



THE UNIVERSITY
of NORTH CAROLINA
at CHAPEL HILL

Dealing with Students Who Cause Problems or are Having Problems

When and Where to Get Help

Originally by Kevin Jeffay

With some modifications by Jim Anderson



Some Statistics

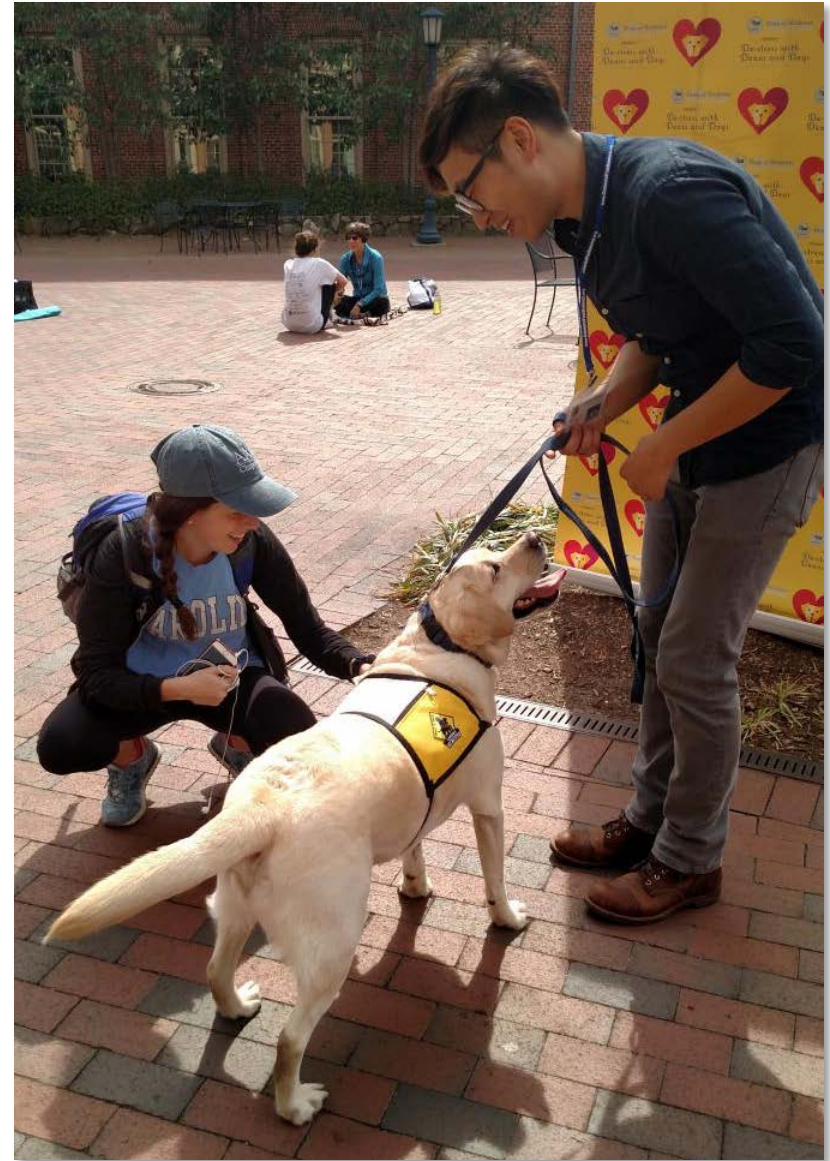
- You can find many statistics similar to these online (these are from the Mayo Clinic, which I regard as trustworthy):
 - Up to 44% of college students reported having symptoms of depression and anxiety
 - Suicide is the third leading cause of death for college students
 - Of those who have been diagnosed with a mental health disorder, 75% have their first episode by 24
 - 30% of students reported feeling depressed in the past year
 - Half of students reported feeling overwhelmingly anxious in the past year



Managing Undesired Student Behaviors

The simple stuff

- Be kind, constructive, and professional — many students will secretly be on the verge of a real or perceived meltdown
 - If you ever suspect a student is having serious emotional trouble report it to the Dean of Students
- It is *ok* to limit your availability to the posted office hours





