GUIDANCE ON MAINTAINING EFFECTIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

BOISE STATE UNIVERSITY

In order to maintain an effective in-person or online learning environment, it is essential that instructors foster and support an environment in which they may teach and students may pursue learning outcomes without interference. View policy 3240 at **boi.st/policy-3240**). However, faculty must be ready to respond to classroom disruptions. This resource provides strategies for instructors to use when confronted with classroom disruptions and distressing or threatening behavior.

STEP ONE: PREPARE FOR A WELCOMING AND ENGAGING CLASSROOM

As the instructor, you play a crucial role in creating a safe, welcoming, and engaging classroom environment. This is the first step in handling classroom disruptions and ensuring effective teaching and learning. Here are some tips for establishing a productive learning space:

Build Relationships and Foster Inclusion

- Share about yourself and your passion for your area of study. Learn how at **bit.ly/10-ways-to-engage-students**.
- Use positive and affirming language in the syllabus and the classroom. Check out **boi.st/syllabus-for-success**.
- Learn and use preferred student names. Review **boi.st/relationship-rich-classrooms**.
- Ask about students' prior knowledge and any concerns they may have. Address those concerns individually or as a whole group. View **boi.st/strategic-first-day-for-students**.
- Maintain high, clear, consistent expectations for students, providing support as needed. Visit **bit.ly/setting-class-expectations**.

Create Engaging and Student-Centered Instruction

- Create interactive lessons with an engaging pace.
- Use surveys or icebreakers to learn about student interests. Review **bit.ly/great-student-starts**.
- Use quick formative assessments to gauge understanding of the content. Learn more at **bit.ly/formative-assessment-tools**.
- Work in the room by interacting with students and reduce anonymity.

Request Feedback and Reflection

- Invite student feedback by collecting mid-semester feedback. Complete the form at **boi.st/MAP-process**.
- Review your course content for potentially challenging or divisive topics. Anticipate and address any concerns students may have with a proactive plan.
- Address classroom conduct proactively by explaining university policies and classroom norms and consequences for unwelcome behavior.
- Co-create classroom norms with students.

STEP TWO: DETERMINE THE TYPE OF STUDENT DISRUPTIONS

Disruptions in the classroom can come in many forms. Boise State University has organized student behavior into three categories. Below are example indicators by level.

Disruptive behavior	Distressing behavior	Threatening behavior
• Persistent tardiness or early departures • Cell phones use • Incessant talking or interruptions during lectures or when others are speaking • Becoming belligerent when confronted about their inappropriate behavior • Sharing inappropriate photos, off-topic comments, or other content in online forums • Using offensive screen names or emails for communication • Arrogant, entitled, rude, or disrespectful comments, emails, or messages to other students or the instructor	• Repeated absences • Written or artistic expression of suicide, morbidity, or despair • Overblown response to grades or evaluations • Recent family issues or loss • More withdrawn or animated than usual • Excessively demanding or dependent • Lack of response to outreach • Deterioration in appearance or personal hygiene • Excessive fatigue or exhaustion • Visible weight changes • Noticeable cuts, bruises, burns • Frequent or chronic illness • Disorganized, rapid, or slurred speech	• Direct or implied threats of violence • Throwing objects • Challenges to fight • Shoving • Physical attacks • Threatening phone calls, emails, or other correspondence • Stalking • Brandishing a weapon or threatening to get a weapon • Inserting themes of violence in class discussions, assignments, essays

STEP THREE: RESPONDING TO DISRUPTIVE CLASSROOM BEHAVIOR

Instructors should address disruptive behavior no matter how minor it may seem. Failing to address disruptions can impact other students and may invite additional unwanted behavior. Use the following questions to guide your decision about when, where, and how to address the disruptive behavior:

- Am I able to continue teaching effectively?
- Are students able to focus on learning?
- Is the classroom safe?

If the answers to these questions are yes, continue to teach and address the behavior later, ideally privately with the student after class. If any answers are no, you may need to address the disruption during class (again, ideally privately). Further suggestions can be found in the Disruptive Behavior Action Plan at **boi.st/disruptive-behavior-action-plan**.

Addressing the Behavior During Class	Addressing the Behavior After Class
• Maintain a professional and calm demeanor when responding to the student. • Briefly remind the student of the classroom norms and ask them to end the disruptive behavior. • If the behavior persists, let the student know they must stop the behavior or leave the class.	• Ask the student to stay after class. • Respectfully ask the student to end the behavior. • Use active listening and encourage the student to explain their perspective. • Work with the student to identify alternative solutions to address the issues they are facing.

In addition to those recommendations:

- At any time, if the behavior escalates to a threatening situation, you may choose to dismiss students from class or end the conversation and contact the Department of Public Safety at **boisestate.edu/publicsafety**.
- Be mindful of students who have a disability or may have a suspected disability. If you have questions about supporting students with disabilities, contact the Educational Access Center (EAC) at eacinfo@boisestate.edu or (208) 426-1853. Learn more at **boisestate.edu/eac**.
- Students who are exhibiting challenging behavior in the classroom may be experiencing distress. It is helpful to ensure that students have access to campus resources. Visit **boisestate.edu/deanofstudents/help-and-support**.
- All direct, indirect, and implied threats should be reported immediately to the Department of Public Safety.

STEP FOUR: WHAT TO DO AFTER DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOR OCCURS IN YOUR CLASSROOM

If a disruption occurs in your course, please document and report the incident to your department chair. They can provide additional guidance or refer you to the appropriate unit on campus. You can also address the situation with the students who witnessed the incident if appropriate. Depending on the situation, students may need emotional support and access to campus resources to help cope with their emotions. Boise State provides email examples that may be helpful when reaching out to students to address behavioral concerns observed in the classroom at **boi.st/email-communication-examples**.

Responding to disruptive behavior can be challenging and stressful for you as well. Be sure to give yourself the time and space to process the experience and take advantage of campus resources designed to support faculty and staff at **boi.st/faculty-staff-support**.

Boise State Campus Faculty and Student Resources

- Advising and Academic Support: **boisestate.edu/aasc**
- Center for Teaching and Learning: **boisestate.edu/ctl**
- Counseling Services: **boisestate.edu/healthservices/counseling**
- National Behavioral Health Crisis Line: **Text or Call 988**
- Dean of Students: **boisestate.edu/deanofstudents**
    - Student Code of Conduct (Policy 2020: **boisestate.edu/policy/student-affairs/code-of-conduct**
    - Report Concerns: **boisestate.edu/report-concerns**
- Department of Public Safety: (208) 426-6911, **boisestate.edu/publicsafety**
    - Download Rave Guardian App: **boisestate.edu/publicsafety-security/home/rave-guardian**
- eCampus Center: **boisestate.edu/ecampus-center**
- Educational Access Center: **boisestate.edu/eac**
- Campus Food Pantry: **boisestate.edu/campusfoodpantry**

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The Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) and Dean of Students (DOS) can offer in-person and hybrid workshops on this topic. Please contact CTL at ctl@boisestate.edu to set up a workshop for your department.

Scan the code for more resources or visit
boisestate.edu/deanofstudents/faculty-resources

OFFICE OF THE DEAN OF STUDENTS
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