

Responding to Disruption in University Learning Spaces

Recommended Guidance December 8, 2020

1. Purpose

1.1 At Ball State, faculty and staff welcome students into a community with shared values of learning and teaching excellence, academic honesty, social responsibility, equity, and inclusion as outlined in the [Beneficence Pledge](#) and the [Inclusive Excellence Plan](#). This document is designed to provide faculty and other University personnel guidance in responding to disruption in university learning spaces. Disruption by a student in a Ball State learning space is a violation of the [Code of Student Rights and Responsibilities](#), specifically

4.2.8 **Obstruction or Disruption:** Obstructing or disrupting the teaching and/or learning process in any campus classroom, building, or meeting area, or any University-sponsored event or activity, pedestrian or vehicular traffic, classes, lectures, or meetings; obstructing or restricting another person's freedom of movement; or inciting, aiding, or encouraging other persons to do so. Note: obstruction or disruption as prohibited here only occurs on campus or in relation to a University-sponsored event or activity including but not limited to field trips, athletic events, study abroad, or alumni events.

2. Definitions

2.1 Disruption is defined as any "behavior a reasonable person would view as being likely to substantially or repeatedly interfere with the conduct of" ¹ learning spaces.

2.1.1 Disruptions should be distinguished from the more serious incidents that are a danger and the less serious ones that are a distraction (Sterling-Turner, Robinson, and Wilczynski, 2001).² Some behaviors or single incidents of some behaviors are not the focus of this policy. These include but are not limited to coming late to or leaving early from class, tapping fingers, eating, reading unrelated materials, and using electronic devices without authorization. While annoying and distracting, these usually can be addressed effectively through culturally responsive classroom accountability techniques that include addressing behavior expectations in the syllabus and during the first class meeting, in-class intervention, and speaking to a student after class.

¹ This and other parts of this policy are adapted from Pavela, G. (July 18, 2001). Questions and answers on classroom disruption. *ASJA Law & Policy Report*, 26. Association for Student Conduct Administrators (formerly Association for Student Judicial Affairs).

² Sterling-Turner, H. E., Robinson, S. L., & Wilczynski, S. M. (2001). Functional assessment of distracting and disrupting behaviors in the school setting. *School Psychology Review*, 30(2), 211-226, doi:10.1080/02796015.2001.12086110

2.1.2 However, students who exhibit behaviors listed above and who *do not respond to reasonable intervention or fail to comply with reasonable instructions* (see section 3 for intervention guidelines), who exhibit more severe behaviors, or who violate another University policy in an academic setting (e.g., intoxication, weapons policy violation) should be referred for adjudication through procedures outlined in the [Code of Student Rights and Responsibilities](#). Such behaviors include but are not limited to

- a. repeated and unauthorized use of cell phones or other electronic devices
- b. persistent speaking without being called upon or disregarding instructor's requests
- c. seeking to be distracting through noise or movement; or
- d. engaging in behaviors reasonable people consider dangerous, including making physical or verbal threats.

2.2 Learning spaces include but are not limited to classrooms, laboratories, studios, and lecture halls where teaching, learning and management strategies are integral. Learning spaces also include informal learning environments not bound by physical criteria, such as a field trip or a community-building program held outside. Finally, please note that learning spaces can be in person and online.

3. Guidelines for Intervening When Disruption Occurs

3.1 Faculty members, through culturally responsive³ classroom accountability techniques (see Toolkit below), should take steps to de-escalate and resolve the disruption. In most cases, actively using de-escalation methods will conclude the incident without a high risk for repeated disruption in the future. Once multiple de-escalation attempts have been made, faculty members and administrators have the authority to instruct the student to temporarily leave the academic setting when a student **fails to comply** with reasonable standards and faculty instructions. To be clear, asking a student to leave should not be the first attempt at resolution. If a student is asked to leave, the student should be told the reason for this request and instructed to communicate with the instructor or administrator prior to returning to the next class. The instructor should consult promptly with the department chair or designee. The faculty member will then choose one of the next two options for resolution:

³ Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke and Curran (2004) developed a five-part concept of culturally responsive classroom management that was informed by culturally responsive teaching, counseling psychology and care ethics. The elements are: "(1) Recognition of One's Own Cultural Lens and Biases; (2) Knowledge of Students' Cultural Backgrounds; (3) Awareness of the Broader, Social, Economic and Political Context; (4) Ability and Willingness to Use Culturally Appropriate Management Strategies; and (5) Commitment to Building Caring Classroom Communities." Weinstein C., Tomlinson-Clarke S., & Curran M. (2004). Toward a conception of culturally responsive classroom management. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 55(1), 25-38.

- 3.1.1 If the faculty member and/or department chairperson believes that the situation is reconcilable, a conference between the faculty member and the student should be held outside of the classroom. The faculty member and the student may want to consider having a third party observe and help facilitate the conference. The event resulting in removal from the classroom should be discussed. The discussion should include consequences for continued disrupting behavior as well as the strategies that can be employed for ending such behavior. At the conclusion of this meeting, the incident and its resolution should be documented by submitting a report to www.bsu.edu/saysomething (select Student Conduct Referral and nature as Information Only). The faculty member is able to copy other administrators on this report based on department/college policy.
- 3.1.2 If the faculty member/department cannot resolve the situation, an incident report should be filed with the Office of Student Conduct to review the situation for potential violations of the Code. The reporter may be the involved faculty member or academic staff person, the department chair, a witness to the event, or any other knowledgeable third-party, including students. Upon receipt of the incident report, the Office of Student Conduct will proceed as described in section V.6 of the [Code of Student Rights and Responsibilities](#).
- 3.2 If there is an **immediate and serious perceived danger or act of violence**, the faculty member should dismiss the class and go to a safe place to call for help. University Police should be contacted by dialing (765) 285-1111 or 5-1111 (from a campus phone). Once the immediate threat is resolved, the reporter should submit an incident report to the Office of Student Conduct for review.
- 3.3 This guidance does not replace or modify facility usage policies already in place (e.g., University Libraries, Student Recreation and Wellness Center, residence halls). These policies vary to meet the unique needs of students in these environments and disruptions in those environments may be handled by procedures outlined in these policies.

[Link to Toolkit including- General Principles for Responding to Disruption](#)