



Responding to Disruptive or Inappropriate Student Behaviors:

General Tips and Guidelines for University Personnel

**The Office of Student Development
Appalachian State University
Revised Spring, 2006**

Acknowledgements

"Responding to Disruptive or Inappropriate Student Behaviors: General Tips and Guidelines for University Personnel" was created in an attempt to assist university faculty and staff in their efforts to respond to situations or interactions with students that they find troubling. This document was adapted from a similar document entitled "Dealing with Disruptive or Inappropriate Student Behaviors: Policies and Guidelines for Faculty" created by the Office of Faculty Development at the University of Maryland. Several members of the faculty, staff, and administration at Appalachian State University have edited, revised, and amended this document keeping it applicable to our campus and consistent with Appalachian policies. Sections contributed by individual offices are noted in the table of contents. Barbara W. Daye, Dean of Students (Retired), and Amy Justice, Research Associate, were instrumental in the initial development of this publication. Special thanks to Lindsey Mitchell, 2005-2006 Student Office Assistant, who worked tirelessly and cheerfully on the 2006 revision.

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Preface

Classrooms and administrative offices very often are the places where behavior is exhibited that can be the early warning signs of a student experiencing some difficulty - - from mild to extremely disruptive. This booklet, as well as the flowchart listed below, is provided as a resource for faculty and staff members to help distinguish if a student is troubled or disruptive; lists what resources, on and off campus, are available; and encourages action sooner rather than later. Early intervention is safer than waiting for things to become more volatile.

The flow chart listed below is modeled after the one established by Eugene L. Zdziarski II, Dean of Students, at the University of Florida.

GETTING HELP: Consultation/Intervention Decision Tree

The Troubled Student

Student is troubled, confused, very sad, highly anxious, irritable, lacks motivation and/or concentration, demonstrates bizarre behavior or is talking about suicide



Consultation Resources

Questions about emotional and behavioral issues and getting help call:

On-Campus

ASU Counseling Center 828-262-3180

After Hours Counselor 282-262-2150

Off-Campus

ASU Counseling Center 828-262-3180

Local Mental Health (see Appendix III, page 27)

And/or

Administrative/Judicial procedural concerns call:

Dean of Students Office 828-262-2060

Office of Student Judicial

Affairs 828-262-2704

And/or

Academic Status call:

Associate Dean for Specific College or College
Department Chair or Program Coordinator

The Disruptive Student

Student's conduct is disruptive or dangerous, uses verbal or physical threats, is actively threatening suicide and is resisting help



Consultation/Intervention Resources

Rule out possibility of harm to self

Or others

If physical safety of student or others is immediate concern and student is on campus call:

University Police Department 828-262-2150

If student is off-campus, call:

911 or see Appendix II, page 26, for Local
Law Enforcement Agency

Then

Administrative/Judicial procedural concerns call:

Dean of Students Office 828-262-2060

Office of Student Judicial

Affairs 828-262-2704

And/or

Consultation with or referral to campus emergency counseling or health resources, call:

Counseling Center 828-262-3180

Student Wellness Center 828-262-3148

For a student off campus at the time:

See Appendix III, page 27 for local Mental
Health Agency

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This section provides warning signs students may exhibit when they are in trouble, and offers suggestions from the Counseling and Psychological Services Center on how to initiate conversations about referrals to help the student deal with the problems.

Adapted from the brochure "Referring Students to the Counseling & Psychological Services Center: A Guide for Faculty, Staff & Students," Counseling and Psychological Services Center, Appalachian State University

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Contributed by Mr. David Larry, University Attorney, Appalachian State University

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General Strategies

That old adage, “An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure,” applies to most student interactions. Prevent difficult situations from arising by:

- Being clear and consistent in your communication with students.
- Including policies in the course syllabus that clearly set forth expectations for classroom behavior as well as academic standards for the course. Provide full information in course syllabus on how and when students can reach you as well as policies regarding class attendance, tardiness, and makeup exams.
- Providing early and regular feedback about student progress (for example, an indication of how well students are participating in class discussion).
- Outlining what you consider appropriate classroom behavior.
- Including a statement in the syllabus about academic integrity.
- Including a statement in the syllabus telling students how to disclose a disability to you.
- Along with the discussion of your expectations for student work, discuss aspects of classroom interchange. For example, tell students whether they are permitted to interrupt you with questions during your lecture or if you prefer that they wait until a designated question-and-answer period.
- If you have noticed problems with classes in the past (for example, students who repeatedly are late for an early morning class), present the current class with a list of the issues and “negotiate” a consensus on how these issues will be dealt with this time. (An advantage of these negotiated behavioral guidelines is that students will take part in developing their own rules of conduct.)

Taking care of YOU:

Consider the following strategies when dealing with a difficult student:

- Stay calm.
- Safety first – for yourself and the other students in your classroom and/or office.
- Listen rather than talk.
- Don’t feel compelled to resolve the conflict on the spot.
- Move the scene of conflict away from other students.
- Attempt to put yourself in the student’s shoes. Ask yourself what might be behind the student’s behavior.
- Recognize that solving the student’s problem is not all your responsibility.

