informed participation in the judicial process; and to increase awareness of and respect for differences of culture, gender, religion, race, sexual orientation, and ability.

The University also has the obligation to conduct its affairs in an orderly and efficient manner. Actions by individuals or groups that interfere with orderly functions or threaten health or safety will not be tolerated. In prescribing the student judicial system, the rights and responsibilities of the individual are considered concurrently with institutional rights and responsibilities. Unacceptable behavior is defined and the consequences of such behavior

The following quote summarizes appropriately the challenges and goals of the Office of Community Standards and Student Conduct.

"The biggest educational challenge we face revolves around developing character, conscience, citizenship, tolerance, civility, and individual and social responsibility in our students. We dare not ignore this obligation in a society that sometimes gives the impression that virtues such as these are discretionary. These should be a part of the standard equipment of our graduates, not options."

Excerpt from the National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges ("Returning to Our Roots: The Student Experience." 1997).

CONSULTATION AND REFERRAL INFORMATION	
Affirmative Action	775-3207
Counseling & Wellness Services	775-3407
Disability Services	775-5680
Student Health Services	775-2552
Community Standards and	775-4240
Student Support Services	775-3749
Women's Center	775-4524
WSU Police Department	775-2111

### ADDITIONAL RELEVANT RESOURCES

- Wright State University Code of Student Conduct: <http://www.wright.edu/students/judicial/conduct.html>
- Wright State University Academic Grievance Process: [http://www.wright.edu/students/handbook/03\\_61.html](http://www.wright.edu/students/handbook/03_61.html)
- Wright State University Faculty Code of Conduct: <http://www.wright.edu/academics/fhandbook/>
- Wright State University Sexual Harassment Policy: <http://www.wright.edu/wrightway/4001.html#0121>
- Wright State University Sexual Assault Policy: <http://www.wright.edu/wrightway/4009.html>
- Wright State University Police Department <http://www.wright.edu/police>

### Specific examples of disruptive behavior include:

- A student who physically confronts another person.
- A student who verbally abuses or threatens another person.
- A student who interrupts the educational process in class by:
  - Making remarks out of turn.
  - Side talking during a lecture.
  - Dominating class discussion.
  - Constantly challenging the professor.
- A student who physically acts out by destroying or damaging Wright State University property.
- A student who shows signs of alcohol or drug abuse and/or comes to class drunk or high.

### INTERVENTIONS FOR DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOR

It is important for faculty and staff members to respond to student behavior that they find **disruptive**. The first step is to request that the student talk with you, preferably in the privacy of your office. If you are fearful for your safety, ask another colleague, department chair, supervisor, or the university police to be present.

Inform the student of the behavior that needs to change, a timeline for when the change must be made, and explain the consequences if the change does not occur. Document your interaction with the student. Follow through with consequences if no change occurs. It can be helpful and/or necessary to provide the student with a written copy of your concerns and the discussed possible consequences if no change in behavior takes place.

### PROCEDURES FOR IMMEDIATE INTERVENTION

Securing a safe environment is always top priority. If you have an immediate safety concern:

- Verbally request that the student stop the behavior immediately.
- Request that the student leave the area.
- Call **University Police at 775-2111** or 911 in case of an emergency.
- Consult with the *Office of Student Judicial Services* about how to proceed with judicial action or to learn what other options may be available to resolve the situation.

### PREVENTING INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIOR IN THE CLASSROOM

Faculty members may find the following procedures helpful for **preventing disturbing or disruptive behavior**:

- Establish clear expectations for behavioral norms and learning goals at the beginning of the course.
- Include rules and procedures for appropriate conduct in the syllabus as well as consequences for unacceptable behavior.
- Review these standards when explaining the syllabus on the first day of class.
- Discuss concerns about inappropriate behavior with students immediately.
- Document all inappropriate behavior from the onset of the incident.
- Strive to decrease anonymity by fostering personal relationships with students.
- Seek feedback from students on how the class is going.
- Encourage active learning through group work and student-centered discussions.

## COMMON STUDENT DIFFICULTIES AND HOW TO ADDRESS THESE ISSUES

### MULTICULTURAL ISSUES

Working with a diverse student population can present unique challenges. Issues related to race, ethnicity, gender, physical, emotional, or socioeconomic status, and sexual orientation may require increased sensitivity, knowledge, and self-exploration. Providing a welcoming and comfortable environment where individuals feel that components of their identity are recognized, valued, and respected is critical.

