

DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOR IN AN INSTRUCTIONAL SETTING

POLICY SUMMARY

Membership in Northern Arizona University's academic community entails a special obligation to maintain class environments that are conducive to learning, whether instruction is taking place in the classroom, a laboratory or clinical setting, during course-related fieldwork, or online. Students have the obligation to engage in the educational process in a manner that does not breach the peace, interfere with normal class activities, or violate the rights of others. Instructors have the authority and responsibility to address Disruptive Behavior that interferes with student learning. Students who exhibit Disruptive Behavior in any Instructional Setting are subject to involuntary withdrawal from the course with a grade of "W".

REASON FOR THIS POLICY

Northern Arizona University instructors have the responsibility to teach, and its students have the right to learn. Fulfillment of these obligations and rights requires Instructional Settings that are free of Disruptive Behavior.

ENTITIES AFFECTED BY THIS POLICY

- All colleges and instructional units
- Counseling Services
- Disability Resources

WHO SHOULD KNOW THIS POLICY

- All students and faculty members
- All administrative academic officials

DEFINITIONS

Disruptive Behavior: disorderly conduct taking place in an Instructional Setting that materially and substantially diminishes, impedes, or obstructs an instructor's ability to teach or a student's right to learn. Disruptive Behavior includes conduct that distracts, disturbs, intimidates or threatens others in a manner that unduly interferes with the educational process. Disruptive Behavior is misconduct subject to disciplinary sanction.

Instructional Setting: any location or space where the organized educational process for a specific course is occurring, including without limitation physical classrooms, online classrooms, laboratories, clinical settings, or in the field. For purposes of this policy, Instructional Settings do not include other spaces or forms of one-on-one communication where organized teaching for the course is not occurring, including without limitation instructor offices, faculty office hours, or correspondence such as electronic mail, letters, notes, voicemail, et cetera.

POLICY

A. Instructor Rights and Responsibilities

Instructors have the right and the obligation to confront and resolve Disruptive Behavior as a means of maintaining an instructional environment conducive to teaching and learning. Instructors are responsible for

establishing, communicating, and enforcing reasonable expectations for appropriate behavior within their Instructional Settings. In furtherance of the University's policy on syllabi, these requirements are often communicated to students at the outset of courses and reinforced with class discussion or other appropriate means. Course rules that instructors sometimes establish can include, but are not limited to:

- The timing and manner for student questions and expression of points of view;
- Proper or required dress and safety practices such as the use of protective clothing or gear;
- Talking during lectures, speaking out of turn, sleeping, eating, other activities unrelated to coursework;
- Use of portable devices such as laptops, tablets, cellular telephones, or video games that are not otherwise authorized as part of an accommodation for a student with a disability; and
- Arriving late or leaving early without the instructor's authorization.

When Disruptive Behavior occurs, instructors may direct a student to cease the offending behavior, to leave the Instructional Setting, may adjourn the class or activity, or when necessary and appropriate, may summon the University police. Instructors will complete a separate [Disruptive Behavior Incident Report](#) to document each incident of Disruptive Behavior and to report its occurrence to their department chair (or administrative equivalent). The instructor will provide a copy of each incident report to the student involved.

B. Student Rights and Responsibilities

Students enjoy the right to participate in all course discussions and freedom of inquiry and expression (see Paragraph D below). At the same time, all students are responsible for behaving in a manner that allows for the regular and normal functioning of the teaching and learning process in all Instructional Settings. Students may not disrupt the delivery of education by instructors or the receipt of education by fellow students, nor may a student interfere with an instructor's responsibility to maintain order and to complete course requirements.

C. Prohibited Behavior

Disruptive Behavior is prohibited in all Instructional Settings such as classrooms, laboratories or clinical environments, during course-related fieldwork, or online. Examples of conduct in an Instructional Setting that can rise to the level of materially obstructing or impeding classwork, causing substantial disorder, or invading the rights of others and that can, therefore, constitute Disruptive Behavior include but are not limited to:

- Repeatedly arriving to class late or leaving early without authorization;
- Making loud or distracting noises either carelessly or with the intent to disrupt;
- Sleeping, eating, or engaging in distracting activities not related to or that interfere with coursework;
- Persistently speaking without being recognized or interrupting or talking over others;
- Malicious or harassing speech or actions directed at the instructor or other class participants, such as personal insults, name-calling, swearing, or other abusive or ridiculing comments;
- Using devices without permission in a manner that disrupts the educational environment;
- Making threats or otherwise seeking to verbally or physically intimidate or panic others;
- Creating a physical safety risk to oneself or others either by overt acts or acts of omission;
- Violating an applicable program rule or policy, particularly after receiving a warning to comply; or
- Refusing to comply with an instructor's rules or request for appropriate behavior.

D. Right to Contribute and Freedoms of Inquiry and Expression

Northern Arizona University students enjoy the right to vigorously participate in legitimate educational discussion and debate. This is a core aspect of the educational process. Further, the University strongly supports the principles of freedom of inquiry and expression as vital to the academic enterprise. Nothing in this policy is intended to or may be used to restrict, stifle, or curtail a student's right or ability to appropriately contribute to and benefit from robust educational discussions that are consistent with planned coursework, as determined by the instructor. Disruptive Behavior does not include the expression of disagreement with a course instructor or other students during times when the instructor permits class discussion. This policy is not intended to curtail the First Amendment rights of University community members, and the University will enforce this policy in a manner consistent with constitutional protections related to freedom of speech.

