



TUTTLEMAN  
Counseling  
Services

*civility*  
ON CAMPUS



TEMPLE UNIVERSITY®  
Student Affairs

# CIVILITY on campus

*This document was developed by a multidisciplinary committee of Temple staff and faculty to address the issue of civility on campus, especially in the classroom. It is intended as a practical step-by-step guide for faculty and staff who deal with issues of incivility on a daily basis. It takes into consideration prevention measures, intervention and emergency response. It is offered with the hope of helping to create a more civil, and thus safer and more satisfying experience for the entire university community.*

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

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# Tuttleman Counseling Services

## INTRODUCTION

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In recent years many college and university professors, administrators and mental health professionals report a growing number of students on campus who become disruptive to the educational mission of the institution. Although a small portion of an entire student population, managing these students often requires a great deal of resources.

It is clear that institutions need to address the trend of increased disruptiveness on campus and provide guidelines to university personnel that are neither too punitive nor too permissive, and strike a proper balance that reflects the educational mission and values of the institution, and are morally and legally sound. For instance, those with mental illness have the same rights as anyone else to pursue higher education and are protected by the Americans with Disabilities Act, provided they abide by the student code of conduct while pursuing their education. The purpose of this document is to provide guidelines for Temple University. The following definition of disruptiveness is adapted from Gerald Amada's article: *Dealing With the Disruptive College Student: Some Theoretical and Practical Considerations*,

**“The disruptive student is one who persistently makes inordinate demands for time and attention from faculty and staff, habitually interferes with the learning environment by disruptive verbal or behavioral expressions, verbally threatens or abuses college personnel, willfully damages college property, misuses drugs or alcohol on college premises, or physically threatens or assaults others. The result is disruption of academic, administrative, social, or recreational activities on campus.”**

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There is an acknowledgment in this definition of a range of potentially disruptive behaviors from those that are simply annoying to those that are criminal. For this reason it is important to present guidelines that take into consideration this range and to present a range of responses on the part of the institution that mirrors the breadth and complexity of the issue. The suggestions that follow include measures that are designed to prevent disruptiveness in the first place, moving on to interventions to try when a student becomes disruptive, and finally to emergency procedures needed when a situation is potentially dangerous. Our recommendations are assembled into three broad categories:

1. **Prevention**
2. **Intervention**
3. **Emergency Response**

In addition, a description is given of Temple University's CARE (Crisis Assessment Response and Education) Team at the end of this document. This group is available to consult with you to determine how best to help you to address a situation.

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## PREVENTION

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This section is offered as a way of helping personnel set a tone at the university that is incompatible with disruptiveness. To accomplish this we must all be proactive and state our expectations for acceptable behavior. Often, by the time faculty or a staff member reports an incident or series of incidents of disruptiveness, the situation is quite serious. It is our hope that some of these incidents can be avoided by adopting some if not all of the following prevention guidelines.

We recommend that instructors **state expectations** for civil behavior in their syllabi, as well as state their expectations verbally in class. University departments can state their expectations in print and web documents as well as on signage. References should be made to the Student Code of Conduct, and copies of that document should be abundant and made readily available.

**Convey empathy** to students who are in distress. At times of high anxiety or agitation, a simple acknowledgment of the student's feelings can go a long way towards deescalating a situation. For example, if a student comes to a professor tearfully explaining that s/he couldn't complete an assignment in time due to the death of a pet, it is appropriate to express condolences, regardless of what the expectation might be for making up the work.

If we **listen carefully AND check that our message is received** we can avoid miscommunication. Often we assume that others are hearing what we intend. The only way to be sure that your messages are received is to ask persons to restate what you have told them.

Anxiety sometimes seems to be contagious. That is, when exposed to someone who is highly anxious, it is possible that you too will begin feeling anxious. It is important to remember that you have a choice about whether or not you will become "infected" by anxiety. It is preferable to **manage your own anxiety** so as to convey a feeling of containment to the student. Remaining calm often serves to help the student calm down.

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It is also important to acknowledge that when students express anger it is not always irrational, or due to feelings of entitlement, or due to a “disorder.” Sometimes it is a response to real frustrations or injustice. When faced with a student’s anger it is important to understand its meaning. **Choosing to remain calm** when faced with a student’s anger is the first step in maintaining or restoring civility. Giving encouragement and praise when appropriate can be very helpful to the student, and helps to restore a feeling of calm.

It can be seen as a supportive and caring gesture to suggest that a student receive emotional support by going to Tuttleman Counseling Services. It is also good practice to **avail yourself of emotional support** and advice by seeking a consultation from Tuttleman Counseling Services staff. This may serve to clarify the issues around disruptiveness and mental health issues.

## INTERVENTION

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Unfortunately at times the prevention methods presented above are not sufficient to deter disruptiveness. At those times it is important to become active in directly addressing disruptive students and documenting the disruptive behavior. Many faculty and staff, for a variety of reasons, will not address the problem quickly, or will lean toward trying to refer disruptive students to counseling rather than stating their expectations and beginning the documentation process. This is a mistake for a number of reasons.