Taking Care of YOU: (continued)

- Don't take the bait. Do not be drawn into an argument.
- Recognize when to draw the line – don't take abuse. Set limits for the student. Define permissible behavior and consequences.
- If necessary, inform your department chair of the situation.
- Get suggestions/help from colleagues or administrators, if needed.
- Contact the University Counseling and Psychological Services Center (828-262-3180) or the Hubbard Center (828-262-3040) if you need to discuss general strategies.
- Always document conflict-oriented (or even unique) interactions with students.
- **If you feel threatened, contact University Police (828-262-2150) or, if off campus, local law enforcement officers, and request that an officer be present in the area or on standby.**

Taking care of THEM:

- Listen carefully.
- Restate what you think is the student's concern. This will indicate to the student that you are listening and also will allow the student to restate the concern if you have misunderstood the nature of the problem.
- Know when to be sympathetic and when to set boundaries. Be understanding without taking abuse.
- Remember that it is possible for your feelings of stress or irritation to make matters worse. Avoid antagonizing, minimizing, judging, patronizing, arguing, provoking, embarrassing, and demeaning the student.
- If the situation warrants (for example, a spirited classroom discussion that has suddenly gotten a bit out of hand), you might try to de-escalate the conflict through humor, by changing the subject, or by ending the discussion.
- If the disruptive behavior occurs during the class, make an appointment to meet individually with the student after class. However, do this only if you believe it is safe to meet the student alone. If you believe it is risky to meet with the student alone, meet the student with an administrator, a representative of University Police, or a local law enforcement officer.
- For problem situations that appear more complex regarding disruption of the learning environment, you may have to consider initiating disciplinary proceedings. Contact the Office of Student Judicial Affairs (828-262-2704) to initiate this process.

Taking care of THEM: (continued)

- If the difficult student also confides in you about a disability or any other personal issues, be careful to respect this information as confidential. Advise the student that no accommodations may be made until he/she registers through the Office of Disability Services. However, it is your responsibility as a faculty or staff member to report the student's disruptive or inappropriate behavior to your department chair and the Office of Student Judicial Affairs. **All students must adhere to the Code of Student Conduct.** If a student threatens harm to self or others, this information should not be kept confidential. It should be shared with the Counseling Center and/or University Police.

If the student's inappropriate behavior leads you to act/speak unprofessionally, the student has exercised control over you. If this occurs in a classroom setting, the next class could be especially difficult. Find a way to address the issue and move forward.

Managing Conflict Situations

There is another old adage, "It's not what you say, but the way you say it." Here are some tips or reminders that may be helpful when you find yourself in situations in which you may feel uncomfortable. You will note that many of these points are about "body language."

When you are talking:

- Maintain eye contact.
- Reinforce messages nonverbally. This may be as simple as nodding your head to indicate agreement.
- Avoid information overload (if you are nervous, you may tend to talk more and more quickly). Talk slowly.
- Be comfortable with silence.
- Use "I" messages. For example, you might say, "I feel uncomfortable when you..."
- Repeat for clarification. For example, "If I am hearing you correctly, you did not understand..."
- Check for understanding.
- Use simple, clear vocabulary.

When you are listening:

- Maintain eye contact.
- Don't interrupt; wait until the student has finished talking. This can be useful if the student attempts to interrupt while you are talking. ("I did not interrupt while you were talking; please allow me to complete my thoughts as well.")

When you are listening: (continued)

- Check back to clarify; restate to confirm. (“Help me to understand how you see this.” Or “I’m trying to understand what the issue is here.”)
- Avoid jumping to conclusions.
- Show interest nonverbally.
- Don’t interject your own issues; focus on the student’s concerns.
- If necessary, further the discussion by prompts such as “Tell me more,” or “Talk a little more about this issue.”

Some additional suggestions:

- Clarify the problem jointly.
- Brainstorm and explore all possible options. For example, review departmental requirements, technical standards, and performance standards as determined by the course and/or degree program.
- Determine your and the student's willingness to consider reasonable alternatives and jointly select the best options or combination of options.
- Ask for an "action plan" and follow-up.

Do not fall into the trap of making decisions for the student who is undecided and/or unable to make a decision. If something goes wrong, the student does not feel responsible for the choice and may blame you.

Dealing With Specific Problems:

Violent or Physically Destructive Students

Faculty or staff may encounter a crisis situation in which students are violent or physically destructive. This typically occurs when the student is totally frustrated and feels unable to do anything to resolve the situation.

