Dealing with Disruptive or Intimidating Behaviour
A Guide for Faculty and Teaching Assistants

It is essential that instructors be able to conduct classes and labs without disruption or intimidation by students in the class; it is essential that students are able to attend and participate in classes and labs free from such behaviours as well. The University administration will fully support all the steps necessary to ensure that this is the case.

The Code of Student Conduct

Western’s Code of Student Conduct makes it very clear that students are required to behave in an appropriate manner:

Membership in the University community implies acceptance by every student of the principle of mutual respect for the rights, responsibilities, dignity and well-being of others and a readiness to support an environment conducive to the intellectual and personal growth of all who study, work and live within it.

Any conduct on the part of a student that has, or might reasonably be seen to have, an adverse effect on the reputation or the proper functioning of the University, or the health, safety, rights or property of the University, its members or visitors, is subject to discipline under this Code.

The Code’s definition of misconduct includes disruption of classes and harassment or intimidation of other community members. Misconduct is an offence subject to a variety of disciplinary actions under the Code.

Class Conduct

It is good practice to set out your expectations of student conduct in your class at the beginning of the term when you are making the usual announcements of evaluation procedures, assignments, etc.

For instance, you might say, “I will conduct this class as a series of lectures; please feel free to raise your hand when you have a question,” or “I will allow five minutes at the end of each hour for questions.” Students rightfully expect to have an opportunity to ask questions or make comments, as part of the normal give-and-take of the University setting.
You may occasionally encounter a student who goes beyond the bounds of what you have defined as acceptable. This information sheet contains some guidance and advice on how to handle disruptive and intimidating students.

**Single Occurrence of Non-Violent Disruptive Behaviour**

When a student disrupts to the extent that the class cannot continue, you might call a pause in the class and attempt to restore order by talking privately with the student or you might ask the student to stop by saying, “Please see me after class.”

If the situation is not resolved with this approach, you may have to cancel the rest of the class. You should then take the actions as described later in this pamphlet.

**Disruptive Behaviour Gradually Emerging Over Several Class Meetings**

If a student repeatedly disrupts the normal flow of activities in your classroom or lab, despite your attempts to maintain order, you are advised to do the following:

- Document the incident(s) right away, noting day, time, place, who and what was involved, and particularly what the student said or did that was disruptive;

- Discuss the situation with the head of your academic program (Dean or Chair). During this discussion, application of the Code of Student Conduct and other academic regulations should be explored.

- If you suspect the student’s behaviour arises from an emotional or psychiatric condition, you may wish to obtain advice from a professional. Contact Psychological Services in the Student Development Centre (519-661-3031) or Student Health Services (519-661-3030).

- If you feel it is appropriate, and if you are comfortable doing so, arrange to meet the student either before or after class or during a class break. At the meeting, review your expectations of students in your class and indicate how the student’s behaviour has been disruptive. Give the student the opportunity to explain his/her behaviour. If appropriate, suggest counselling services to the student and indicate that you are prepared to arrange for the student to discuss the situation with an advisor. Document this conversation.

- If you do not feel comfortable meeting with the student on your own, arrange to have someone else (academic advisor, other instructor etc.) present. If you choose to meet with the student on your own, you may
wish to have someone “check in” on you during the course of the meeting.

- If the student persists in the disruptive behaviour and refuses to leave the class at your request, call the Campus Police (519-661-3300) to assist in removing the student.

- Keep your Dean or Chair informed if the situation should reach this stage. You and your Chair should meet as soon as possible with a representative from the Dean’s Office. The Dean may include other individuals in this meeting. Again, the possible application of the Code of Student Conduct should be explored at this meeting.

Assessing Your Teaching Space: How Will You Get Help?

Assess your physical environment (classroom, lab, seminar room, office) prior to your first class, tutorial, demonstration or meeting. Ask yourself:

- How can I avoid being trapped in my classroom or lab by a disruptive or intimidating student?
- Where is the nearest telephone?
- What is the room number and building name of the classroom to enable help to come quickly?
- Is there an office or room nearby where I might find help during my regular classroom hours?

Emergency Situations

In any potentially dangerous situations – if a student is acting violently, carrying any sort of weapon or threatening someone – call the Campus Police immediately (911) or ask a student in the class to do so.

Harassment or Intimidation Outside the Classroom

Harassment outside the classroom by one of your students (including during office hours or by e-mail) will be treated in the same general way as in-class harassment. The University’s policies apply off-campus during the course of University-related activities.
What Help is Available on Campus?

Emergencies - Call Campus Police (911)

If you feel unsafe walking on campus in the evening - Contact Western Foot Patrol (519-661-3650).

If you feel a student is harassing you or another student or that discrimination is taking place - Contact Equity & Human Rights Services (519-661-3334).

If you receive harassing e-mails from a student (or anyone else), follow the procedure for dealing with such harassment set out at: www.uwo.ca/its/doc/hdi/email/email-harassing.html.

If you feel a student should speak with a counselor as a result of emotional or psychological issues, contact Student Health (519-661-3030) or the Student Development Centre (519-661-3031).

For information on teaching issues, contact the Teaching Support Centre (519-661-2111, ext. 84622).

Who Can Help?

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These materials adopted from the Office of the Assistant Vice-President (Student Affairs) at University of Toronto. Equity & Human Rights Services (EHRS) is available to assist with harassment and discrimination issues. Print resources, an informal resolution process and workplace training opportunities are available through EHRS.