

# Dealing with Student Disruptive Behavior in the Classroom – A Case Example of the Coordination between Faculty and Assistant Dean for Academics

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## Abstract

Disruptive behaviors are common in higher education classrooms. When they occur, faculty members have options for dealing with each situation, which is as unique as the students involved. Ultimately, the preferred goals of the educators are to end the distraction and to have the disruptive student(s) continue their civil participation and progress in the class. To achieve both goals it may become necessary for the faculty member to seek help from school administrators to resolve the disruption.

This paper discusses the coordination between a professor and an assistant dean in addressing recurring disruptive behavior by a student in the professor's classroom. Each is employed in a college of business at a large state university in Pennsylvania. The result of their cooperation led to a win/win situation for all participants. The first win was the termination of the disruption and the second win was the student's improved attitude, performance, and ultimate timely graduation. However, multiple challenges and a high level of collaboration between the faculty and the assistant dean were required to reach this outcome. The steps they took to address the student's combative and disrespectful behavior are explored in this paper.

A point to be clarified is that the title assistant dean for academics is used here. Although this is the title specific to the case discussed later in the paper, it is synonymous with the position at any university that is initially responsible for intervention regarding student and faculty academic issues. Thus, although the paper shows the actual cooperation that took place with the "assistant dean for academics", it can also be applied to the more general titles of "academic dean" and "dean of students". For purpose of simplicity, the title academic dean has been used in the remainder of the paper except in the discussion of the specific case which took place at the university indicated in this Study.

**Keywords:** Student problems, faculty and student problems, student disruptive behavior, classroom disruptions, coordination between

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faculty and academic dean, coordination between faculty and assistant dean, coordination between faculty and administration.

## Introduction

Anyone who has taught in a college classroom or for that matter any classroom has, on occasion, been confronted

with an unruly student. The kinds of behavior that a disruptive student might exhibit include sleeping in class, arriving late, engaging in conversation either with other class members or on their cell phones, arguing with the instructor text messaging, playing video games or even in rare cases becoming hostile (Hubell and Hubell, 2010, p. 1).

Facing disruptive behavior seems to be an inevitable part the working environment of many educators (Anderson, 1999, Nordstrom, Bartless and Busy, 2009, Siedman, 2005) The issues leading to the disruption are often easily resolved by pointing out to the student how their behavior disrupts the teaching/learning process. Sometimes, several reminders from the instructor are needed before the student responds appropriately. In rare cases, students may persist with their disruptive behavior and administrative measures subjecting the student to some form of disciplinary action may be needed. The key is for the educator to take some action to stop the disruptive behavior, reactivate the student's participation in the learning process, and prevent other class members from being affected (Nordstrom, Bartels and Bucy 2009). In addition, if the offending student will be a member of future classes taught by the instructor, it is important to attempt to preserve a good relationship between the two.

Administrative measures may include temporarily or permanently removing the student from the class, dismissing the student from the department, placing them on probation or removing them from the institution altogether. Any one of these actions may harm the student's academic progress and, in the long run, may put their completion of a degree in jeopardy (Johnson, 2012). Instead of taking these measures, faculty can attempt alternative corrections that may yield a win/win outcome (Feltner and Goodsell, 1972). This can be achieved by stopping the disruptive behavior while not impeding student's academic progress. To accomplish this, cooperation/collaboration between the faculty member and the academic dean regarding the student's behavior may be necessary (Kuo, 2009).

This paper illustrates the experience of a faculty and an assistant dean for academics in dealing with disruptive behavior in the classroom. The case on which this paper is based occurred when a female student demonstrated her unhappiness with an assignment by slamming her computer keyboard and desk repeatedly, calling attention to herself and distracting the other students. The professor talked to the student several times but, rather than calming down, the student continued her actions and became increasingly hostile. Because the professor felt punitive disciplinary actions would likely result in the student's dismissal, he approached the assistant dean to develop an alternative solution. Due to their collaboration, the issue was ultimately resolved, the student took additional courses with the same professor and ended up graduating "on time".

