

Help for Faculty in Coping with a Student Who Seems Threatening

Guide for Brooklyn College Faculty

This guide outlines the assistance and options available to faculty at Brooklyn College when dealing with a student who makes them feel uneasy, is aggressive, 'pushy', or demanding or who is overtly threatening. Please refer to the guide *How to Identify, Assist and Refer Students with Personal Problems and/or Disruptive Behavior* for related information. You may also wish to consult *About Resolving Conflict and Preventing Violence*. For copies, ask your department chair or the Personal Counseling program (951-5363).

Do not ignore your uneasy feelings about a student.

If a student behaves inappropriately with you or otherwise makes you feel uneasy, discuss your experience with someone else: a colleague, your department chair, or someone from personal counseling, student life or the appropriate dean's office. Try to identify the specific behavior that makes you feel uneasy: The student may stand too close, speak in a raised voice, be discourteous, mumble inaudibly, make veiled or overt threats, submit exams or other written work with bizarre or threatening content, refuse to comply with your reasonable requests or directions.

Do not meet with the student in an isolated place like your office. (If you feel unsafe, meet in a public or semi-public area, such as a room that adjoins a department office where others are working. Leave the door open. If you feel that you need to do so, ask another person to be present.)

Do not 'give in' to overly aggressive or 'pushy' behavior in order to feel safe. Get help instead. Setting a limit (denying a student request for good reasons, asking the student to behave appropriately--speak reasonably or politely, etc.) at the beginning can avoid a more serious situation later. If you do not feel safe in setting a limit, ask security (951-5511) to provide someone to monitor the situation while you do so.

If the student's inappropriate behavior or your uneasy feelings persist:

Meet with the student and ask them to change their behavior. (Again, if you feel unsafe, meet in a public or semi-public area, such as a room that adjoins a department office where others are working. Leave the door open. If you feel that you need to do so, ask another person to be present.) You must tell the student which of their behaviors are creating a problem (see above) and ask them to change the behavior.

You should try to refer the student for help with whatever difficulties may be involved in the behavior problem. Tell the student that you understand that they may be under stress and that you would suggest that it may be helpful for them to consult with a counselor. See the guide *How to Identify, Assist and Refer Students with Personal Problems and/or Disruptive Behavior*

for information on how to refer the student for counseling.

If a threatening situation emerges during a class meeting:

Exercise one of two options available to you: (A) Ask the student to accompany you to discuss the situation at the department office or another area where help is available. Or, (B) tell the class that it is not possible to continue the meeting. Ask students to leave and to reconvene later or at the next scheduled meeting.

Seek assistance. Both security and personal counseling should be contacted. A personal counselor is always on call to respond to urgent situations.

Contact the personal counseling program and request a counselor to help debrief your class about the incident at the next class meeting. Other students may have strong emotional reactions to the situation.

If the student cannot or will not change their behavior after repeated, clear requests to do so:

You may ask the student to cease attending your class until they can change their behavior. You may want to arrange a security presence in advance to enforce your request. Consult with the director of security. Security assistance can be provided to monitor your classes and office hours, if indicated. A security escort to and from transportation is available at any time.

You can and should also take disciplinary action with respect to the student.

Contact the office of the Dean for Student Life (951-5352) for assistance. When you file a complaint, there will be an attempt to resolve the situation. First informal mediation will be attempted. If efforts are unsuccessful, formal action can be taken to impose sanctions and requirements on the student. If warranted, immediate action can be taken to prohibit the student from entering campus.

It is important to take disciplinary action if the student cannot control their behavior because other faculty and staff may also be experiencing problems with the student. It is important to bring the total situation to light. The Dean's office can contact all of the student's instructors to find out if there is a broader problem.

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