

The University of New Mexico

**MANAGING
DIFFICULT STUDENT
BEHAVIOR**

**GUIDELINES
FOR FACULTY AND STAFF**

Dean of Students Office
277-3361
Counseling and Therapy Services (CATS)
Student Health Center
277-4537

University faculty and staff are sometimes faced with student behavior that is troublesome to them in their role of maintaining an effective learning environment. Various student services exist to support faculty and staff with these situations. The campus resources listed in this publication are available for consultation or student referral.

It may be helpful to talk over your concerns if you're not sure about the action you want to take. Counseling and Therapy Services (CATS), the Dean of Students Office, and supervisors or Department Chairs are available to assist you. Frequently just talking with another professional will clarify issues and help you in your problem solving.

Examples of student behavior that you may find **disturbing, disruptive, or both**, are included in the middle section of this brochure. On the grid you will find the University resources available to assist you should you want a consultation for yourself, or a referral option for a student.

It is useful to distinguish between student behavior that is **disturbing rather than disruptive**.

IDENTIFYING DISTURBING BEHAVIOR

Disturbing behavior usually causes us to feel concerned, alarmed, afraid or frustrated.

Disturbing behavior of a student might mean that there is no negative impact of the behavior on other students, the professor's ability to teach or conduct class, or the implementation of other professionals' roles in the University. However, it may indicate that a particular student is having difficulties that affects his/her academic performance.

Examples of **disturbing behavior** may include such things as:

- A student who jokes in class about killing himself.
- A student who perspires profusely when giving a talk in front of a class.
- A student who discloses that his/her mother was diagnosed with terminal cancer.
- A student who seems to work harder than most students but can't pass an exam.
- A student who appears to be losing significant weight yet speaks with pride about how little she eats.
- A student whose writing appears disjointed and fragmented, as though he cannot maintain a logical sequence in his thought processes.
- A student who reports that FBI agents are following her around campus.

INTERVENTIONS FOR DISTURBING BEHAVIOR

Clearly, faculty and staff have options for responding to student behavior they find **disturbing**. They can do nothing. They can initiate a private conversation with the student about the behavior that concerns them. They can consult with other professionals on campus. They can refer the student to other professionals on campus. Faculty and staff can learn techniques for defusing hostile or emotional situations by consulting Counseling and Therapy Services (CATS) or the Dean of Students Office.

IDENTIFYING DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOR

Disruptive behavior, on the other hand, is student behavior that interferes with the educational process of other students. It may or may not be responsive to faculty or staff intervention. It is behavior that may prevent faculty members and staff from carrying out professional responsibilities. Specific examples of **disruptive behavior** include:

- A student who physically confronts another person.
- A student who verbally abuses another person.
- A student who interrupts the educational process in class by:
 - making remarks out of turn.
 - taking over the lecture.
 - dominating class discussion.
- A student who physically acts out toward University property by:
 - breaking windows.
 - throwing furniture.
 - smashing doors.

INTERVENTIONS FOR DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOR

The University professional may find the following procedures helpful when dealing with **disruptive behavior**:

Securing a safe environment is always the top priority. If you have any questions about immediate safety, call Police at **911** from any phone.

Talk with the student, preferably in the privacy of the faculty or staff member's office. If you are fearful of violence erupting, ask another colleague, Department Chair, or supervisor to be present. Inform the student of the behavior that needs to change, a timeline for when the change needs to be made, and delineate the consequences if the change does not occur. Follow through with the consequences if the change does not occur. After the meeting, commit the content of the meeting to paper. It is sometimes helpful and/or necessary to provide the student with a written copy of your requirements and the consequences.

Some procedures for intervention in the classroom or offices of the University are:

- Verbal request to stop the behavior.
- Verbal request to leave.
- Call Police at 911 from any campus phone.
- Consult the Department Chair about dropping the student from your class.
- Consult the Dean of Students Office about possible violations of the Student Code of Conduct.

THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW MEXICO RESOURCES FOR CONSULTATION & REFERRAL

Initial Contact = 1

Further Contact = 2

	Student Health Center 7-3136	Counseling & Therapy Services (CATS) 7-4537	Dean of Students Office 7-3361	Depart. Chair	Police 911	Office of Equal Opportunity (OEO) 7-5251	Accessibility Services 7-3506	Center for Academic Program Support 7-4560
WORKING WITH A STUDENT WHO:								
Poses an immediate danger to self or others		2	2	2	1			
Talks about suicide or homicide		1	2	2				
May have a disability							1	
Exhibits behavior that seems bizarre or out of touch with reality		1	2	2				
Shows signs of alcohol or drug abuse	2	1	2					
Seems overly emotional, e.g., aggressive, depressed, anxious, dependent, demanding, suspicious		1	2					
Is having difficulty because of illness or death in the family		1	1					
Is suspected of cheating			1	2				
Is the subject of complaints by other students regarding class behavior			1	2				
Reports sexual harassment, civil rights discrimination			2			1		
Appears to have a learning problem; may need diagnostic evaluation				2			1	
Appears to have a medical problem, e.g., seizure, fainting, fatigue, sleep, illness	1		2					
Has a serious problem with test/presentation anxiety		1					1	
Needs help with test taking, learning strategies, time management, tutoring								1
Appears to have an eating disorder or distorted body image	1	1						
Continuously disrupts class and refuses to stop			1		2			
Has a chronic illness, e.g., asthma, diabetes	1	2						
Is a victim of violence, stalking, intimidation	2	2	2		1			
Displays anger or hostility inappropriately		1	1					



“...The purpose of the University is Education...First Amendment rights...are available to teachers and students...Broad avenues of communication are essential to the orderly functioning of the University...The Faculty individually and collectively must accept a full measure of responsibility for the orderly functioning of the University...”

**Excerpt from UNM Faculty Handbook,
pp. A-3 to A-4 (Edition of 10/1/90)**



“Any member of the University community—student or member of the faculty or staff—is subject to discipline if he or she acts in such a way as to affect adversely the University’s educational function or to disrupt community living on campus. All authorized University activities are deemed to be part of its educational function. No member of the community has a right to interfere with another in the pursuit of an education or in the conduct of University duties and responsibilities...”

Excerpt from “Rights and Responsibilities at The University of New Mexico,” UNM Faculty Handbook, pp. A-4 to A-6 (Edition of 10/1/90)



“...Classroom Conduct. The classroom instructor is responsible for all classroom conduct, behavior and discipline. University policy permits only enrolled students, persons authorized by the instructor, and administrative personnel to be admitted to instructional areas during scheduled periods. University policy and New Mexico state law also prohibit all forms of disruptive or obstructive behavior in academic areas or any actions which would disrupt scheduled academic activity...Any person or persons in unauthorized attendance or causing a disturbance during scheduled academic activity shall be identified by the instructor and asked to leave. Persons refusing such a request may be removed by the University Police and are liable to legal prosecution...”

**Excerpt from “Academic Rights and Responsibilities of Students,”
UNM Faculty Handbook, pp. F-2 to F-4 (Edition of 10/1/90)**

ADDITIONAL RELEVANT RESOURCES

(Full text available in the [UNM Pathfinder](#) or the Student Activities Center’s web site @ www.unm.edu/~sac)

- UNM “Student Code of Conduct”
- UNM “Visitor Code of Conduct”
- UNM “Student Grievance Procedure”
- UNM “Sexual Assault” Policy
- UNM “Sexual Harassment” Policy
- UNM “Student Employee Grievance Procedure”
- UNM “Student Records” Policy
- UNM “Policy on Illegal Drugs and Alcohol”

This brochure is prepared by the
Dean of Students Office
(www.unm.edu/~doso)

and

Counseling and Therapy Services (CATS)
Student Health Center
(www.unm.edu/~shc1)

at the University of New Mexico.
It is available from those offices.



The University of New Mexico

The University of New Mexico is an Affirmative Action/Equal Opportunity institution. In accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, this material is available in alternative formats upon request.

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