

NORTHERN
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MANAGING BEHAVIORS OF CONCERN IN THE CLASSROOM

Panel Discussion

Faculty Professional Development Series

January 30, 2014

PANELISTS

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BEHAVIORS OF CONCERN

Distressed Student

Exhibits behavior that causes concern for the personal well-being of that student rather than creating a worry for his/her impact on you or on the classroom

Disturbed Student

Exhibits irrational behavior that makes others feel vaguely uncomfortable

Disruptive Student

Exhibits behavior that makes it difficult for routine work or teaching to take place due to the negative impact it has on those around

Dangerous Student

Exhibits behavior that threatens the safety or well-being of others

DISTRESSED STUDENTS

Definition: Exhibits behavior that causes concern for the personal well-being of that student rather than creating a worry for his/her impact on you or on the classroom

Examples of Behaviors:

- Marked changes in student's performance and/or appearance
- Infrequent class attendance with little or no work completed
- Repeat requests for special considerations
- Appearing overly nervous, tense or tearful
- Listlessness, lack of energy, or frequently falling asleep in class

MANAGING DISTRESSED STUDENT BEHAVIOR

- Speak with the student privately
- Document all conversations
- Encourage student to meet with counselor
- Do not promise absolute confidentiality
- Contact your Chair, Associate Dean or Dean or the Office of Student Life for assistance, if needed
- Consult with Counseling Services/Disability Resources for ideas about how you might assist/support the student

WORKING WITH A DISTRESSED STUDENT

Consider this scenario:

Three weeks into the semester a student who had been regularly attending begins missing class, his performance on assignments drops, and he appears listless in class. In journal entries he makes references to a significant life event (e.g., death, illness, divorce, etc.).

What is your response? What actions would you take to address this student's behavior?

POSSIBLE RESPONSES

- Speak to the student privately:
“Sam, I am concerned about the sudden changes I’ve noticed in your attendance and your grades. I remember that you mention in your journal that you went through a major change in your life. You don’t seem to be as lively as you used to be. Are you feeling down?”
- Remind the student of resources available on campus that might be of assistance. In this case, you’d particularly want to reference:

Counseling Services (for counseling support)

Office of Student Life (for assistance with missed classes)

Disability Resources (if the student brings up a disability or a diagnosis that might make them eligible for resources)

DISTURBED STUDENTS

Definintion: Exhibits irrational behavior that makes others feel vaguely uncomfortable

Examples of Behavior:

- Disjointed thoughts
- Incongruent and/or inappropriate emotional responses
- Frequent or high levels of irritability
- Suspicious or paranoid thoughts
- Bizarre behavior (talking to someone who isn't there)
- Written assignments with concerning themes
- Expressed suicidal thoughts
- Self-mutilating behaviors
- Reports sexual or physical assault
- Recently learned of the death of a friend or family member

MANAGING DISTURBED STUDENT BEHAVIOR

- If no immediate threat, speak with student privately
- Document all conversations and incidents of inappropriate behavior
- Express concern for behavior and set limits
- Do not reinforce delusions
- Acknowledge feelings without supporting misperceptions (“I understand you think you are hearing voices, but I do not hear them and I believe you are safe.”)
- Consult the Classroom Disruption Policy
- Contact your Chair, Associate Dean or Dean and the Office of Student Life (especially if student needs to be removed from class)
- Consult with Counseling Services
- Consult Disability Resources if the student mentions a disability or a diagnosis that might qualify him/her for services

WORKING WITH A DISTURBED STUDENT

Consider this scenario:

A student in your class does not seem to fit in with anyone. Other students seem to avoid interaction with this student. The student acts “strange” with off-the-wall comments and actions. There is no information from Disability Resources regarding this student. At times you have noted scratches or cuts on the student’s arms.

What is your response? What action, if any, should you take?

POSSIBLE RESPONSES

- If there is no immediate threat, speak with the student privately:

“Jake, I am worried about you. When you say things like (cite examples) and act (cite examples), you disrupt the class. I’ve also noticed scratches or cuts on your arm and I am not sure you are aware that some of what you say and do is worrisome to your classmates and to me and frequently disrupts the class period as well. I am concerned enough about you and your behavior that I would really like for you to make an appointment to meet with a counselor in Counseling Services. We can walk over there now and you can talk to a counselor. Jake, if nothing changes and your actions continue to disrupt this class, I can dismiss you from class for the rest of that period. You will then need to meet with the Dean or Associate Dean of Students before you can return to this class.”

