

THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW MEXICO

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MANAGING  
DIFFICULT  
STUDENT BEHAVIOR  
HANDBOOK

guidelines for faculty and staff

# DISTURBING BEHAVIOR

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. **Student Health and Counseling**, 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 this handbook. You will find the University resources available to assist you on the included chart, 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

- 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 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 SHAC Counseling Services 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

### EXAMPLES

- 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, or dominating class discussion.
- A student who physically acts out toward University property by breaking windows, throwing furniture or smashing doors.

## INTERVENTIONS FOR DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOR

*Securing a safe environment is always 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. After meeting with the student, inform the student in writing 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. 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.**

# RESOURCES FOR CONSULTATION AND REFERRAL

Student Health  
and  
Counseling  
277-3136

STUDENT  
ISSUE

Poses an immediate danger to self or others

2

Talks about suicide or homicide

1

May have a disability

Exhibits behavior that seems bizarre or out of touch with reality

1

Shows sign of alcohol or drug abuse

1

Seems overly emotional (e.g. aggressive, depressed, anxious, dependent, demanding, suspicious)

1

Is having difficulty because of illness or death in the family

1

Is suspected of cheating

Is the subject of complaints by other students regarding class behavior

Reports sexual harassment, civil rights or discrimination

Appears to have a learning problem, may need diagnostic evaluation

Appears to have a medical problem (e.g. seizure, fainting, fatigue, sleep, illness)

1

Has a serious problem with test/ presentation anxiety

1

Needs help with test taking, learning strategies, time management, tutoring

Appears to have an eating disorder or distorted body image

1

Continuously disrupts class and refuses to stop

Has a chronic illness (e.g. asthma, diabetes)

1

Is a victim of violence, stalking, intimidation

2

Displays anger or hostility inappropriately

1

**INITIAL CONTACT = 1 FURTHER CONTACT = 2**

Dean of Students Office 277-3361	Department Chair	Police 911	Office of Equal Opportunity 277-5251	Accessibility Resource Center 277-3506	Center for Academic Program Support 277-4560
2	2	1			
2	2	2			
				1	
2	2				
2					
2					
1					
1	2				
1	1				
2			1		
	2			1	
2					
				1	
					1
1	1	2			
2		1			
1					

# UNM POLICY AND RIGHTS

“...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 RESOURCES

Full text is available in the UNM Pathfinder: Student Handbook at <http://pathfinder.unm.edu/> or the UNM Faculty Handbook at <http://www.unm.edu/~handbook/>

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



THE UNIVERSITY *of*  
NEW MEXICO

The background features a large, light gray watermark of the University of New Mexico logo, which includes a stylized sun rising over a mountain range. The letters 'UNM' are prominently displayed in a large, white, serif font across the center of the page.

**This Handbook is brought to you by**

**Dean of Students Office**

<http://dos.unm.edu>

**Student Health and Counseling**

<http://shac.unm.edu>

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