The remainder of this paper is divided into the following sections: First, it defines disruptive behavior and examines its underlying causes and forms and presents faculty and student perspectives of the behavior. Second, it examines faculty's role in maintaining civility in the classroom. Third, it explains the role of academic dean in dealing with student issues and describes the position of the assistant dean for academics at the institution where this case study was based. Fourth, it explains details of the case study of this paper and finally, it offers a summary and suggestion for future research

### **About Disruptive Behavior in the Classroom**

Holton (1999) noted "Conflict has always been a part of the classroom ... in early American classrooms, student uprisings were not uncommon" (p. 59). Although conflict may be common in the classroom, when it elevates to the level of disruption for others in the classroom, actions must be taken to seek resolution. To understand disruptive behavior, we need to clarify what makes a behavior disruptive and view it from the perspectives of the parties involved.

## ***Disruptive Behavior – Definition***

The University of North Carolina student affairs office defined disruptive behavior as “any behavior that disturbs, interferes with, disrupts, or prevents any normal operations and functions of the University. As the primary function of the University is education, “normal operations” would include teaching, classroom activities, and a student's right to pursue educational opportunities” (What is disruptive behavior, 2012). Charles (1999) defines misbehavior as “behavior that is considered inappropriate for the setting or situation in which it occurs” (p. 2). Although both definitions give general understanding of the meaning of disruptive behavior, dissecting the words and understanding their meaning gives deeper insight into what constitutes “disruptive behavior”.

Webster’s dictionary defines the word disruption within three contexts: “to break apart, to throw into disorder and to interrupt the normal course or unity of” (disruption, 2012). At the same time, it gives the following three contexts of the word behavior: “the manner of conducting oneself, the way in which someone behaves and the way in which something functions or operates” (behavior, 2012).

Taking both words within the context of the classroom, the authors believe that what constitutes a disruptive behavior are the following three criteria:

- There is conduct that interrupts the normal education process, such as teaching or giving an exam
- The conduct is repeated
- The conduct has the intention of interruption

For example, if a student is interrupting the class by talking with fellow students during lecture times, it may not be disruptive. However, if the student is asked not to talk while the professor is lecturing and keeps doing it after being told not to, then the behavior is considered disruptive.

## ***Disruptive Behavior – Underlying Causes***

Although students may disrupt the classroom because they disagree with something said or done by the professor or another student during class, there are often underlying causes of disruptive behavior unrelated to the class itself. Student misbehavior may be caused by physical problems, emotional challenges, or environmental factors (Kuhlenschmidt and Layne, 1999).

Physical causes beyond permanent physical impairments may include the use of medications, drugs, and other substances. A study conducted by O'Malley and Johnston (2002) confirmed what most faculty already know that college students have an alarmingly high rate of alcohol use/abuse. The study used five sources of data for estimating recent levels of alcohol (and other drug) use among college students: Harvard School of Public Health College Alcohol Study, the Core Institute, Monitoring the Future, National College Health Risk Behavior Survey and National Household Survey on Drug Abuse. The study results indicated that attention and self-control leading to disruptive behavior in class can be significantly impacted by a student’s consumption of alcohol in the hours before (including the evening before class. Other physical factors including injury or illness may also lead to behavior that disrupts the normal classroom atmosphere (Kuhlenschmidt and Layne, 1999).

Emotional challenges that many students experience include feelings of isolation and loss, immaturity, misdirected aggression, and struggles associated with identity development (Kuhlenschmidt and Layne, 1999). These issues can manifest themselves through misbehavior in the college classroom, such as being angry before class and bringing that emotion into the classroom.

## Student Disruptive Behavior in the Classroom

Environmental factors which can influence a student's misbehavior include norm of conduct, class size, culture and task. Norm of conduct deals with what the students are accustomed to or what they consider "disruptive" versus "not disruptive". A student may consider talking with other students sitting beside them as perfectly normal not aware of their effect on the other students or the class (Johnson, 2012). Large classes can reduce the sense of connection to the instructor,

In addition to the causes mentioned above, vague course requirements are considered one of the prime factors for student disruptions. Faculty whose syllabi do not clearly outline academic and behavioral expectations for his/her courses may leave students guessing about what the instructor expects. The resulting confusion can lead to unintended disruptive behavior which becomes intentional if the student then defies the instructor's intervention (Richardson, 1999).

