Disruptive Behaviour: Guidelines For A Coordinated ANU Response

1. Background

The University aims to provide a safe, supportive and healthy environment for students and staff.

From time to time however, there are incidents where a student’s behaviour is disruptive in the classroom or in other settings on campus. While some behaviour may simply be inappropriate without any rationale, disruptive behaviour may also arise where a student has a psychological or physical disorder that causes distress to others, or where a student may have an unresolved grievance against the University.

In the majority of cases, students will be effectively managed by direct responses by ANU staff and/or referral to student services, the Dean of Students and/or other resources internal or external to the University for counselling, problem solving or support.

However, if the behaviour is repeated, severe, highly visible and/or there is a significant impact on others, then considered and coordinated management by staff in key roles may be necessary to promote positive outcomes for the student and the University community.

Harassing (eg sexual harassment and bullying behaviours), discriminatory or physically violent behaviours are not covered by these guidelines, but are addressed elsewhere under the University’s policies and rules.

2. Objectives

This document aims to:

- Provide guidelines for the management of disruptive student behaviour
- Outline how a coordinated ANU response can be developed where a student’s behaviours may be impacting on a number of aspects of University life.

3. Principles

- The University response must be appropriate to the level of behaviour demonstrated by the student

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1 For the purposes of this document, disruptive behaviour includes distressed, disturbed or threatening student behaviour that impinges on others. See also the brochure for staff ‘Dealing with Student Distress’ prepared by the University Counselling Centre http://www.anu.edu.au/counsel/advisor.php

2 Contact Security x52249 about violent behaviours

Disruptive Behaviour: Guidelines for a Coordinated ANU Response. Prepared and revised by University Counselling Centre, Dep Registrar DRSS, Dean of Students, University Counsel, Office of Policy and Regulation Aug 2008
• The response must recognise and balance behaviours which may arise from health problems/disability and concerns for community safety and well-being
• Early intervention is usually more effective than a deferred response
• Fairness, transparency and reasonableness should characterise the decision-making process, with comprehensive but confidential records essential.

4. **Relationship to the Medical Leave Rules**

Where a student’s behaviour arises as a symptom of a possible *serious health condition* as defined by the Medical Leave Rules, the Registrar should be notified in accordance with the procedures set out in those Rules: www.anu.edu.au/cabs/rules/MedicalLeaveRules.pdf

These guidelines outline an approach to managing all students that may also have benefits when applied to a student with a *serious health condition*, but are not designed to be followed without regard to the processes outlined in the Medical Leave Rules.

5. **Related policies, protocols and rules**

Related procedural information can be found in the following:
• Student Complaint Resolution Policy http://info.anu.edu.au/Policies/_DVC/Policies/Student_Complaint_Resolution.asp

Useful information about privacy and discrimination issues:
• Disclosure of information by students with a disability or illness http://info.anu.edu.au/Policies/_DVC/Policies/Disclosure_of_Information_by_Students_with_a_Disability_or_Illness.asp
• Frequently Asked Questions on Privacy http://www.anu.edu.au/legal/content/privacy/
• Privacy Policy http://info.anu.edu.au/Policies/_VC/Policies/Privacy_Statement_Collection_Use_Control_Personal_Information.asp

Useful information about dealing with distressed or disturbed students:
• the University Counselling Centre brochure entitled ‘Dealing with Student Distress’ which can be found at www.anu.edu.au/counsel/adviser_to_staff/index.php
• Adviser to Staff website http://www.anu.edu.au/counsel/adviser_to_staff/
• Dean of Students website http://www.anu.edu.au/dos/

6. **Problem Identification**

When a staff member is concerned about a student’s behaviour, the matter should be discussed initially with the staff member’s academic or area supervisor.
Where the behaviour may be an isolated instance, or does not significantly affect others or appears to be a symptom of illness or social distress, the staff member and/or supervisor (e.g., a more senior staff member such as the Dean or Director of the College or Centre at which the student is studying or the Head of the Residential Hall where the student is living or the Delegated Authority for the area - see delegations 2.18) may discuss the matter with the student, and where appropriate, refer the student to the relevant student services (e.g., Counselling Centre, Disability Services Centre).

Where the staff member/supervisor becomes aware that the behaviour is continuing or is significantly impacting on others in the University community, through their own observations or contact, or reports made to them by others, then the Delegated Authority should be contacted. Again, if the student has not already been advised of the extent of concerns about their behaviour, the Delegated Authority should convene a meeting with the student. The meeting might also include staff members most aware of the concerns.