Often there is the naïve belief that a referral to counseling services will cause the disruptive behavior to stop. While counseling can be very helpful for a wide variety of concerns, and it may in fact eventually have an impact on disruptive behaviors, the reasons for disruptiveness are quite varied and counseling may have little or no initial impact. Students may not be interested in counseling, and may see it as coercive to be referred after a behavioral infraction (which can be counterproductive to establishing the counseling relationship). In addition, valuable time will be lost during which the problem could begin to be addressed.

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Such a referral also could serve to distort and undermine the basis for a disciplinary process, namely confronting disruptive behavior and creating a civil community. It also serves to inappropriately transfer the responsibility and authority for administering discipline from where it rightly belongs i.e. the University Disciplinary Committee or other judicial bodies.

The following interventions should be tried when students' disruptiveness does not abate spontaneously or diminish as a result of the prevention methods described above. They are presented in ascending order from least confrontational and restrictive to most.

**Verbally inform** students about the specific behaviors that are disruptive (e.g. "When you talk continuously in the back of the room I find it very difficult to teach the lesson. It is distracting and I would like you to stop.") Then document the conversation.

**Document everything** in behavioral language (e.g., "Jane Doe talked continuously to her neighbors during lecture on these dates. I asked her to discontinue this practice on \_\_\_\_, however she continued to talk incessantly at every class meeting").

**Involve witnesses** to corroborate what you are experiencing. Sometimes when other students are adversely affected by disruptiveness they are more than willing to add documentation to your own. This can be very helpful if a judicial process is begun.

**Communicate with your supervisor.** It is recommended to involve your supervisor even before you determine that the problem may require disciplinary procedures. Ask for advice and share the burden of figuring out the proper response.

**To begin formal disciplinary procedures, consult with the University Code Administrator 1-8531.**

**At any point in the process, consultation is available with Tuttleman Counseling Services staff 1-7276.**

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## EMERGENCY RESPONSE

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It is hoped that warning signs are heeded and that steps are taken early to deescalate a situation. However this is not always possible and at times danger is imminent and needs to be dealt with immediately. In the book *The Gift of Fear* the following are presented as possible warning signs of violence: inflexibility; adverse reactions to criticism; blaming others for the results of one's own actions; paranoia; use of threats; intimidation; manipulation; escalation; unrealistic expectations; sullen, angry, or depressed affect; history of filing grievances; history of assault or behavioral offenses; and hopelessness.

It is very important that individual instructors decide for themselves the point at which disruptiveness crosses over into the category of danger. No faculty or staff member should have to put up with bullying or intimidation or worse. It is also recognized that different faculty and staff, due to their own histories, will have very different thresholds for perceiving danger. For this reason the following definition of a dangerous situation is offered:

**A dangerous situation can be defined as one in which a student (or anyone) poses a serious threat to themselves, to you, or to someone else. This may include verbal threats of bodily harm, physical intimidation or assault, sexual assault, and threats of suicide or homicide.**

If a student is highly agitated, remember that you should not meet with that person in isolation, or at all if you feel unsafe. As a general rule, as the level of perceived threat increases, it is important to **inform your supervisors and enlist their assistance**. Usually department chairs have a role in listening to all sides of a situation and determining what other agents of the university should be involved to restore order. At that time contacting a CARE team member (see below) is recommended. Doing so can add to a feeling of safety and also afford the consultation that may help you assess a situation properly. It is well known that under stress our ability to assess situations and make good decisions suffers. Asking for help also enables you to share responsibility for the outcome.

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The following options are available if it is believed that a student (or anyone) poses a threat to themselves, to you or to someone else: Immediately call Campus Safety Services 1-1234, to restore order in the event of an imminent threat or physical violence. If mental health issues seem to be present, in addition to the involvement of police, Tuttleman Counseling Services 1-7276 staff may have a role. If students are not an imminent threat and are amenable to going to Tuttleman Counseling Services for an evaluation, mental health staff will assess the students' needs and make recommendations about the next steps to take, as in cases where hospitalization may be indicated.

After the emergency has been dealt with it is important for all parties to document the event in writing.

## CARE TEAM

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In line with emerging best practices across the nation, Temple made a decision in the summer of 2007 to create a special team of individuals who discuss students of concern. The CARE (Crisis Assessment Response and Education) Team meets weekly to discuss how best to intervene when serious safety concerns are present. The group is chaired by the Dean of Students and is also comprised of individuals who represent the following offices: University Counsel, Campus Safety Services, Tuttleman Counseling Services, Academic Affairs, University Disciplinary Committee, University Housing, Student Health Services, and Disability Resources and Services. The group works diligently to find solutions to potentially dangerous situations by getting students the help and services they need and/or by confronting inappropriate or threatening behavior.

## WORKSHOPS

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It is possible to request a workshop on the contents of this document and other related topics. CARE Team members will be selected to address your particular needs. Please call the Dean of Student's Office 1-7188 to request a workshop.

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