

Office of Student Conduct and Civility Education Faculty/Staff Guide to Services and Support



Handling Disruptive Student Behavior or Other Incidents

Content adapted from University of South Carolina, UCLA Counseling and Psychological Services and the UCLA Office of the Dean of Students, George Mason University, University of Mississippi, and the Towson University Counseling Center.

Incivility in the Classroom and on Campus

Issues surrounding the principles of civility on college campuses have become a topic for discussion in the university community. Incivility can present itself in a number of ways ranging from disruptive conversations during class and text messaging to verbal opposition and aggressiveness. This literature aims to provide faculty and staff with suggestions and resources on how to prevent uncivil behavior in the classroom, as well as how to appropriately respond. Additional resources can be found online at www.towson.edu/studentconduct.

Disruptive behavior is behavior that disrupts or obstructs teaching, research, administration, disciplinary proceedings or normal university operations.

Preventing Disruptive and Uncivil Behavior in the Classroom

- Include specific behavioral norms and expectations for you and your students in the course syllabus. The Office of Student Conduct and Civility Education can help you craft these statements for purposes of building your syllabus.
- On the first day of class, ask students for their suggestions on what the behavioral norms and expectations should be for the classroom. You may find that students are the strongest supporters of classroom decorum and that when they help establish these rules, a sense of ownership will result.
- If using online discussion boards, outline appropriate response etiquette in your course syllabus as well as directly to the class.
- Serve as a role model and exhibit the type of behavior you expect from your students.

Tips on Handling Disruptions

When responding to an angry or disruptive student, faculty/staff members should:

- Discuss the situation with the student privately if appropriate (such as after class).
- Based on the situation you may allow the student to remain in class, but inform him or her you will speak about the behavior at the end of the class session.
- If concerned for your safety or that of others, call TUPD (410-704-4444) or ask someone else to place the call.
- Try not to argue or interrupt and remain as calm as possible. Speaking clearly and slowly may help calm the student and increase the chances you'll be heard.
- Call the student by name if possible. This will help create a greater connection between you and the student and may help calm the situation.
- Acknowledge his or her anger and frustration. "I can see that you are upset. What can I do to help you?"
- Give the student a reasonable opportunity to express himself or herself without being abusive. "You have the right to be angry, but it's not OK for you to yell at me or use that kind of language."
- If the student makes unreasonable demands, let him or her know the limits of what it is reasonable for you to provide.
- If you are uncomfortable meeting with the student one on one, contact the department chair or supervisor. We also recommend meeting with the door to your office open.
- Following the meeting, send a follow up letter to the student reiterating what you discussed. Also, retain a copy for your records.
- If you feel the behavior may be a violation of the Code of Student Conduct, contact the Office of Student Conduct and Civility Education.

The First Amendment and Student Rights

The Code of Student Conduct outlines the specific rights of students in regard to classroom expression within the guidelines of the First Amendment. Below you will find an excerpt from the code which outlines these specific rights. For more information regarding the code of conduct please visit www.towson.edu/studentaffairs/policies/conduct.asp.

Classroom Expression:

- a. Discussion and expression of all views relevant to the subject matter are permitted in the classroom, subject only to the responsibility of the instructor to maintain order and reasonable academic progress.
 1. Faculty comportment shall be in accordance with standards set forth by the American Association of University Professors.
 2. Students shall not be penalized for expressing controversial views relevant to the subject matter in class.
- b. Evaluation of a student's academic performance shall be neither prejudiced nor capricious.

If you ever feel that a student's expression falls outside of the guidelines set forth in the Code of Student Conduct, we encourage you to address the behavior with the student individually or with the assistance of your department chair or a member of our office. Addressing questionable behavior early will help to maintain a healthy learning environment for all students, even those with differing perspectives.

Emergencies

In an emergency, call the campus police at 410-704-4444 and state your location. Examples include:

- Possession of a weapon on campus
- Compromised safety
- Acts or threats of violence to you or others

Non-Emergencies

If appropriate, first attempt to resolve the situation yourself or with the help of university resources, such as the Office of Student Conduct, the Counseling Center, Disability Support Services, or your department chair or supervisor. You may reach the Office of Student Conduct and Civility Education at 410-704-2057 or visit www.towson.edu/studentconduct. Examples include:

- Behavior that disrupts or obstructs teaching, research, administration, disciplinary proceedings or normal university operations.
- Any pattern of odd behaviors that may pose a non-emergency threat to safety.

How do I know whether a situation should be reported?

You do not have to make that determination on your own.