Suggested Strategies:

- Prevent total frustration and helplessness by quickly and calmly acknowledging the intensity of the situation. (“I can see you are really upset.”)
- Explain clearly and directly what behaviors are acceptable. (“You have a right to be angry, but [breaking things, disrupting the class or office] is not OK.”)
- **GET HELP.** You can summon another instructor or staff member. If the situation is severe, ask someone to contact University Police (8000) or local law enforcement (911). University Police have the right to remove the student from a class, an office, or another campus facility when that student becomes disruptive and/or belligerent. If you are at an off-campus location, contact the local law enforcement offices or 911.
- **Request that the student leave your class or office.** You have the right to exclude a student from a class or office for disruptive behavior until the situation is addressed and resolved “in a timely manner.” This is true if you request that the student leave, and/or if the University Police or local law enforcement officers remove the student from the class or office.
- Report any violent behavior to your department chair. Even if you have a student leave your class or office, remember that the student’s behavior must be dealt with and resolved. Contact the Office of Student Judicial Affairs (828-262-2704) to obtain information on how to handle this.
- If you have reason to be concerned for the student’s psychological state, or fear he/she could hurt himself/herself or others, contact the Counseling and Psychological Services Center (828-262-3180) and/or University Police (828-262-2150). If you are at an off-campus location, contact the local mental health agency.
- Always carefully document everything!!

Your safety and the safety of other class members and/or faculty and staff are of paramount importance in this situation.

Things to avoid:

- Ignoring warning signs that the student is about to explode- (i.e., lose control of his/her emotions.)
- Waiting before taking some action.
- Threatening, daring, taunting, touching, or pushing the student into a corner.

Emotionally Troubled Students

Students may be emotionally troubled for a wide variety of reasons and exhibit quite varied behavior. The symptoms of some students suffering from emotional problems may not be recognized in the classroom setting. Sometimes, however, an instructor becomes aware of some major behavioral changes. For example, a student may suddenly appear withdrawn or uncommunicative in class or worry excessively about failure; the quality of the student's performance in the course may change dramatically; or, the student may become irregular in class attendance. These may or may not be signs of emotional problems. If any of the signs are evident and this concerns you, you may ask to see the student individually to discuss his or her progress in the course.

Suggested Strategies:

- Keep the relationship professional. Discuss the student's performance in the context of instruction. (For example, discuss with the student his\her inadequate homework or late papers.) When a student is not addressing emotional difficulties, it is okay to share with the student the **behaviors** you are observing that lead you to **believe** there may be psychological difficulties **and** to invite the student to respond. You should not be a counselor, but you should respond to the expressed issues by referring the person.
- If the student does confide in you about emotional problems, be sensitive to his or her difficulties. Ask if the student is willing to talk to a counselor on campus or, if off campus, to a local mental health professional.
- Be available to listen, talk, and be concerned at the appropriate time. **REFER** the student to offices that have the expertise necessary to advise or counsel the student. (This is an important point to remember because some troubled students may want you to become overly involved in helping them solve their personal problems. You will want to be sympathetic; however, it is more beneficial for such students to seek and receive proper professional help.) It is important that you do not commit yourself to assisting the student in dealing with emotional problems, not only for the student but also for yourself.
- Don't take responsibility for the student's emotional state. It is possible to show compassion for how difficult things are without trying to solve things for the student.
- Tell the student that you think someone else can help better than you can. Talk honestly to the student about why you think a referral is appropriate. Try not to confuse the student with multiple referrals. In a crisis, simplicity is important.
- Be sure the student has accurate information about where and when to go, who to see, and what to expect. You may want to call ahead and alert the counselor that the student is coming and tell the counselor information that he/she may need to know. Remember, you are not bound by confidentiality.

Staff at the Counseling and Psychological Services Center (828-262-3180) will assist you individually in dealing with students who are emotionally troubled, and they will gladly make presentations to your academic department on how to deal with emotionally troubled students. Off-campus faculty may consult with Counseling Center staff at any time.

Students Who Sexually Harass

Sexual harassment is defined as unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, or conduct of a sexual nature when such conduct has the effect of emphasizing sexuality, sexual identity, or sexual orientation in a manner offensive to a reasonable person, or that has the effect of creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive environment inside or outside the classroom. *Unwelcome* refers to an unsolicited action or behavior; *sexual nature* includes any conduct that refers to sex. The harassment can be limited to a single serious incident, or it may involve a series of incidents that are serious enough to interfere with a student's ability to learn, his/her living conditions, or any opportunity Appalachian State University provides.

Any member of the university community may be subjected to sexual harassment. Federal and state laws, the University of North Carolina System, and Appalachian State University policies prohibit the sexual harassment of students by other students, of employees by fellow employees, of students by employees, of students by vendors, as well as harassment directed by students toward employees -- faculty or staff.

- Physical - Leering, ogling, or staring at a person's body; inappropriate touching, grabbing, groping, brushing or bumping a person; unwanted hugging, kissing, or following a person around; gestures or pelvic thrusting; and coerced sexual intercourse.
- Verbal - Sexual innuendoes such as comments about a person's body, appearance, or sexual orientation; direct sexual propositions or pestering someone for dates after no interest is returned; sexually derogatory name calling; insulting and belittling through sexual ridicule; whistling or making suggestive sexual sounds (sucking noises or cat calls); spreading rumors about a person's sexual activity or feelings; and obscene phone calls.
- Visual - Displaying pictures, calendars, cartoons, or other materials with sexual content in public areas of the campus.
- Written - Letters, notes, materials, or emails of a sexual nature; pictures, calendars, cartoons, or other material with sexual content displayed in a public place.