### ***Disruptive Behavior – Forms***

Meyers, Hill and Thomas (2006) described interpersonal conflicts that lead to disruptive behavior and gave the following examples:

- Disparaging the instructor
- Arguing with classmates
- Actively disputing course grades and requirements
- Inattentiveness, engaging in side conversations

Seidman (2005) added two other forms of disruptive behavior:

- Students chatting and laughing amongst themselves
- Active cell phone use during class

Many types of disruptive behavior are found in a college classroom, but in general, forms of disruptive behavior fall into one of three categories: Behavior by the student individually (including while interacting with technology), behavior interacting with other students, and behavior interacting with the instructor. Kuhlenschmidt and Layne (1999) and (Nordstrom, Bartels and Bucy, 2009) noted that all faculty are confronted at some point with disruptive students who come to class late; leave early; speak out inappropriately; call, text, or play games on cell phones; read materials unrelated to the class, such as newspapers or other course texts; or sleep during class.

Disruptions can be caused by a group of students together, such as carrying on conversations, passing notes between students, or cheating on an exam. This may lead to further disruptions and to the involvement of additional students.

Disruptions caused by a student interacting inappropriately with the instructor include talking back disrespectfully or challenging the instructor in a negative tone while arguing over grades, assignments, or other course requirements. If the instructor does not handle these interactions properly, these kinds of behaviors have the potential to spread to other students as well. Kuhlenschmidt and Layne (1999) add the more serious behaviors of stalking, intimidation, and attacks to the list.

### ***Disruptive Behavior – Effects***

From the perspective of students, disruptive behavior in the classroom inhibits learning and impacts retention (Young, 2003) In addition, disruptive behavior negatively influences faculty comfort and satisfaction, as well as the satisfaction of other essential university employees such as those working in the bookstore, financial and academic service offices, etc. (Seidman, 2005, p.45).

Student comprehension of the course content is impacted by what is going around them in the classroom. When students engage in extraneous conversation during class, they and others around them are distracted from the lecture or class activities (Seidman, 2005). Disruption of learning also occurs with students arriving late, leaving early, or using class time to engage in personal conversation with the instructor. The disruption of the flow of the class may affect student satisfaction with the instructor and the general performance of students in the class (Meyers, Hill and Thomas, 2006).

### ***Disruptive Behavior – Faculty Perceptions***

Nordstrom, Bartels and Bucy (2009) theorized that today's students believe they only need to play a passive role in the learning process. Bugeja (2006) noted that today's students expect to be entertained as they learn and Boice (1996) indicated that when students are asked to take more active role in the learning process, they may become resistant, disruptive or outwardly hostile.

Faculty perceptions of student disruptions are further thought to be related to both student background and generational issues. Anderson (1999) noted the following:

Institutions of higher learning have as their primary mission the promotion of student learning and, ultimately, student success. More than any other group, college instructors are charged with executing this mission. Among the challenges that instructors face today is a new breed of students who, in many cases, approach the college classroom as a simulation of their real-world experience. They are often portrayed as members of the self-centered Generation X, no longer exhibiting the work ethic and the motive to achieve that historically has been attributed to college students (P. 69).

The effects of generational influences on classroom behavior were expanded by many other educational researchers. A study conducted by Nordstrom, Bartels and Bucy (2009) identified three student attributes that explain disruptive behavior: attitude toward uncivil behavior, narcissism and consumerism. Twenge (2006) described members of Generation ME as students interested primarily in their own experiences with little regard toward how others feel. Young (2003) stated that students perceive themselves as "consumers" with their tuition "paying" the salary of their professors, which therefore entitles them to behave as they wish in the classroom:

Professors complain that students increasingly see themselves as customers, viewing their professors as employees rather than instructors. So some students show up for class whenever they feel like it, or send e-mail messages to professors flatly stating that they missed class because they were hung over -- and that they expect the professors to fill them in on what they missed (p. 30).