Managing Undesired Student Behaviors

The not-so-simple stuff

- Students will have outbursts in class
 - Or txt/talk on their cell phone, watch videos on their laptop, ...
- Students will stop coming to class
- Students will cyber-bully other students on class websites
 - Or say or do inappropriate things to women in the class
- Students will use profanity
- (Rarely) students will lose touch with reality



Preventing & Handling Class Disruptions

Set clear expectations at the beginning of the course

- Set expectations regarding conduct expected of all students
- This can be done in your syllabus by setting standards for attendance, cell phone usage, tone of discussions, respect for differences of opinion
 - Also note that all students are expected to abide by the Honor Code and explain what this requires
- State in writing possible consequences for students who do not abide by your stated expectations
 - Be fair and consistent when addressing possible problems and determining consequences



Preventing & Handling Class Disruptions

Mild disruptions

- If the disruption is a low-level one, you may want to address the entire class instead of singling out certain individuals
- Do not hesitate to address a potential problem early
 - The earlier that you address a potential problem, the less likely that it will develop into a more serious problem



Preventing & Handling Class Disruptions

The problem student

- If a particular student is being disruptive, calmly and respectfully ask him or her to stop their behavior
 - It is best to speak to the student privately
 - You may want to set a meeting for the two of you to speak
 - During this meeting, share with the student your expectations of classroom conduct and how you perceive that his or her conduct is not in line with your expectations
- If the behavior continues, ask the student to leave the class for the day and inform them that the incident will be turned over to the Honor System for disciplinary action
- Be sure to document incidents and share with your department chair or dean or the Dean of Students



Preventing & Handling Class Disruptions

If you ever have serious concerns or fear...

- Trust your instincts!
- If you feel a student is exhibiting behavior that might be dangerous to themselves or others, contact the police/Department of Public Safety
- If you feel the student needs professional help, contact the Dean of Students or Counseling and Psychological Services
 - Don't just suggest that the student “see someone”
 - A detailed FAQ about referring students for help can be found [here](#)



The Dean of Students

Who are they and what do they do?

- An office (not just a person) that is typically part of the campus student advising infrastructure
- The office deals with:
 - Health and well being
 - Academic issues
 - Disciplinary & criminal issues
 - Financial issues
 - Crisis management
- Typically there is someone who can be reached in the DoS office around the clock



The Dean of Students

When to refer

- You should refer students exhibiting behaviors including (but not limited to):
 - Excessive absences or decline in coursework
 - Markedly changed patterns of interaction
 - Unusual or exaggerated emotional responses
 - New or repeated behavior that interferes with other students' experiences
 - Disclosure of serious problem or crisis
 - Other marked changes in behavior, dress, or hygiene



The Dean of Students

When to refer

CONCERNING BEHAVIOR RESPONSE GUIDE

STUDENT IN CRISIS —OR— STUDENT OF CONCERN?



STUDENT IN CRISIS:

A person whose conduct is markedly bizarre, disruptive, or dangerous; makes verbal or physical threats, which may include active threats of suicide.



STUDENT OF CONCERN:

A person who appears confused, very sad, highly anxious, irritable, lacks motivation and/or concentration, may be thinking about suicide.

YES

POTENTIAL HARM TO SELF OR OTHERS

NO



EMERGENCY

911



CONTACT the OFFICE of the DEAN of STUDENTS

919.966.4042

deanofstudents.unc.edu/carereport | dos@unc.edu



Important Rules that Limit YOUR Behavior!

- FERPA — The Federal Educational Rights Privacy Act
- UNC Policy on Harassment and Discrimination
- UNC Policy on Amorous Relationships
- UNC Honor Code



Important Rules/Regs/Policies

FERPA

- FERPA is a set of Federal laws affecting access, to and disclosure of, student records
- (Overly) Simple view:
 - Students over age 18 are adults and are in charge of most aspects of the dissemination of information about themselves
- How it effects you:
 - FERPA affects how you return graded material and what you are allowed to say
 - Basically, you cannot reveal the results of a student's graded work to anyone except that student unless the student has given permission.
 - Not even their parents!