If a student sexually harasses you:

- Inform the student of the specific behavior that you find unwelcome and tell the student you want the behavior to cease immediately. If the behavior does not stop, you may choose to repeat your request and inform the student that you will report the behavior to university officials if it continues. You may also report it at that time.
- Keep written documentation related to the harassment, including the date, time, place, witnesses, and a complete description of the incident(s).
- If you need assistance in handling a situation that has the potential to become harassing and it involves a student, contact Student Judicial Affairs (828-262-2704).
- If you need assistance in handling a situation that has the potential to become harassing and it involves faculty and/or staff, contact the Equity Office (828-262-2144) for more information about types of harassment and how to handle them.

If a student sexually harasses you: (continued)

- Some forms of sexual harassment may constitute criminal misconduct. Contact University Police (828-262-2150) or local law enforcement to obtain information.

If sexually harassing behavior is directed toward you or others in your class:

- Serve as a role model: address the situation immediately but politely, thus making the environment conducive for learning.
- Speak individually to the involved student(s) after class.
 - *Offended Student(s)*: Ask her or him to describe the offensive behavior.
If the behavior seems to be peer harassment, you must report it to Student Judicial Affairs (828-262-2704) or the Dean of Students (828-262-2060)
 - *Offending Student(s)*: Inform her or him of the exact inappropriate behavior, but refrain from using the term "sexual harassment" in the conversation.
- Be prepared to accommodate an offended student reasonably, if you decide it is necessary or if the student requests such accommodations (e.g. separating the students from one another or re-organizing work or projects).
- If you need assistance in dealing with harassment issues, contact the Equity Office (828-262-2144) to discuss possible appropriate solutions.

If a student tells you he/she has been sexually harassed:

- Take the matter seriously; your initial reaction is critical.
- Remain neutral as to who is to "blame."
- Never promise confidentiality; you have legal responsibilities toward your students or persons whom you supervise. Inform the complainant what actions you must take as a university employee. If you are unclear as to what these obligations are, contact the Equity Office.
- Be sympathetic without expressing opinions or making a commitment to a particular outcome.
- Inform the complainant of available on-campus resources: the Equity Office (828-262-2144), Student Judicial Affairs (828-262-2704), the Dean of Students (828-262-2060), the Counseling Center (828-262-3180), and Counseling for Faculty and Staff (828-262-4951).
- You *must* report incidents of sexual harassment that have been made known to you to the appropriate campus officials. When a university employee learns of alleged misconduct, but deliberately remains indifferent to it, the university *and* the employee may be liable.

To avoid potential trouble:

- Create open, non-threatening learning environments.
The following questions may be helpful for you to ask yourself:
 - Does the behavior of the teacher or students contribute to the accomplishment of class goals?
 - Could this behavior hurt fellow employees or students if they were present?
 - Could an outsider interpret this behavior as harmful or harassing?
 - Could this behavior be sending out signals that invite harassing behavior on the part of others?
- Be a role model. Set the tone for what behavior will be tolerated in your classroom and office. Do not permit sexist, stereotyping, or direct sexual comments to go unnoticed. Use the event as a "teachable moment."
- Interact professionally and appropriately with students at all times. Be aware of Policy 23 in the Appalachian State University Resource Manual: "Policy Concerning Improper Relationship Between Students and Employees" and know the professional and personal consequences for faculty and students who engage in a consensual relationship. Furthermore, know that harassment based upon race, color, religion, creed, sex, national origin, age, or disability is a form of discrimination in violation of federal and state law and Appalachian State University policy, and will not be tolerated. It is the internal policy of Appalachian State University to prohibit harassment on the basis of sexual orientation. Retaliation against any person opposing or complaining of harassment is in violation of federal and state law and Appalachian State University policy, and will not be tolerated. For more information on this policy, contact the Equity Office (828-262-2144).

Verbally Aggressive Students

Verbally aggressive students are often frustrated individuals who feel out of control. These students may project their anger onto the instructor, their classmates, and/or other faculty and staff. They are usually aware of the dramatic impact of their anger.

Suggested Strategies: *(Some of these suggestions are adapted from “A Faculty Guide for Dealing with Troubled Students,” prepared by the Counseling Center, University of Maryland.)*

- Deal with such students on a one-to-one basis away from their peers and possibly with a colleague present. This stops some of their need to be verbally aggressive, particularly when there is no audience.
- If an outburst occurs in the classroom, let the student know that you will not discuss the issues during the class. Invite the student to see you after class to set a time to have a conversation to identify issues of concern.
- Help the student identify the reason for the anger. (“It seems that you are upset because you feel your rights are being violated and nobody will listen.”)
- Stay confident.
- Be sure students respect your physical boundaries. If the student is standing too close, tell him or her to please stand back.
- When the student becomes more calm, help him or her to articulate the problem and come up with solutions to the real issue. Sometimes the student will accept suggestions on dealing with anger and finding a counselor to assist him or her in dealing with situations that seem to “trigger” the anger.
- Never confront an intoxicated person. If a student comes to class intoxicated, call University Police (828-262-2150) or local law enforcement immediately.