Among the other perceptions held by faculty are generalization about the current generation of college students, the so-called Entitlement Generation, Generation Y or Generation Me, born between 1970 and 1999. According to Twenge (2006), Generation Me has the following tendencies to:

- extend adolescence beyond all previous limits
- abide by few rules
- have a declining belief in the importance of personal responsibility
- be more prone to depression
- have embraced materialism
- adorn themselves in what was previously unconventional ways
- be almost obsessively focused on themselves

While many educators agree with these descriptions, most emphasize that only a small percentage of students cause disruptions to the classroom while the majority behaves appropriately. Seidman (2005) noted the following about most students:

Obviously, as any instructor knows, not all students exhibit this type of behavior. Most students can sit through a class period without causing any disruptions. They are there to get value from the class and for the most part exhibit maturity and self-control. Unfortunately, it is the handful of misbehaving students who can disrupt the class and inhibit the learning of the so-called "good students" (p. 41).

### ***Disruptive Behavior – Student Perceptions***

Young (2003) explained the result of a survey conducted by the office of dean of students at Arizona State University in which 750 students described how they perceived disruptive behavior. The participants included loud gum chewing and popping, pen and pencil tapping, packing up while the professor is still speaking, body odor, skimpily clad individuals, and off-topic discussions among other disruptive behaviors. The same study concluded that the common perception is that students as well as faculty are bothered by disruptive behaviors.

Others put the responsibility for disruptive behavior on the instructor, whose way of handling class conflicts can cause them to spread, be exaggerated and become a source of classroom disruption. Tantleff, Dunn and Gokee (2002) reported a survey of high school, undergraduate and graduate students regarding teacher's methods of handling conflict. Students in the study viewed the instructors' actions in response to conflict as often coercive and authoritarian and believed that these kinds of responses intensified the conflict frequently lead to additional disruptive behavior.

Nordstrom, Bartels and Bucy (2009) indicated that one common source of conflict in the classroom is the lack of proper training for faculty to deal with such student problems. Anderson (1999) specifically noted this lack of expertise, stating "at the center of this scenario is an instructor who may possess a high degree of expertise in an academic discipline but may not be skilled at promoting an effective alliance among learners or between a learner and himself/herself" (p. 69).

There is a general admission among students that their peers are often the initiators of classroom conflict. However, students believe that faculty responses sometimes exacerbate the conflict further. Tantleff-Dunn, et al. (2002) noted the following:

Again, it bears repeating that students may act in inappropriate ways that precipitate conflict, and students' perceptions sometimes may be very distorted and based on their personal issues. Nevertheless, responding inappropriately is unprofessional and likely to fuel unnecessary power struggles that deter effective conflict resolution. In addition, attention to careful course preparation and organization is very important. Students felt cheated and lost respect for instructors when they perceived that instructors did not care about the course. Faculty may prevent and help resolve disputes by being sensitive to the impact of the power differential on how students perceive their behavior and by maintaining a high level of professionalism in all aspects of teaching. (p. 200)

### **Dealing with Disruptive Behavior**

Kuhlenschmidt and Layne (1999) stressed that disruptive and uncivil behavior must be dealt with quickly because the entire classroom will be impacted if the behavior is ignored. They noted fur-

ther “misbehavior may escalate to intolerable levels” (p. 45). Tantleff-Dunn, et al., (2002) recommended that disruptive behaviors be addressed in the early stages of their occurrence; otherwise their escalation may negatively impact the faculty members’ reputation with the other students. Yet, corrective action is not a single-step process. In addition to the instructor, interaction by the department and institution itself may be necessary. The remainder of this section offers ways to deal with disruptive behavior in the classroom.