Contacting the Office of Student Conduct and Civility Education (OSCCE) can help you to determine if a particular incident should be handled by our office or by another department or entity. Certain circumstances warrant immediate referral to OSCCE and possibly other departments. Such incidents would include:

- Alleged sexual assault/sexual harassment, stalking, and dating/domestic violence
- Alleged child abuse/neglect
- Possession of a weapon on campus
- Compromised safety
- Acts or threats of violence to one's self or others

These incidents require immediate contact with OSCCE and/or other departments. Contact your department chair or supervisor for guidance.

Responding to Information Regarding Sexual Assault, Sexual Harassment, Stalking, and Dating/Domestic Violence

Conservative estimates put the rate of attempted and/or completed sexual assaults for college students at one in six. Moreover, these assaults are overwhelmingly committed by someone the student knows. Incidents of sexual assault, sexual harassment, stalking, and dating/domestic violence are very traumatic. The nature of sexual assault makes it an inherently humiliating crime, which often makes it very difficult for students to discuss. Students who have experienced these events may have difficulties with concentration or motivation, suffer sleep disturbances, have trouble trusting others and may feel highly anxious or afraid.

- If you receive any report of an alleged sexual assault, sexual harassment, stalking and/or dating/domestic violence incident, you must report it to the Office of Student Conduct and Civility Education immediately by calling 410-704-2057. Please also report the incident online via www.towson.edu/studentconduct.
- In these circumstances it is appropriate to ask the student if they feel they are in any immediate danger. If they respond indicating they feel they are in danger you should encourage them to contact Towson University Police at 410-704-4444. It is our recommendation that you offer to be with the student when they reach out to TUPD, or to refer them to the OSCCE where staff can assist the student in making contact with local authorities to ensure their safety and comfort.

Tips for responding:

- Listen to what students tell you—and believe them. The vast majority of students do not make up stories about being assaulted, harassed, or stalked.
- Inform students of on-campus resources such as the University Counseling Center (410-704-2512) for psychological care, as well as the Health Center (410-704-2466) for medical care. Refer students to the Office of Student Conduct and Civility Education (410-704-2057) for information on legal and disciplinary proceedings.
- If they wish to seek help off-campus, give them information for TurnAround Inc. (410-828-6390), the local crisis center for sexual assault and intimate partner violence with a 24 hour hotline and trained advocates who offer confidential support and information to victims. Also, you can refer them to the National Domestic Violence Hotline (410-889-SAFE).
- Avoid asking too many questions, or inadvertently placing blame for what happened, for example, "Were you drinking?"
- Avoid being this person's only support or resource—recovery takes a long time and often involves the need for professional services. Encourage students to get help using campus resources.

Report or Seek Consultation

Office of Student Conduct and Civility Education
410-704-2057
www.towson.edu/studentconduct

**Student Affairs Lifeline —
Division of Student Affairs**
410-704-5433
www.towson.edu/studentaffairs

Counseling Center
410-704-2512
www.towson.edu/counseling



Office Services and Presentations

The Office of Student Conduct and Civility Education is committed to educating students about their role as members of the Towson and greater Baltimore communities. Through marketing campaigns, participation in educational workshops and facilitated conversations, Towson students are empowered to think beyond themselves and understand how their actions affect their future, the lives of others and their surrounding environments.

Below, you will find a list of topics presented by our office. If you have specific topic ideas, please contact our office by e-mailing studentconduct@towson.edu and we will do our best to work with you on developing a presentation that meets your specific needs.

Presentation topics for students, faculty and staff:

- The Code of Student Conduct and how it applies to students on and off campus
- Academic Integrity
- Family Educational Right to Privacy Act/ FERPA (Buckley Amendment)
- Setting expectations and communication strategies within the classroom/ workplace
- Cyber bullying and social media
- Ethical decision making
- Classroom management and responding to disruptions
- Promoting responsible off-campus behavior
- Conduct records and the job search
- Civility in the workplace
- Civility topics focused on campus impact

Civility in Action Workshop

The Civility in Action workshop is a two-and-a-half hour program used as an educational sanction for students who have violated policies that impact the community. The purpose of this workshop is to expose students to the concept of civility as it relates to Towson University and to emphasize their duty to be responsible citizens. Through interactive activities and discussion, students explore their role as responsible citizens within the Towson community and beyond, and the impact that their decision-making and personal conduct have on their personal, university and Baltimore communities.

The workshop can also be tailored to the classroom setting to help instructors and staff address issues of incivility that occur, or as a preventative measure in classes that encompass a large amount of discussion-based learning.