Important Rules/Regs/Policies

FERPA

- Scenario 1: Father of a student calls to learn the student's grade
 - “I’m paying tuition and have the right to know how he’s doing!”
- Scenario 2: Mother of a student calls because student is unhappy with a grade in a class last semester
 - “I just want to help and advocate for Bobby!”
- Scenario 3: Parent of student calls to learn why a student can’t get into a particular class they want
- Scenario 4: Potential employer calls to confirm a student is on track to graduate in May
 - Or attended the university during a given period, or ...



Important Rules/Regs/Policies

FERPA

- General rule to follow: Always get the *written* permission from a student before divulging any personal information about the student to anyone
 - Make sure the authorization is use-specific



Important Rules/Regs/Policies

Discrimination and Harassment

- *Discrimination*

- An intentional or unintentional act that results in adverse treatment of a person based on race, color, gender, age, color, national origin, religion, creed, disability, veteran's status or sexual orientation gender identity or gender expression (“protected status”)

- *Harassment*

- A form of discrimination that occurs when verbal or physical conduct based on an individual's protected status unreasonably interferes with that individual's work or academic performance or creates a hostile work or educational environment for that individual, including affecting his/her personal safety or participation in University-sponsored activities



Important Rules/Regs/Policies

Discrimination and Harassment

- Simple points:
 - Be sensitive to the diversity of our student body
 - Be careful, even in the jokes you tell in recitation and office hours
 - Treat others as you'd want them to treat you
- Also, note that *you* can be a victim of discrimination or harassment!
 - Students can be mean/cruel/inappropriate
 - Today, many people seem concerned about being fraudulently accused of discrimination or harassment
 - » This has led to strong opinions on open vs. closed door meeting policies --- give this a read
- Tell your Dept. Chair immediately if you feel you are being harassed or offered a *quid pro quo*



Important Rules/Regs/Policies

Amorous relationships with students

- There sure are a lot of good looking students on this campus (and all campuses!)
- Students and Profs/Instructors/TAs develop friendships
- Friendships, professional relationships are fine
 - In fact, these are encouraged!
- But romantic relationships are strictly forbidden between faculty and students they advise/supervise
 - Don't even think about it with students in your class!
 - The president of the University of Michigan was fired back in January 2022 for violating a similar rule!
 - And the president of CNN resigned in February 2022 for something similar!



Important Rules/Regs/Policies

Amorous relationships with students

- UNC policy (summarized):
 - It is *misconduct*, subject to *disciplinary action*, for a University *employee* to evaluate or supervise any enrolled student of the institution with whom he or she has an amorous relationship or to whom he or she is related by blood, law or marriage
 - It is *misconduct*, subject to *disciplinary action*, for a University *employee* to engage in sexual activity with any enrolled student of the institution, other than his or her spouse, who is a minor below the age of 18 years
- What exactly is “amorous”?
 - An “amorous relationship” exists when, without benefit of marriage, two persons as consenting partners (a) have a sexual union or (b) engage in romantic partnering or courtship that may or may not have been consummated sexually



Important Rules/Regs/Policies

Honor Code

- The Honor Code is an elaborate code of conduct for all UNC students, especially undergraduates
 - Covers lying, cheating, forging, plagiarising, stealing, ...
- Highlights:
 - All students are required to sign a pledge on all graded academic work certifying that no unauthorized assistance has been received or given in the completion of the work
 - Students suspected of violating the pledge are subjected to a student-run judicial process to adjudicate



Honor Code

What does this mean for you as an instructor?

- If, for *whatever reason* you *suspect* that someone has cheated, or otherwise violated their pledge, you must act on your suspicion
 - You can't ignore suspected violations
- You can either refer the case to the Honor Court or attempt to investigate yourself
 - If you investigate, document every step you take
 - If you refer the case, all work must be graded as if it were in full compliance with the pledge
 - (Although you don't have to return the work to the student)
- Taking action on your own (*e.g.* giving a zero on a plagiarized assignment) is prohibited
 - You can take no punitive action against the student without first discussing the matter with the student



Where to go for help

- Teaching or being a TA is not an exercise in machismo
 - It's ok to ask for help and there's lots of help to be had
 - Just be sure to ask for help early enough for it to do some good
- Sample places where help can be found:
 - Senior colleagues will always be glad to help navigate tricky situations
 - Center for Faculty Excellence has programs
 - The Grad School offers some mini courses