### **Written Policies**

Young (1999) noted that one way to deal with disruptive behavior in the classroom is to write rules about how to deal with disruptions, and to stick to these rules. Holton (1999) suggested including rules regarding classroom manners in the syllabus (like not wearing hats in class). Holton (1999) further noted that it is helpful to point the policy out when reviewing the syllabus to the students.

Written policies regarding inappropriate behavior in the classroom are abundant. Student and/or academic affairs offices usually have policies that include rules regarding conduct in the classroom, academic integrity, and conduct in the college dorms or on campus and other behavior related issues. It is vitally important that professors familiarize themselves with such policies for two reasons: First, they may need to refer and use these policies. Second, they may want to add some rules of their own to their classes.

Faculty need to review existing written policies that may be outdated or may not include all the aspects that the faculty wants to cover. The rapidly changing world of technology may necessitate establishing policies to regulate the use of new technological devices. More specifically, universities, colleges or departments may not have policy on the use of cell phones for calls, texting or accessing the internet in the classroom. Bugega (2006) noted that in the absence of such policy at the college level, that faculty may need to include phrases in their syllabus to govern the use of cell phones in the classrooms.

### **Faculty Role**

Anderson (1999) explained that faculty have the responsibility for promoting conflict-free college classrooms and suggested five key points for alliance between faculty and student: Mutual respect, shared responsibility for learning, effective communication including a mechanism for feedback, willingness to negotiate conflict and a sense of security in the classroom.

Mutual respect is essential in establishing a conflict-free classroom. To gain respect is to show respect at the same time. One way to have mutual respect is to have clear understanding of the roles of each party (student or faculty) since conflicts very often are minimized if both parties know their roles and stick to them.

Shared responsibility for learning means that the student is not the only party responsible for learning; the instructor is accountable as well. The instructor is responsible for understanding and employing teaching philosophies and strategies that promotes effective learning of the course material. Students have the responsibility for paying attention to the instructor and synthesizing the material.

Effective communication helps to clarify facts and reduces chances of conflict in more ways than one. To communicate effectively means both parties should speak clearly, listen carefully and engage in calm and reciprocal exchange until an understanding is mutually agreed upon (Brockman, Nunez and Basu, 2010). Conflict between faculty and student can intensify when students aggressively question the professor; or when faculty becomes frustrated over student’s slow com-

prehension of the concepts being discussed. Effective communication reduces the likelihood, and intensity, of conflict (Anderson, 1999).

## ***Conflict Management***

Holton (1999) noted that conflicts must be dealt with in one way or another:

There is a plethora of tactics to use to avoid conflict and create classroom communities where students feel valued and engaged, but when the conflict occurs, it must be managed. If it is not dealt with, the other students may assume that the behavior is tolerable. Other students will begin to have side conversations, read the newspaper, listen to their music, get up and leave, or worse.

It is also necessary for professors to manage conflict effectively because whatever they do will come back to haunt them. The student grapevine works rapidly and lets all students know what they can get away with in a classroom. Most professors have war stories about conflicts that were managed unsuccessfully and have brilliant ideas, in retrospect, about what should have been done (P. 60).

The longer a conflict goes on, the more difficult to determine when it began (p. 62).

Tiberius and Flak (1999) identified the “teacher–learner alliance” (p. 5) as a significant component of effective education and outlined steps for building and repairing relationships between teachers and students. Strong relationships can be developed through the application of skills including effective listening, paraphrasing, being aware of reactions/emotions of both parties, and empathy. In addition, Holton (1999) provided a model for dealing with conflicts in higher education which stressed listening as an essential tool in effective conflict management and facilitated conflict identification, potential solutions, and implementation of solutions. It is therefore apparent that the instructor must be the party that initiates mutually-respectful interactions with students. Good pre-conflict relationships will both alleviate unnecessary conflict and create a culture of support for the professor if and/or when individual students cause disruptions.