#### *Some suggestions for facilitating an open environment include:*

- Be aware of resources offered by different campus organizations and assist your students in utilizing them.
- Be respectful of student's world view, i.e. what is important to them, what is considered taboo.
- Understand there may be a conflict between academic and cultural values.
- Attempt to determine what the problem is from the student's viewpoint. Be aware of the differences in the meaning of words across various cultures.
- Be aware that different norms may exist in dealing with male and female students.
- Ask what might make the student more comfortable to talk with you.
- Appreciate physical boundaries that some students need.

### SUBSTANCE ABUSE

The use of alcohol and drugs is a problem that is present at many different universities. The serious problems that students can encounter with substance use may follow them after college, and in some cases, cause a student to withdraw from school. Students with substance abuse issues are often difficult to handle due to their denial of a problem being present. In working with these students it is important to be patient, as well as persistent.

#### *Possible Warning Signs:*

- Falling asleep in class.
- Wearing inappropriate clothing, i.e. long sleeves when hot, sunglasses when cloudy or in class.
- Unexplained mood swings.
- Deterioration of physical appearance over time.
- Change in quality of work.
- Poor physical coordination, i.e. difficulty talking or walking.
- Withdrawal, isolation, depression and/or fatigue.

#### *How to Address Concerns:*

- Communicate your caring and concern for the student.
- Speak honestly and directly about the behaviors you observe.
- Be well informed about alcohol, drugs and their use.
- Avoid being judgmental, "The use of marijuana is wrong."
- Avoid coming across as having all the answers.
- Refer the student to Counseling and Wellness Services for an evaluation.

## REFERRALS, CONSULTATION & WORKSHOPS

### Community Standards and Student Conduct

The Office of Community Standards and Student Conduct is available for consultation and workshops pertaining to disturbing or disruptive student behavior. The staff can assist you proceeding with judicial action if a violation of the Code of Student Conduct has occurred and/or to discuss what other options may be available to resolve the situation.

### COUNSELING AND WELLNESS SERVICES

The Counseling and Wellness Services Staff are available to assist you in addressing student difficulties. Initial appointments are on a walk-in basis from 11am to 3:30 pm, Monday through Friday. Subsequent sessions will be scheduled with your treatment provider following the initial appointment. We are open Monday through Friday from 8:30 am to 5:00 pm. After hours crisis intervention is available during the Fall, Winter, and Spring Quarters; and may be accessed by contacting the WSU Police Department at 775-2111.

The staff at Counseling and Wellness Services are available to consult with you over the phone. Phone consultations often help the faculty/staff member provide the student with the best course of action. We also offer workshops on a wide range of topics. Workshops are generally 30 to 60 minutes in duration and provide another avenue for faculty and staff to impart valuable information to students. To schedule a workshop contact either Dr. Daniela Burnworth (Associate Director) or Dr. Robert Rando (Director) at 775-3407. Helpful information may also be found at: [www.wright-counseling.com](http://www.wright-counseling.com)

## ANGRY & UPSET STUDENT

### *How to Handle Angry/Upset Students:*

- Do not physically touch the student. Respect the student's personal space.
- Find a quiet corner away from others so you may talk privately with the student.
- Keep your voice soft and your speech pattern a bit slower than normal so the upset or angry student will have to listen carefully in order to hear you.
- Seek clarification of the problem. What is it that the student sees as the real problem?
- Apologize if the fault is yours or if the fault is in the system, (e.g. students kept waiting for their appointment) "I am sorry you had to wait to see me but I can give you my full attention now. How can I help you?"
- In any disagreement remember that a satisfactory conclusion has to leave both parties feeling they can accept the conclusion. It is prudent to do the following:
  - Try and see the problem from the student's perspective, as well as your own.
  - Listen carefully, do not work on counter arguments while the student is speaking.
  - Solicit suggestions from the student about a possible solution to the problem.
- In extreme situations where it appears that no reasonable compromise can be attained, be pleasant but firm, "I am sorry that you are not satisfied with any of the options we have discussed. Since this is the case, I suggest you pursue a different course of action which may be able to accommodate your request."

## SETTING APPROPRIATE STUDENT & FACULTY/STAFF BOUNDARIES

Relationships between students and faculty/staff are varied and unique. Working more closely with some students will afford you the opportunity to develop closer relationships to those individuals and further assist in their development as a student and adult. It is also important to remember that a student's expectations of his or her relationship with faculty/staff may differ greatly from your expectations of the relationship. In order to maintain effective relationships with your students, it is helpful to give some thought about how to create the most rewarding relationship for everyone.