Always report incidents of verbal abuse to your department chair. Always feel free to ask his/her assistance in dealing with verbally aggressive students. Also consider reporting intentional disruption to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs, University Police, or local law enforcement.

Manipulative or Time-Demanding Students

The effects of manipulative or time-demanding students often take you by surprise. Many times the relationship with these students starts off positively, and quickly they are in your office excessively or are asking you for help that goes beyond what you consider reasonable. In order to help you identify potential trouble situations early, the following are some characteristics of this type of student.

Manipulative or time demanding students:

- May tell you how wonderful you are.
- May act overly helpless, getting others to do what they can do themselves.
- Will induce guilt when you tell them you can't be available when they want you to be available.
- May tell you that no one understands them like you do. They don't want to talk about their problems with anyone but you and perhaps others in their circle of support.
- May have constant excuses, not take responsibility for behavior, and blame others for their condition.
- May have a history of mental health treatment and will tell you of the many mental health professionals that have let them down or treated them poorly.
- May have gone through a succession of roommates, hall mates, Resident Assistant's, coaches, or teachers, frustrating the best efforts of each to help him/her feel better or solve problems, and requiring on-going and expanding amounts of time and energy.
- Tend to view people or situations as good or bad with "all or nothing" thinking.
- Can be like a bottomless well. The utmost time and energy given these students will not be enough.
- Often seek to control your time and unconsciously believe that the amount of time received is a reflection of their worth.
- May find it difficult to be alone.
- Can have broad shifts in moods and emotions.
- Often engage in impulsive behaviors (e.g. spending, sex, substance abuse, binge eating, self-mutilation, etc.).
- Will hint at being suicidal without making a direct threat.
- May create conflict between others, trying to engage others in the argument.
- May have a new "crisis" almost daily or weekly.

Suggested Strategies:

- Don't let these students use you as their only source of support.
- Encourage students to go to the Counseling and Psychological Services Center or local mental health services. You may call 828-262-3180 to find out the best way to obtain services, on or off campus.
- If on campus and it is an emergency, you may walk them to the Counseling Center.
- Consult the section on "Referring the Troubled Student" on pages 20 and 21 of this document, or the Counseling and Psychological Services Webpage at www.counseling.appstate.edu, for strategies on referring students.
- You may call the Counseling Center Staff to consult about disruptive students between 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. For after-hours emergencies when classes are in session, an on-call counselor may be reached by calling the University Police (828-262-2150).
- If you feel threatened or endangered, call the police immediately.

Students with Disabilities That May Affect Behavior

Not all disruptive behavior is voluntary or calculated. Some students exhibiting inappropriate behaviors may be suffering from a number of different kinds of disabilities. Although you may request that students inform you of special needs due to disabilities, in many cases you may not know that the student has a disability or that a disability may be a cause of behavior that you view as disturbing or disruptive.

Psychological disabilities may cause a student problems in waiting patiently, controlling anxiety, remaining quiet in testing situations, or exhibiting appropriate behavior during exams. Medication for the disability may produce side effects that affect behavior.

Students with learning disabilities may be easily distracted, have trouble understanding directions, misinterpret subtleties in language, vocal tone, or social situations, or appear disoriented in time or space (sometimes coming very early or very late to appointments or to class), or have trouble sticking to schedules.

Students who have suffered head injuries may exhibit memory deficit or attention deficit disorders, may have communication problems, or may show irritability, impulsiveness, or lack of social judgment.

Many students who have a disability may not wish this fact to be public. It is best to make an announcement at the first class session, as well as state it in the course syllabus, that you welcome any students in the class with special needs to contact you privately. If a student does inform you of a disability and he/she is registered with the Office of Disability Services, the student should be aware of accommodations that are appropriate and approved for him/her. If a student informs you of a disability and that student is not registered with the Office of Disability Services, it is in the best interest of the student and the faculty member to refer the student to the Office of Disability Services. Always be sensitive to the student's right to privacy and be careful not to "single out" the student in class.

Suggested Strategies:

- Encourage students who voluntarily disclose a disability to you to register with the Office of Disability Services (828-262-3053).
- It is the responsibility of the Office of Disability Services to determine eligibility for accommodations when a student self-discloses.
- If the student desires a referral or requests special tutoring or classroom accommodations, suggest that the student contact Disability Services.
- Remember that, regardless of the accommodations made for any students, care should be taken that course requirements and objectives are suitably met.
- The Office of Disability Services can provide proctored test sites.
- For students out of touch with reality, respond politely but with firm reasoning. Acknowledge their feelings and fears without supporting their misperceptions.
- Remember that **all** students are held to the same Code of Student Conduct and follow the same referral process as those used by their non-disabled peers.

Things to avoid:

If a student exhibits irrational behavior:

- Don't try to convince him/her of the irrationality of his/her thinking. This makes the student defend his/her position more.
- Don't play along with his/her fantasy.
- Don't expect customary emotional responses.
- Don't demand, command, or order.
- Don't hesitate to call for assistance, including University Police or local law enforcement agencies.