## ***Dealing with Disruptions***

Seidman (2005) made the following notes regarding disruptive student behavior: “This problem does not appear to be going away any time soon and for that reason it should not be overlooked” (p. 42). But the method of dealing with the disruptions may be the most important piece of the equation for addressing disruptive behavior. Young (2009) suggested working with the students, as oppose to confronting them, as the best way to deal with issues constructively. Another study suggested a solution that gives a win/win outcome in which the disruption stops but at the same time does not interfere with the misbehaving student completing their degree on schedule (Feltner and Goodsell, 1972).

Tantleff-Dunn, et al. (2002) suggested reactions faculty should avoid when dealing with disruptive behavior:

- Do not overreact to the situation; address the problem “as it is” Do not use the situation for purposes of revenge, retaliation or reaction to prior interactions with the student in question
- Do not give in to the student demand (i.e.: giving them the grade they asked) just for the sake of stopping the disruption. To do so, will give other students reasons to cause disruptions because they may think they will get the same result if they behave similarly.

Additional strategies that may help in reducing or eliminating disruptions include the following:



- Address the student privately, respectfully and in non-offending way
- Attempt to take the steam out of the conversation; use a calm, non-confrontational voice
- Explain the effect of the disruptive behavior on the class, both as a whole and for individual students
- Refer to rules regarding disruptive behavior (institutional and/or course rules)
- Give deadlines for improving or stopping the behavior
- If a reward is appropriate to stop the disruptive behavior, use it, but be careful it is not unfair to the other students in the class

### **Coordinating with Administration**

Sometimes, despite best efforts by the faculty to deal with disruptive behavior, the same behavior continues. This may lead to intensifying the disruption and may become a disruption to the entire class or to the educational process. At these times, seeking the expertise and authorities of the administration is a viable approach that may lead to ending the disruption. At most colleges, the administrative position that holds the job of addressing student behavior is called the academic dean/assistant dean, the dean/assistant dean of students or the assistant dean for academics. This position has the responsibility of taking many tasks, including enforcing university rules. However, coordination between the faculty and the academic dean is helpful in these cases. In order to shed more light on this coordination, an overview of the role of the academic dean is important.

### **The Role of Academic Dean**

The terms “Academic Dean” and “Assistant Dean for Academics” are used in this paper. Both terms refer to the administrative position, depending on the institution, that has the responsibility in dealing with student problems in the academic setting, resolving conflicting situations and making difficult decisions. Feltner and Goodsell (1972) noted the following perceptions about the role of academic dean:

The perplexing role of the academic dean suggests that he is neither *fish* nor *fowl*, neither administrator nor faculty member, yet he is both at the same time. His powers as a leader are further confused and curtailed by the fact that he is considered the "first among equals," and leaders usually require sufficient followers in order to be effective. Prior to the 1960s, campus climate generally allowed the dean to subsist in this role with relatively low visibility. The past decade, however, saw policies questioned and conflicts arise with increasing severity and frequency. The dean, as academic leader, was called upon to resolve such conflicts and arbitrate justly. All too often solutions could not be reached which were satisfactory to all concerned (p. 692).

The wide range of responsibilities that are placed on the academic dean made their tasks to be subject to interpretation. Sarrosa, et al. (1998) wrote an article describing the role of the academic dean titled “The Academic Dean: A Position in Need of a Compass and Clock”. Hyun (2009) noted that the position of academic dean is viewed as being legally, politically, and ideologically challenging position and explained that their primary responsibility is one of student success. Hyun suggested that student retention is the main measurement of the academic dean’s job success and one of their main functions is that of mediation with a variety of parties.

Johnson (2012) classified the roles of academic dean’s position into four duties:

- Enforce school discipline
- Deal with students’ parents
- Responsibility for student health

- Challenges due to technology

The remainder of this section explains three other interrelated tasks often performed by the academic dean in higher education: enforcing college rules, conflict management, and coordinating with faculty over academic issues.

