It is important to differentiate between disruptive classroom behavior (that which directly interferes with the ability of the instructor to teach or the ability of other students to benefit from the classroom experience) from behavior that is merely rude or uncivil. While the latter may become disruptive when it is repetitive or persistent, it usually is best addressed by example and influence.

Disruptive student behavior is detrimental to the academic community because it interferes with the learning process for other students, inhibits the ability of instructors to teach most effectively, diverts university energy and resources away from the educational mission, and may indicate a significant level of personal problems or distress on the part of the disrupter.

### Common Types of Disruptive Classroom Behavior

**Grandstanding:**

Use the classroom for themselves by monopolizing class discussion, speaking protractedly and bombastically on favorite subjects with no regard to relevancy to the discussion.

**Sleeping in Class:**

While passively disruptive, it sends a message to the other students about the quality of the class or teaching. It is disrespectful to the instructor and the other students.

**Prolonged Chattering:**

Small cliques of 2-3 students who engage in private conversations or pass notes to each other.

**Excessive Lateness:**

Students who not only come in late, but make an entrance speaking to friends, walking in front of the professor, arranging their belongings.

**Noisy Electric Devices:**

Beepers and pagers going off in class or students talking on the telephone during the class.

**Disputing the Instructor’s Authority or Expertise:**

Students may be disappointed or frustrated over a grade and may debunk or devalue the instructor’s judgment, authority, and expertise. This may take the form of comments in the class or memos to department chair or dean.

**Verbal or Physical Threats to Students or Faculty:**

Some verbal threats are veiled while others are more explicit. A threatening student may approach the instructor or fellow students menacingly, or actually shove the individual, or worse, physically assault them.
Levels of Response

- **Prevention** – setting standards for behavior in class, developing a process for notifying students of the standards, developing a process to respond to violations of class standards as well as university standards, and responding to violations in a consistent and fair manner.

- **Intervention** by the Instructor.

- **Reporting** behavior to **Department Chair** for consultation/intervention.

- **Reporting** behavior to **Student Conduct** for disciplinary action.

- **Reporting** behavior to **University Police** for immediate action.

Reasons Why Instructors Do Not Respond to Disruptive Acts

**“Benign” Inaction:**

Some instructors believe if they take no action, that somehow the disruption will stop on its own. They believe that at some point the student will see the error of his/her way and stop the behavior.

The instructor may think that the student will see such action as being a “good guy”, generous and kind and will therefore be grateful to the instructor.

However, many students interpret this as fear, naiveté, or indifference to their conduct. If this is a highly disruptive student, they often take further advantage of their power and the behavior may escalate.

**Fear of Receiving Inadequate Administrative Support:**

Some instructors are afraid of receiving adverse reactions from administrators in their department. They may be afraid that the administrator may believe that there had been malice or ineptitude on the part of the instructor.

It can happen that the administrator may devalue the instructor’s assessment of the seriousness of the disruption. This is most difficult for instructors who are part-time or untenured.

**Fear of Harming the Psychologically Fragile Student:**

Often reports by instructors include reference to the students’ state of mind or psychological status. However, once they convince themselves of the students’ psychological frailty, they think it would be inappropriate to use the discipline process with them.

However, many of these students need the direction and limit-setting from others that the discipline process can provide.
**Fear of Physical Reprisals:**
Instructors are often afraid to respond or report disruptive behavior because of real or perceived threats from students.

If a real threat has occurred, the instructor may not only be afraid of the student, but may convince themselves that reporting would incite the student to physical action. It is always best for the instructor to take threats or threatening behavior seriously and consult with the appropriate administrator about the appropriate course of action.

However, as an agent of the university, all faculty have a duty to report threats of violence.

**Fear of Legal Reprisals:**
Instructors sometimes fail to act because they are afraid of being sued. While we live in a litigious time where anyone can sue anyone, if instructors follow the university due process procedures, the likelihood of having to deal with a lawsuit is diminished.

**Misperceiving the Nature of Discipline:**
Many instructors attach very negative connotations to the role and nature of discipline and choose not to place themselves the role of disciplinarian, nor want to report to an office that they perceive is punitive.