The Learning Assistance Program (828-262-2291) houses the Office of Disability Services (828-262-3053). This office is located in room 222 D. D. Dougherty Hall. Information about study skills classes is also available here. Two publications, *Resource Guide for Students with Disabilities at Appalachian State University* and *A Descriptive Analysis of the Accessibility of the Buildings and Grounds of Appalachian State University for People With Mobile, Hearing, and Visual Impairment*, are also available through this office or the Office of Compliance Programs which is located in Room 128, B. B. Dougherty Administration Building. Full text copies of the above publications are available at www.ods.appstate.edu and www.compliance.appstate.edu, respectively.

The “Bad” Class

Even experienced teachers sometimes have an entire class that is difficult to teach. Students may be inattentive, unwilling to participate, or disruptive in a variety of ways. Sometimes the problem is due to a misunderstanding, i.e. you assumed a background knowledge that the students do not have. For lack of a better term, sometimes teachers will talk about having a “bad class.”

Suggested Strategies:

- Be frank with the students and discuss the situation with them. Let them know that you have noticed that the class isn’t working well together and this troubles you. Often students will come forth with their own sense of what is going wrong. Ask for their suggestions in a variety of ways. Some may speak openly in class; others may want to speak with you privately; others may prefer to write their observations in class or in an e-mail.
- Once you have discovered what is problematic, be willing to change procedures, routines, and directions. Make changes in concert with the whole class, if possible.
- Some classes don't respond to strategies that may have worked in the past. When you find that you need to make changes in the way you are teaching or relating to the class, clearly explain the changes and any new expectations, and stick to them.
- Use a variety of teaching strategies. Vary the pace of the class.
- Observe nonverbal behavior carefully. Be sensitive to cues that students may be having difficulty and “shift gears,” if necessary.
- Ask for help from your chair, from colleagues, or from the Hubbard Center.
- The Hubbard Center is a helpful resource for researching teaching strategies.

Ask for feedback, suggestions, and ideas from students only if you really want them.

Students Who Interrupt or Dominate the Discussion

Some students may try to gain attention by interrupting, challenging the teacher’s statements, or dominating class discussion. If the student’s behavior compromises learning for others in the class, the teacher should intervene.

Suggested Strategies:

- Encourage other students to participate by asking, “Who has another view about this?” or “What do those of you on the right (left) side of the room think?”
- When asking questions, increase the “wait time” before calling on a student. This allows more students time to formulate an answer.

Suggested Strategies: (continued)

- You may call on specific students who have not yet participated in the discussion. Remember, however, that some students may find being "called on" intimidating and would prefer to speak only if they have first raised their hands.
- Consider assigning, on a rotating basis, a group of appropriate students who will be responsible for leading the discussion. This gives every student a chance to participate and takes some of the power away from the "dominator."
- If the dominating student persists in his or her behavior, see the student after class and tell him or her that you appreciate his or her involvement, but would also like to hear from others in the class too. Engage the student as an ally in helping you think of ways to increase the participation of others in the class.

Students Who Chat Excessively During Class

Every teacher has probably encountered a class situation in which a few students engage in conversation and annoy others around them who are trying to listen to the presentation. When, as sometimes happens, the classroom itself poses acoustical problems (for example, a long, narrow classroom), such student chatting becomes truly disruptive.

Suggested Strategies: (adapted from Faculty Focus, Spring 1992)

- Do NOT ignore excessive chatter. If you start writing or lecturing expecting the chatter to subside, it may or may not do so. You are allowing students to dictate the terms of classroom behavior.
- Do NOT compete with the noise in the classroom by talking louder. If students see that you are prepared to shout above their noise, they will let you go on doing it.
- Politely ask the students to hold their conversation until the break or after class.
- If the problem persists, speak to the students privately before or after class.
- Make direct eye contact with the students as they are talking so that they know you see them.
- Physically move to that part of the room. Look directly at the students who are talking.
- Rotate seating if the problem is recurrent.
- Do not rely on the class majority to quiet down the few disrupters. While this may work in some classes, particularly upper-division ones, it may not be effective in a large, lower division class.
- If you are presenting, try to vary the pace to hold students' attention. In future classes, plan to incorporate some structured small group work into the class session. (The Hubbard Center has some useful tips for situations such as this.)

Referring the Troubled Student

Warning signs that a student is having problems:

- Depression
- Drastic change in behavior
- Smell of alcohol or bloodshot eyes
- Evidence of a problem, written or verbal

Referring Students to the Counseling Center (or if off campus to the local mental health agency):