### ***Enforcing College Rules***

Enforcing college rules is a task that is shared among many segments of the college/university. But the academic dean plays a unique role in the process for several reasons. First, it is often perceived that the academic dean is the originating source for the rules that deal with student discipline. Second, students and faculty alike may believe that the academic dean is the ultimate enforcer of the college rules. Thus if all efforts by faculty fail to end misbehavior, the final resolution of the matter will fall to the academic dean. Additional factors must be considered by the dean when they are reviewing student-faculty conflict over classroom disruptions. The immediate objective is to stop the disruption so other students will not be further affected. The secondary objective is to preserve academic integrity. And, the final objective is to retain the student, and their academic progress, if possible (Feltner and Goodsell, 1972). The desirable goal is to end the disruption without ending the offending student's participation in the educational process. For example, expelling the student or putting the student on probation may impede, delay or cancel graduation possibility. Because of the academic dean has access to information about students that faculty do not have, they bring a more comprehensive view of the students behavior to the situation and thus can offer viable suggestions for resolution of conflict.

### ***Conflict Management***

More recent writers describe the role of the dean as a dove of peace intervening among warring factions that are causing destructive turbulence in the college, a dragon driving away internal and external forces that threaten the college and a diplomat guiding, inspiring and encouraging people who live and work in the college (Gmelch, et al., 1999, p. 718).

Conflicts in the classroom are usually handled adeptly by faculty. But, when conflict escalates and requires the attention of the academic dean, the issue often requires a different set of conflict management strategies to be employed. In general, the preferred resolution to conflict between the faculty and the student is to promote a win/win situation (Feltner and Goodsell, 1972).

### ***Coordinating with Faculty***

The coordination related to disruptive student behavior requires careful consideration. The manner in which faculty and administration handle students who demonstrate negative behaviors in the academic classroom can impact several aspects of the universities policies and goals, including academic integrity, student retention, and student-university relations. It is critical that all of these issues be considered in the resolution process (Hui-Min, 2009).

It is helpful to have someone outside of the conflict to view the situation as a whole, to provide clarity to the real issues and to offer suggestions on how to approach determination of a solution. The academic dean can play such a role in mediating faculty-student conflicts because they are experienced in dealing with troubled students (Feltner, 1972, Hui-Min, 2009). In addition, the academic dean deals with the students at many levels. Beside their academic work, the dean may have knowledge of student's life beyond the classroom and this insight aids the communication process with getting students to cease their offending behavior(s). By coordinating resolution efforts with the faculty, the two may be able to approach the student in a more effective manner.

## **Assistant Dean for Academics at ECOBIT**

This section explains about the position of the assistant dean for academics at Eberly College of Business and Information Technology (ECOBIT) at Indiana University of Pennsylvania (IUP) in relation to conflict management.

### ***Enforcing College Rules***

Regulations and procedures regarding student behavior at the university in this case study fall under two jurisdictions: those governed by the Office of Student Conduct in the division of Student Affairs that include behaviors that take place outside of the classroom, and behaviors that fall under academic integrity policies and procedures under the division of Academic Affairs (Indiana University of Pennsylvania Undergraduate Catalog, 2012-13).

The university academic integrity policy “is part of an effort to develop a community where trust, honesty, ethical principles and personal integrity guide interactions with others, thereby providing for orderly academic and scholarly processes.” (p. 33). Included in the types of violations covered by this policy are “Class behavior which significantly disrupts the learning process or is a threat to others” (p. 34, III, A, 10.).

Either a faculty member or an administrator can level charges of academic integrity violations. And they may select from one of three options for resolution: 1) informal, where the student and faculty member or administrator and student agree to a resolution; 2) resolution by documented agreement, where the faculty member, student, and administration meet and reach a mutually agreeable solution which is documented and 3) resolution for formal adjudication where a mutually agreeable resolution cannot be reached between parties and a sanction is imposed on the student in the form of a lowered grade, involuntary withdrawal, suspension, expulsion, or rescission of a conferred degree.

It is the preferred goal of most faculty and administration to reach a resolution at the lowest level possible, and it is with that intent that the assistant dean intervenes.