E. Mediation

An instructor and a student may identify a mutually acceptable mediator and agree to participate in a facilitated Disruptive Behavior resolution process with the goal of implementing a written agreement in which the student accepts and agrees to comply with appropriate behavioral standards or to voluntarily withdraw from the course. Participation is voluntary, and the instructor or the student may cease their participation in the mediation process at any time. If, in the opinion of the instructor, a student violates a behavioral agreement following its implementation, the instructor may move to involuntarily withdraw the student from the course.

F. Students with Disabilities

The rights and responsibilities for students with disabilities within the Instructional Setting are the same as for all students. Students with disabilities who may need a reasonable accommodation to comply with course-specific rules or this policy are encouraged to contact [Disability Resources](#) at 928-523-8773 (voice), 928-523-6906 (TTY), 928-523-8747 (fax), or dr@nau.edu.

G. Involuntary Withdrawal

An instructor may involuntarily withdraw a student from a course with a grade of "W" when the student's Disruptive Behavior materially and substantially impedes the educational process and the student refuses reasonable requests as documented by the instructor to cease the offending behavior. When deciding to involuntarily withdraw a student, mitigating or aggravating factors may be considered. Involuntary withdrawals must be approved in advance by the instructor's department chair (or administrative equivalent). Involuntarily withdrawing a student from a course is a significant act. When seeking to apply this policy, instructors and department chairs should first seek procedural guidance from the Vice Provost for Academic Affairs.

H. Student Appeal

A student may appeal an involuntary withdrawal by filing an [Involuntary Withdrawal Notice of Appeal](#) with the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs (or designee) within two (2) business days of receiving an involuntary withdrawal decision notice from the student's instructor. Such appeals will be investigated by two (2) faculty members appointed by the Provost, one from the instructor's college and one from a different college. After meeting separately with the student and instructor, the investigators will prepare a written recommendation for the Provost, which may include joint or dissenting opinions, as to whether the involuntary withdrawal decision should be upheld or overturned. The student and the instructor may also submit a written statement. A copy of the investigator panel's recommendation and any statements will be provided to the student and the instructor. The Provost will review the entire written record to determine whether the involuntary withdrawal should be upheld or overturned and will document the decision and its rationale in a written decision letter that will be shared with the student and the instructor. The Provost's decision is final. Tuition and fee refunds are not provided in cases of involuntary withdrawal. University officials conducting involuntary withdraw administrative actions will operate in a time-sensitive manner that enables a student who prevails on appeal to rejoin and complete the course. The student will be allowed to make up any work missed due to the involuntary withdrawal procedure. Retaliating against a student who exercises their right to appeal an involuntary withdrawal decision is prohibited.

I. Relationship to the Student Conduct Process

When a threat of physical harm to a member of the University community exists, involuntary withdrawal is not a substitute for appropriate administrative action taken pursuant to the *Student Code of Conduct*, such as interim suspension. Threats should be immediately reported to the NAU Police Department and Office of Student Life.

RESPONSIBILITIES

Appeal Investigators: in a time-sensitive manner, prepare a written recommendation for the Provost for Academic Affairs as to whether an involuntary withdrawal appealed by a student should be overturned.

Counseling Services: supports and assists instructors and students to manage or resolve troubling behavior that students may exhibit in an Instructional Setting; advocates for students with mental health concerns.

Department Chairs: work with instructors to address Disruptive Behavior challenges in accordance with this policy; in a time-sensitive manner, respond to instructor requests to involuntarily withdraw a student due to Disruptive Behavior.

Disability Resources: supports and assists instructors and students with disabilities to manage, mitigate, or resolve troubling behavior in Instructional Settings; advocates as appropriate for students with disabilities.

Instructors: establish clear behavioral expectations at the start of each course; confront and resolve Disruptive Behavior in accordance with this policy and related guidance.

Office of the Registrar: processes involuntary withdrawals with a grade of “W”.

Provost: responds to student involuntary withdrawal appeals in a time-sensitive manner.

Vice Provost for Academic Affairs: supports instructors and department chairs in understanding this policy.

PROCEDURES

[Involuntarily Withdraw a Disruptive Student](#)

RELATED INFORMATION

Forms or Tools

[Disruptive Behavior Incident Report](#)

[Involuntary Withdrawal Notice of Appeal](#)

[Involuntary Withdrawal Process Flowchart](#)

[Notice of Involuntary Withdrawal](#)

Cross-References

[Student Code of Conduct](#)

[Academic Policy 100227, Syllabus Requirements and Template](#)

Sources

[Arizona Board of Regents Policy 1-119](#)

[Arizona Board of Regents Policy 5-308](#)

[Arizona Board of Regents Policy 5-401](#)

APPENDIX*

[Office of Student Life Guidelines for Managing Disruptive Behavior](#)

*Disclaimer: all documents, links, or other materials included in this policy's appendix are provided solely for the user's convenience and are not part of official University policy.