

Policy & Governance Unit, Academic Registrar's Division

## GUIDELINES FOR DEALING WITH DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOUR

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<b>Approved by:</b>	Senior Manager, Policy & Governance Unit				
<b>Custodian title &amp; e-mail address:</b>	Senior Manager, Policy & Governance Unit <a href="mailto:torimc@uow.edu.au">torimc@uow.edu.au</a>				
<b>Author:</b>	Policy Analyst, Policy & Governance Unit <a href="mailto:taylor@uow.edu.au">taylor@uow.edu.au</a>				
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<b>References &amp; Legislation:</b>	<a href="#">Anti-Discrimination Act 1977 (NSW)</a> <a href="#">Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cwth)</a> <a href="#">Disability Standards for Education</a> <a href="#">Campus Access and Order Rules</a> <a href="#">Disability Policy – Students</a> <a href="#">Roles and Responsibilities for Workplace Health &amp; Safety</a> <a href="#">Student Conduct Rules</a> <a href="#">Student Health Assessment &amp; Leave Policy</a> <a href="#">UOW Emergency Response Guidelines</a> <a href="#">UOW Critical Incident Guidelines and Procedures</a>				
<b>Audience:</b>	Public – Accessible to anyone				
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## 1 Introduction

1. Disruptive behaviour falls on a continuum. It amounts to more than strong emotions or opinions expressed during the course of academic debate, and it is more than the expression of controversial and/or extreme points of view. Individual lecturers vary in the range of behaviour they tolerate in their classrooms; generally, however, “disruptive behaviour” is that which interferes with teaching and learning. The persistence, severity, and nature of the behaviour are key factors in determining disruptiveness. Examples include:
  - talking when others are speaking
  - verbal badgering, frequent interruptions
  - sleeping or eating in class
  - mobile phone use/text messaging in class
  - chronic lateness or early departure from class
  - swearing or using derogatory and demeaning language
  - monopolising class time or discussions
  - refusal to heed written or oral directions
  - stalking
  - verbal or physical threats
  - erratic, or otherwise odd or unusual behaviour
  - excessive noise-making
  - intoxication/drug use
  - physical aggression to people or property
2. These Guidelines are based on guidelines prepared by the University of Mary Washington, USA.

## 2 Purpose

1. These Guidelines are intended to provide information to and assist UOW staff in identifying and dealing with disruptive behaviour by students, where appropriate. The Guidelines may be read in conjunction with the UOW Student Health Assessment & Leave Policy.

## 3 How should you respond to disruptive behaviour?

2. **Plan ahead.** Try to prevent problems before they occur. Determine the standards you wish to enforce in your classroom or office. Include specific behavioural guidelines in your syllabus and discuss your behavioural expectations in class as each academic session begins.
3. **Consider your response to continued disruption** If disruptive behaviour is transitory or occasional, it may be that no action needs to be taken beyond asking for the student to stop the behaviour. If it continues or becomes a pattern of behaviour that is interfering with teaching and learning, then further action should be taken. Don't ignore the behaviour and hope that it will stop. Take the student outside or ask the student to meet with you and inform the student (but not in front of the group) that his/her behaviour has violated the standards of acceptable behaviour in your classroom. Be specific and concrete. Use examples of acceptable and unacceptable behaviour you have directly observed. Inform the student of the consequences of continued disruption, including the potential for misconduct proceedings. Your response might depend on your assessment of the student's situation.
4. **What can you do if the behaviour continues?** You can consult with your colleagues, but without identifying the student. In addition to support and ideas, a colleague may be willing to sit in when you meet with a student and act as an informal witness to what is discussed. You can also speak to the Subject Coordinator or Sub Dean for further advice. The Student Support Advisers can provide staff with general advice on behavioural matters. You can also refer the student to their faculty Student Support Adviser or suggest the student should make an appointment to see a counsellor at the University Counselling Service, which is a free service.

5. **What if the behaviour appears to be related to the student's emotional or psychological state?** If you reasonably believe that the student's behaviour could be related to a mental health issue, there are support services at the University that can assist the student. These include the Faculty Student Support Advisers and the University Counselling Service.

You can also make a report to a Designated Staff Member under the Student Health Assessment and Leave Policy. A documented disability, including a psychiatric disability, does not excuse disruptive behaviour nor preclude student compliance with classroom conduct standards. If a student's disruptive behaviour relates to a psychological or physical disability, the Designated Staff Member can refer the matter on for further investigation, if needed.

2. **Document your interventions.** If you talk to a student about his/her behaviour, make a record including the date, names of those present and what was said, as well as the student behaviour that was objectionable.
3. **Seek help and support.** Remember: it is not part of your job to put up with disruptive or threatening behaviour. You are not alone, and there are resources available to you, some of which are listed below.
4. **What if the student appears dangerous?** Your safety and the safety of your students are paramount. If a student is behaving in a verbally aggressive manner, remain calm. Do not raise your voice or confront the student. Politely request that they respect your physical space and speak in a conversational tone if s/he wishes to continue speaking with you. It is always OK to set limits on student behaviour, if done appropriately. Don't touch the student or move closer to him/her or turn away. If a student actually makes a threat or becomes physically aggressive, contact University Security (or the Police at teaching sites other than the Wollongong campus) immediately.

#### 4 Resources and Contacts

**University Security**      Emergencies 4221 4900      General enquiries 4221 4555  
<http://www.uow.edu.au/about/security/index.html>

##### **Staff Services – Employee Assistance Program (EAP)**

Under the EAP, UOW employees can refer themselves for help to the University Counselling Service for free and confidential counselling.

<https://intranet.uow.edu.au/personnel/staffservices/eap/index.html>

**University Counselling Service** 4221 3445

<http://www.uow.edu.au/student/services/cs/index.html>

##### **Web resources recommended by the University Counselling Service**

<http://www.uow.edu.au/student/services/cs/links/index.html>

**Mental Health First Aid** – training course offered by PODS      4221 4929

The Mental Health First Aid training is offered with a view to improving general mental health literacy of staff. The course aims to equip staff to feel more confident in providing initial support for people developing a mental illness or experiencing a mental health crisis. The training includes information on how to refer people to appropriate sources of professional help when required.

<https://intranet.uow.edu.au/pods/calendar/index.html>

##### **Student Support Advisers**

The Student Support Advisers (SSAs) provide liaison, information, support and referral to University of Wollongong students. Each faculty has a SSA, and the list of SSAs can be found at:

<http://www.uow.edu.au/student/services/SSA/UOW021160.html>

##### **Student Health Assessment & Leave Policy**

The purpose of the Student Health Assessment and Leave Policy is to provide for the management of a student with a serious health condition.

<http://www.uow.edu.au/about/policy/UOW060720.html>

**University of Sydney information pages on managing students with a psychological disability**

Includes general information on psychological disability and advice on teaching strategies that may be useful when working with students with psychological disability.

[http://sydney.edu.au/stuserv/disability/staff\\_mental.shtml](http://sydney.edu.au/stuserv/disability/staff_mental.shtml)

## 5 Version Control Table

Version Control	Date Effective	Approved By	Amendment
1	28 October 2010	SM PGU	New document
2	30 Nov 2012	Vice-Principal (Administration)	Updated to reflect change from OHS to WHS.