### ***Coordination between Faculty and Students***

One of the roles of the assistant dean for academics in the university where this case study is situated is that of being one of the first administrators (prior to elevation to the Dean level) to work with students and faculty in an unbiased manner to attempt to resolve conflict which arises in the classroom. The person in this position is also the academic standards officer for the college and is responsible for enforcing academic integrity policy and guidelines. Students and faculty may independently approach the assistant dean and ask for assistance in resolving conflicts. The assistant dean attempts to serve as an intermediary in the process of addressing concerns of each party.

## **The Case**

This section illustrates the coordination between a faculty and the academic dean at Eberly College of Business and Information Technology (ECOBIT) at Indiana University of Pennsylvania (IUP) and how their cooperation led to two positive outcomes:

- There was no more disruption in the courses that the student took with the same faculty after that
- The student finally completed the additional courses and graduated.

The remaining of this section explains how the disruptions started, and the different steps and approaches followed that led to solving the problem at hand and student graduating on time.

## ***The Disruptions***

This disruption of this student started before the midterm of one of the semesters and continued for a few weeks. The following was exhibited by the student

- Using the cell phones in the class
- Picking up and leaving in the middle of class
- Being rude and loud, arguing with the faculty in front of the class
- Refusing to complete the assignments
- Refusing to take the exam

Later stages of the conflict included more actions that bordered on violence, including the following

- Faculty offering to help the student and the student replied by tapping strongly on the keyboard, pushing the keyboard back.
- Coming to the faculty office and yelling at the faculty

## ***Faculty Perception***

The student was disruptive in the class. The student talked about previous encounters with other faculty in the past. This caused different students to notice the disruptive behavior and complain about it. The faculty felt that something needs to be done to stop the disruption in the classroom. Otherwise, it may lead to affecting other students in the class and spread to different aspects as well.

## ***Student Perception***

The student complained about the following

- Was not using the cell phone, instead was just holding it
- Was not taught the subject that was asked in the exam
- Was targeted uniquely

## ***Faculty Responsibility***

- Talked to the student and notified her that she cannot leave before end of class, otherwise they consider it absent.
- Listened to the student about the issues in the course that are bothering her
- Offered to help the student about the missed assignment

Despite the faculty efforts, the disruptive behavior continued. At that time, the faculty decided to ask the assistant dean of academics to intervene in the hope of resolving this issue to the best interest of the students and the entire class.

## ***Collaboration with Academic Dean***

The academic dean took many initiatives to solve the problem. Some had to do with the student as listed below:

- Met with the student and explained the college regulations
- Advised the student to go for counseling
- Took the student to the counseling center at the university
- Provided the student with new communication techniques

As the problem persisted, the academic dean made the following attempts:

- Arranged for a meeting with the dean of the college to talk about these issues

- Continued to provide advice to the student on how to effectively communicate with the faculty
- Offered to come to the classroom and deal with the student if the problem persisted.

### **Subsequent Courses:**

The same student continued to take courses. Some issues were about to appear again, however the faculty continued coordinating with the academic dean and both talked to the student at different times. No major issues were resulted from attempts. The student graduated a semester later.

## **Summary and Suggestions for Future Research**

This paper explained the coordination between faculty and academic deans in dealing with conflicts between students and faculty in the classroom and the student disruptive behavior. The paper began by explaining the conflicts that occurs in the classroom and their potential effects on the classroom in general. The paper then shifted the focus to illustrate the role of academic deans in tackling these problems. Then the focus shifted to a description of the case at Eberly College of Business and Information Technology. The paper explained the role of the academic dean at this college and then shed light on their collaboration with a faculty member at the college. It further explained how this faculty and academic dean cooperated to solve these conflicts with one student. The result was that the student continued taking courses, the student continued to completing the courses he/she took and the student finally graduated.

Future research on this topic will include the development and implementation of a survey instrument to gather data on the collaboration of faculty and administration in resolving classroom behavioral issues.

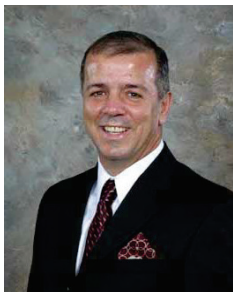
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