- Approach the student in a gentle, caring, and non-judgmental way.
- State specifically why you are concerned. Describe the behaviors observed and suggest a visit to the Counseling Center or local mental health service providers.
- Explain that normal people get counseling.
- Suggest the Counseling Center or local mental health service provider, if off campus, as a possible resource (rather than telling the student he/she should go because they "need help").
- Present the Counseling Center as a FREE resource used by over a thousand students each year, and state that using the services can be like "taking a class to learn about yourself." (Mental health agencies are not free but do use a sliding scale fee.)
- Remind students that they don't have to have a "deep dark" problem, nor do their problems need to reach crisis proportions for them to benefit from professional help. Reluctant students might also be relieved to know that they can just "walk-in" and speak to a counselor on a one-time basis without making a commitment to ongoing therapy. The Walk-In Clinic on-campus hours are Monday-Thursday 1:00 p.m. - 4:30 p.m. and Friday 1:00 p.m. - 3:30 p.m.
- To provide extra support if off campus, offer to have the student call the local mental health agency from your office and/or accompany the student to his/her first session.
- Inform the student that the Counseling Center staff or local mental health professional tries to help students help themselves.
- Remind the student that he/she doesn't always have to know what's wrong before asking for help. If the student expresses concern that his/her problem is too big or too small to go to the Counseling Center or local mental health agency, you could say "If your problem is not appropriate for the Counseling Center or local mental health professional, they can make sure that you are directed to the right place."

Referring Students to the Counseling Center: (continued)

The Counseling and Psychological Services Center is available for consultation regarding any questions or concerns dealing with troubled students. In case of an after-hours emergency, a crisis staff member can be reached during the academic year, when classes are in session, by calling ASU Police (828-262-2150), 24 hours a day. For more information, call 262-3180.

Students in classes off campus should be referred to the local mental health services. Appalachian State University Counseling Center personnel are available for consultation and referral in dealing with these situations.

Handling Disruptive Students: A Teacher's Rights and Options under Applicable Law and Policies

- *1. Disrupting a class is unlawful (a Class 2 misdemeanor) in North Carolina. *See* N.C.G.S. § 14-288.4(a)(6) ("Disorderly conduct is a public disturbance intentionally caused by any person who," among other things, "[d]isrupts, disturbs or interferes with the teaching of students at any public or private educational institution or engages in conduct which disturbs the peace, order or discipline at any public or private educational institution or on the grounds adjacent thereto").
- *2. Disrupting a class is a violation of the *Code of Student Conduct*. Section 4.02 of the Appalachian State University *Code of Student Conduct* prohibits, among other things, "[i]ntentional disruption of, obstruction of, or interference with teaching," and "the intentional creation of a public disturbance on University property . . . including, but not limited to . . . engaging in disruptive behavior; [and] . . . disrupting, disturbing, or interfering with the academic atmosphere of a . . . learning environment." *Code of Student Conduct*, § 4.02d and § 4.02r.
3. You might include in your syllabus's course policies a section on "Comportment," or announce at the first incident of disruption, that disruptive students:
 - a. Will not be tolerated and will be asked to leave class if they won't cooperate; and
 - b. Will be counted as absent for entire class if asked to leave class.
4. If a student will not desist from disruptive conduct and will not leave the classroom, you may call the campus police (or ask a student to go to the department office and ask that campus police be summoned to your classroom).
5. In extreme cases, consider working with your department chair, the Dean of Students, and the Office of the University Attorney, to prepare a letter putting the student on notice that his or her conduct will not be tolerated. Such letters have included the following language:

Section 4.02 of the Appalachian State University *Code of Student Conduct* prohibits, among other things, "[i]ntentional disruption of, obstruction of, or interference with teaching," and "the intentional creation of a public disturbance on University property . . . including, but not limited to . . . engaging in disruptive behavior; [and] . . . disrupting, disturbing, or interfering with the academic atmosphere of a . . . learning environment." *Code of Student Conduct*, § 4.02d and § 4.02r. Likewise, N.C.G.S. § 14-288.4 defines "disorderly conduct" to include "a public disturbance intentionally caused by any person who . . . [d]isrupts, disturbs or interferes with the teaching of students at any public or private educational institution. . . ." N.C.G.S. § 14-288.4(a)(6).

Handling Disruptive Students: A Teacher's Rights and Options under Applicable Law and Policies: (continued)

Further, “[f]ailure to comply with the . . . order of a duly designated . . . agent of the University” constitutes a violation of the *Code of Student Conduct*. See *Code*, § 4.02m.

Behavior by you that disrupts, obstructs, or interferes with teaching or with the academic atmosphere of learning environments at ASU must cease. Effective immediately, you must comply with the following directions (which I have reviewed with Dean of Students Susie Greene):

In class, you will speak only when called on or requested to speak by the professor, and if the professor requests that you cease speaking, you will do so without further comment or resistance.

When you are in conversation with any person (faculty, staff, or student) on campus, if that person requests that you cease speaking, you will do so without further comment or resistance.

If any person (faculty, staff, or student) with whom you wish to interact requests that you do so only in writing or through an intermediary, you will comply with that request, unless and until that person subsequently advises you otherwise.

If any member of the ASU faculty, staff, or administration requests that you leave the relevant area (classroom, office, work space), you will immediately comply with that request, without further comment or resistance, unless and until that person subsequently advises you otherwise.

In a Memorandum, a copy of which is enclosed, I am advising relevant department chairs and relevant heads of administrative units on campus that you are to follow these directions. As stated above, “[f]ailure to comply with the . . . order of a duly designated . . . agent of the University” constitutes a violation of the *Code of Student Conduct*. See *Code*, § 4.02m.