POSSIBLE RESPONSES (CONT)

- Document all conversations as well as each incident of inappropriate behavior; share information with your Chair, Associate Dean or Dean
- Consult with staff in the Office of Student Life regarding the possibility of removing the student from the classroom
- Consult with staff from Counseling Services about the behaviors you have observed to assist them in their assessment of the student
- Consult with Disability Resources if the student mentions a disability

DISRUPTIVE STUDENTS

Definition: Exhibits behavior that makes it difficult for routine work or teaching to take place due to the negative impact it has on those around (may include elements of disturbed behavior)

Examples of Behavior:

- Failure to comply with directives
- Unruly or abrasive actions, including argumentative questioning
- Monopolizing of classroom discussion
- Behavior that interferes with effective class management
- Bizarre behavior (talking to someone who isn't there)

MANAGING DISRUPTIVE STUDENT BEHAVIOR

- Speak with the student privately. Avoid escalating the situation, speak calmly and with concern. Avoid physical contact.
- Express concern for the behavior and set appropriate limits.
- If the student continues to disrupt, ask the student to leave the classroom.
- If the student is uncooperative in leaving the classroom, contact NAU Police.
- If the student poses a danger to others, dismiss the class.
- Consult the Classroom Disruption Policy.
- Document each incident, including witnesses. Share the information with your Chair, Associate Dean or Dean.
- Contact the Office of Student Life (especially if student needs to be removed from class)
- Consult with Counseling Services
- Consult with Disability Resources

WORKING WITH A DISRUPTIVE STUDENT

Consider this scenario:

A student comes to class late on a regular basis and “makes an entrance” when she arrives. She brings food and drink to class and when she finishes her snack, she arbitrarily gets up to throw the food containers away while making a commotion. During a lecture, she will often say “that’s dumb” in response to others’ comments. Other students give her “looks” that indicate “straighten up”, but to no avail.

What is your response? How would you manage this student and her impact on your classroom?

POSSIBLE RESPONSES

- If there is no immediate threat, speak to the student privately.
- Speak calmly and with concern, avoid escalating the situation and avoid physical contact

“Mallory, I need to talk to you about some of the things you say and do in class. For example, (cite examples). These behaviors are disruptive. I need for you to change your behavior in class. You need to arrive on time for every class period and to enter the classroom quietly. During the class period, listen without interrupting while your classmates ask questions or make contributions to class. I believe you can manage your behavior well enough to routinely wait your turn before making relevant comments, including constructive criticism. I want to make you aware that if you continue to say and do things which disrupt the class that I can dismiss you from the rest of a class period. You would then need to meet with the Dean or Associate Dean of Students before you could return to the next class period.”

POSSIBLE RESPONSES (CONT)

- Document all conversations and each incident of inappropriate/disruptive behavior; share the information with your Chair, Associate Dean or Dean
- Review the Classroom Disruption Policy
- Consult with staff in the Office of Student Life regarding the possibility of removing the student from the classroom
- Consult with staff from Counseling Services about the behaviors you have observed to assist them in their assessment of the student
- Consult with staff from Disability Resources if the student references a disability or a diagnosis

DANGEROUS STUDENTS

Definition: Exhibits behavior that threatens the safety or well-being of others

Examples of Behavior:

- Harassment or stalking
- Specific threats of physical harm
- Expression of suicidal thoughts
- Intimidating behavior
- Self-mutilating behavior
- Brandishing a weapon

MANAGING DANGEROUS STUDENT BEHAVIOR

- Contact NAU Police immediately
- If student poses a danger to others, dismiss the class
- Do not attempt to keep the dangerous student from leaving the room
- Avoid escalating the situation. Speak calmly and with concern
- Document the incident, including witnesses; share the information with your Chair, Associate Dean or Dean
- Avoid physical contact

WORKING WITH A DANGEROUS STUDENT

Consider this scenario:

A student writes a paper that clearly indicates violence against individuals who are homosexual which includes the following statement: “if it’s the last thing I do, I will kill my homosexual classmates.”

What is your response? How would you handle this situation? Would you report the matter and forward the paper to any other institutional office (e.g., counseling, student life, police, etc)?

POSSIBLE RESPONSES

- Report the incident to your Chair, Associate Dean or Dean
- Report the situation to Student Life for assistance in determining the student's eligibility to remain in your class/the university
- Contact NAU Police (523-3611)