### *Some suggestions for maintaining appropriate boundaries include:*

- Communicate respect for students and for yourself.
- Consult with a colleague about sensitive issues or concerns involving your relationships with students.
- Consider how the different cultural backgrounds of each person may affect their expectations in relationships.
- Consider the roles that you wish to take with a student.
- Consider when a referral to another person may be beneficial for you or the student.
- Note what draws you to certain students or what distances you from others.
- Understand and clarify your reasons for making exceptions to your policies for particular students at particular times.
- When or if a sexual attraction to a student occurs, consult a trusted colleague or other professional.

## DEPRESSION/SUICIDE

Depression is the most common problem affecting college students. Because depression can have a serious impact on a student, it is an issue that warrants everyone's attention.

As with most problems, it is helpful to intervene as soon as possible. By being better able to recognize the symptoms of depression and knowing what course of action to take, you may assist depressed students in pursuing changes that will result in a lessening of their depressive symptomology.

### *Some Signs of Depression Include:*

- Flat affect (inexpressive face).
- Slow speech.
- A decrease in their interest in course material.
- Difficulty concentrating.
- Poor class attendance.
- Expressions of hopelessness or worthlessness.
- Agitation or irritability.
- Failure to complete assignments.
- Crying.
- Low energy/lethargy.

An internal indicator of a student's depression may be whether YOU feel depressed or somewhat hopeless when speaking with the student. At times, depression can lead students to experience thoughts of suicide.

### *Some Warning Signs of Suicide Include:*

- Remarks suggestive of wanting to die.
- Feeling hopeless.
- History of recent significant loss.
- Feeling depressed.
- Some direct statements about wanting

to kill oneself.

- Behavior such as giving away favorite possessions.
- Statements like:
  - "I just want to sleep forever."
  - "I don't care if I'm assaulted."
  - "I don't care if my car hits a tree."

### *What To Do:*

- Take the issue seriously.
- Remember that people who are evidencing suicidal behavior are often crying out for help.
- Listen.
- Directly ask the student if he or she is feeling depressed or hopeless.
- Remember that people often reach out directly or indirectly to those people they think will take them seriously.
- Note that friends may be minimizing their feelings by telling them everything is 'all right' or 'everything will get better.'
- Try not to threaten, admonish, or reproach a depressed student for not attending class or for falling behind in course work.
- Attempt to find ways of working out the problem with the student (e.g., alternate projects, incomplete grade).
- Do not leave the student alone.
- Make appropriate referral to Counseling and Wellness Services.

### **CONTACT INFORMATION:**

**Office of Community Standards and Student Conduct - 775-4240**

**University Police - 775-2111**

**Counseling and Wellness Services - 775-3407**

<b>WRIGHT STATE UNIVERSITY RESOURCES FOR CONSULTATION AND REFERRAL</b>  <b>1= Initial Contact    2= Further Contact</b>	Student Health Services	Counseling & Wellness	Community Standards and Student Conduct	Dept. Chair or Program Coordinator	WSU Police	Affirmative Action	Disability Services	Student Support Services	Women's Center
	775-2552	775-3407	775-4240		775-2111	775-3207	775-5680	775-3749	775-4524
<b>University Police Dept. is available 24 hrs/everyday. All other offices operating hours are M-F</b>									
<b>Working with a Student who:</b>									
Possesses an immediate threat to self or others.		2	2	2	1				
Writes or verbalizes a direct threat to another person.		2	2	2	1				
Displays anger or hostility inappropriately.		2	1	2					
Talks about homicide.		1	2	2	1				
Talks about suicide.		1	2	2	1				
Exhibits behavior that seems bizarre or out of touch with reality.		1	1					1	
Is a victim of sexual assault.		1	1		1			1	1
Seems overly emotional, e.g., aggressive, depressed, demanding, suspicious.		1	2						
Continuously disrupts class and refuses to stop.			1	1	1				
Is the subject of complaints by other students regarding class behavior.			1	1					
Shows signs of alcohol or drug abuse/comes to class drunk or high.	2	1	1	2	1				
Appears to have an eating disorder or a distorted body image.		1						2	2
Is a victim of violence, stalking, or intimidation.		1	1		1				2
Is having difficulty due to illness or death in the family.		1						1	
Appears to have a chronic illness or sudden medical problem e.g. seizure, fainting or illness	1	2						2	
May have disability.		2					1		
Appears to have a learning problem; may need diagnostic evaluation.		1		2			1		
Has a serious problem with test/presentation anxiety.		2					1		
Is suspected of cheating.			1	2					
Reports sexual harassment or civil rights discrimination.		1	1			1		2	2