Once the problem has been discussed with the student, it may be clearer what the next steps should be. These could include:

- Liaison with Counselling or other relevant University services about options for intervention
- Consider, in collaboration with the Disability Services Centre, the possibility of reasonable adjustments to course delivery
- Continuing review by the College or Centre without referral to others
- Referral to University student support services, such as the Counselling Centre, Health Centre or Disability Services Centre
- Referral to the Dean of Students
- Referral to the Registrar under the Medical Leave Rules
- Management of the problematic behaviour through formal ANU procedures (See Point 5 above)
- Management of the behaviour through the legal systems (with advice from the University's Legal Office) and/or Security

7. Follow-through

After the meeting, the Delegated Authority (or most senior staff member, in the Delegated Authority’s absence) alone, or where relevant, in collaboration with other involved University staff, such as the Registrar, Dean of Students, Legal Office or Security staff:

- must take active steps to ensure any changes/adjustments agreed by or imposed upon the student are monitored
- should keep brief, factual notes of the meeting. These may be stored as a separate confidential file in the Delegated Authority’s office. They may also include a copy of the staff member’s brief factual notes as well. The student should be advised that this is occurring
- should ensure that the Occupational Health and Safety Unit has been advised of any incidents which have affected the emotional or physical safety of staff.
Staff who are distressed by the situation are able to seek support through the University's Adviser to Staff (X 53616) or the Employee Assistance Program http://info.anu.edu.au/hr/Salaries_and_Conditions/Staff_Counselling.asp.

8. A coordinated University response

Where a student's behaviour is affecting many sections of the University community, a coordinated university response is required. The aim with this approach (known as ‘case management’) is to ensure the student receives consistent messages from all parties, with one person carrying the responsibility for liaising with the student. The case management approach may be required even when formal University procedures are being implemented (eg Medical Leave or Disciplinary procedures under the relevant rules).

The Dean of Students is responsible for the initial coordination of concerns, assessment of the situation and overseeing the development of the case management plan. The Dean of Students may:

- meet with the student to hear the student’s perspective
- refer the student to relevant student support services eg Counselling Centre, Health Centre, Disability Services Unit, Academic Skills and Learning Centre etc
- meet with relevant staff or stakeholders (eg ANU Security) to develop a coordinated response (in some instances this may extend to developing a ‘safety plan’)
- mediate or request mediation from an external provider
- contact external service providers if appropriate
- explain to the student possible further responses by the University to the student’s behaviour eg University procedures, legal action etc
- delegate the overview and monitoring of the situation or retain responsibility for ongoing monitoring
- refer the student to the Registrar to consider formal assessment by an external medical specialist (forensic or clinical), and other action under the Medical Leave Rules.

9. Responding to threatening or inappropriate behaviour

In face-to-face cases the immediate safety of everyone involved is the paramount consideration. If, at any time, you begin to feel unsafe ask the person to leave. If they refuse, leave yourself and seek assistance by going to the closest place with other people and call Security x52249.

‘Gathering support’ whereby a number of staff gather to provide assistance will often de-escalate the situation. Another staff member may keep the person talking while Security arrive. All should leave if the situation continues to escalate. If you call Security be clear about your building number and location.

If you believe it is safe to pursue the conversation then remember safety of people is the first priority. Never put yourself at risk for the sake of property or argument.
following guidelines can be helpful when conversing with a person who is threatening or inappropriate:

- Be calm: the more fear and confusion you display, the more the aggressor feels in control which reinforces their threatening behaviour. Remind yourself to be calm and professional and follow your prepared procedures. Be ready to withdraw from the scene should their aggression escalate.
- Be aware: assess the situation, step back and take in information - keep thinking. Avoid being drawn into the aggressor's emotional storm by concentrating on the tasks you have to perform.
- Be professional: if you have decided it is safe to engage the aggressor, keep a safe distance and attempt to engage them in conversation. Use their name, if you know it, and introduce yourself, including your role and let them know you want to understand the issue and that you intend to help them. Examples of this might be:
  1. Hello I’m ....(name) and I’m the supervisor here, what can I do to help you?
  2. If I know the problem then I can tell you what I can do to help

- Defuse/de-escalate: encourage the person to tell you their grievance in a calm and clear way that allows you to work together to solve the problem. Tell the person you want to help and you will do what you can.
- Summarise what they have told you
- Tell them that you cannot allow threatening or inappropriate behaviour, so you cannot help them if they continue

If aggression and hostility are escalating rather than diminishing, after genuine attempts to assist the person, do not persist. Leave and call Security x 52249

As soon as the person has left, and the immediate phase of the incident is closed, do the following:

- account for everyone involved and acknowledge everyone's safety
- take a break from normal duties and take some time to calm the situation.
- As soon as is practical write a detailed summary of what occurred including the wording of any threats
- Hold a meeting with staff/students concerned to debrief the situation and refer if appropriate to EAP or counselling.
- Notify appropriate supervisory staff and Dean of Students for students x 54184 or HR Director for staff x 53349
10. Relevant stakeholders

Relevant University stakeholders in the process may include representatives of the following:

- Security 52249
- Dean of Students 54184
- Deputy Registrar (Student Services) 51757
- University Counselling Centre 52442
- University Health Centre 53598
- Disability Services Centre 55036
- Academic Skills and Learning Centre 52972
- International Education Office 54643
- University Legal Office 58489
- College/ Centre/ Division
- Halls/ Colleges of Residence
- Human Resources (including Occupational Health and Safety and Employment Strategies Branch) 53349
- The Registrar 53634
- Students’ Association PARSA 52444 54187