6. A good resource re: dealing with disruptive students: “Responding to Disruptive Students: A case study,” by Gary Pavela: <http://www.collegepubs.com/ref/SFX000911.shtml>

* The Code of Student Conduct is revised yearly. Check online for any changes at: www.judicialaffairs.appstate.edu.

Appendix I

Quick Reference Guide

Admissions 1 st Floor – John E. Thomas Building.....	828-262-2120
http://www.admissions.appstate.edu	
Counseling for Faculty and Staff Hubbard Center 1 st Floor – Old Belk Library.....	828-262-4951
http://www.hubbard.appstate.edu	
Counseling & Psychological Center.....	828-262-3180
1 st Floor – Miles Annas Student Services Building http://www.counseling.appstate.edu	
Dean of Students.....	828-262-2060
Room 109 – B.B. Dougherty Administration Building http://www.studentdev.appstate.edu	
Disability Services, Office of.....	828-262-3053
Room 222 – D. D. Dougherty Building http://www.ods.appstate.edu	
Equity Office.....	828-262-2144
Room 123 – I.G. Greer Hall http://www.equity.appstate.edu	
Extension and Distance Education.....	828-262-3113
2 nd Floor – University Hall http://www.ext-dl.appstate.edu	
Graduate School, The Cratis D. Williams.....	828-262-2130
2 nd Floor – John E. Thomas Building http://www.graduate.appstate.edu	
Housing and Residence Life.....	828-262-2160
3 rd Floor – John E. Thomas Building http://www.reslife.appstate.edu	
Hubbard Center for Faculty and Staff Support.....	828-262-3040
1 st Floor – Old Belk Library http://www.hubbard.appstate.edu	

Quick Reference Guide (continued)

Learning Assistance Program.....	828-262-2291
D. D. Dougherty Building http://www.gs.appstate.edu	
Student Judicial Affairs.....	828-262-2704
2 nd Floor – Plemmons Student Union www.judicialaffairs.appstate.edu	
University Attorney.....	828-262-2751
3 rd Floor- B.B. Dougherty Administration Building	
University Police.....	828-262-2150
Parking Deck – Rivers Street http://www.police.appstate.edu	
Student Wellness Center	828-262-3148
(Includes Alcohol and other Drug Service, Stress Management, Smoking Cessation and Dietician Services) 2 nd Floor – Miles Annas Student Services Building http://www.counseling.appstate.edu	

Appendix II

Off- Campus Sites Law Enforcement Information

Cleveland Community College - Shelby Police Department - 704-484-6845

Forsyth Technical College - Forsyth Technical College Public Safety - 336-734-7243

Hickory Metropolitan Higher Education Center - Hickory Police Department -
828-328-5551

Catawba Valley CC (Taylorsville) - Alexander County Sheriffs Office - 828-632-4658

Caldwell Community College - Hudson Police Department - 828-728-5021

Catawba Valley CC (Hickory) - Hickory Police Department - 828-328-5551

Isothermal Community College - Rutherford County Sheriffs Office - 828-287-6247

Mayland Community College - Mitchell County Sheriffs Office - 704-688-2171

McDowell Technical College - Marion Police Department - 828-652-3231

Surry Community College - Dobson Police Department - 336-386-8161

Surry Community College (Yadkin Center) - Yadkin County Sheriffs Office -
336-679-4217

Western Piedmont Community College - Morganton Department of Public Safety -
828-437-1211

Wilkes Community College - Wilkesboro Police Department - 336-667-7277

Winston-Salem Graduate Center - Winston-Salem State Police Department -
336-750-2900

Appendix III

Off- Campus Sites Mental Health Service Providers

Cleveland Community College - Pathways Mental Health/Developmental Disabilities/Substance Abuse - 704-867-2361

Forsyth Technical College - CenterPoint Human Services - 336-714-9100

Hickory Metropolitan Higher Education Center - Mental Health Services of Catawaba County - 828-327-2595

Catawba Valley Community College (Taylorsville) - Foothills Area Mental Health/Developmental Disabilities/Substance Abuse Program - 828-438-6230

Caldwell Community College - Foothills Area Health/Developmental Disabilities/Substance Abuse Program - 828-438-6230

Catawba Valley Community College (Hickory) - Mental Health Services of Catawaba County - 828-327-2595

Isothermal Community College - Western Highlands Mental Health/Developmental Disabilities/Substance Abuse Services - 828-225-2800

Mayland Community College - Western Highlands Mental Health/Disabilities/Substance Abuse Services - 828-225-2800

McDowell Technical College - Foothills Area Mental Health/Disabilities/Substance Abuse Services - 828-438-6230

Surry Community College - Crossroads Behavioral Healthcare - 336-835-1000

Surry Community College (Yadkin Center) - Crossroads Behavioral Healthcare - 336-835-1000

Western Piedmont Community College - Foothills Area Mental Health/Disabilities/Substance Abuse Services - 828-438-6230

Wilkes Community College - New River Behavioral Healthcare - 828-264-4357

Winston-Salem Graduate Center - CenterPoint Human Services - 336-714-9100