

## Art of Confrontation

*The most basic condition for the advancement, dissemination, and application of knowledge is freedom of expression and communication; however, just as absolute order means tyranny, absolute freedom means anarchy. Therefore, the University must strive to balance maximum freedom and necessary order which best promotes a conducive learning environment.*

– adapted from [Article 1 of MSUs Student Rights and Responsibilities](#)

### **WHY – Effective Learning Environments**

For classrooms, laboratories and clinical environments to be effective, its community of scholars must feel a sense of safety and security that allows them to focus on that which brings them together (teaching and learning). Building a sense of shared community and establishing behavioral standards by which all community members will abide greatly minimizes the potential for disruptions.

Instructors can accomplish this task through effective syllabus design, classroom management, and norming positive social behavior.

### **WHAT – Community Building and Standards**

Consider the metaphor of a warm rock. Rocks have long been associated with the foundations and cornerstones of human civilizations. As such, they have come to symbolize safety and security. Likewise, warmth is often associated with safety and shelter, in addition to its ability to promote healing. If we connect the classroom community with the metaphor of a warm rock, we realize the need to create spaces where all members feel safe, secure, valued, and welcome. In doing so, a community of scholars can safely engage with the unknown and uncomfortable, effectively sifting ideas that may be in conflict.

Instructors can accomplish this task by learning students' names and encouraging them to learn each other's names; allowing time for students to ask questions and provide feedback about what is happening in their lives; providing time for informal conversation or check-ins at the start or end of class; using humor and story to augment course content; and sharing appropriate as a way to establish rapport, make connections, and humanize yourself.

### **WHO – The Principle of Reciprocity**

*The student, as a member of the academic community, has both rights and duties. Within that community, the student's most essential right is the right to learn ...[t]he student also has duties to other members of the academic community, the most important of which is to refrain from interference with those rights of others which are equally essential to the purposes and processes of the University.*

– (excerpt) [Article 1, MSUs Student Rights and Responsibilities](#).

Through the creation and discussion about classroom standards and expectations, the instructor takes the lead on establishing a proper environment for learning; however, students share responsibility as well and can be powerful allies in helping to co-create norms for classroom behavior. Even with clear standards and a positive climate, even the best prepared classrooms will periodically face disruptions, and the information that follows are suggested strategies for addressing such disruptions.

## HOW – Principles for Enforcing Classroom Standards

- FIRST**                      **Politely identify the specific behavior and seek voluntary compliance.** You may do this publicly so as to not single out an individual student (e.g., *Does anyone need a mask? I often forget mine. We have some at the entrance to the class if you don't have your own*), or you might address an individual in a non-threatening way (e.g., *hey can I talk with you for a minute...I notice you do not have a mask. Do you have one you can put on?*).
- SECOND**                      **Regularly remind the entire class of our collective responsibilities, our community standards and University policy** (e.g., *Please remember that masks are required for class attendance. Please put on your mask now. We will begin once everyone is masked*).
- THIRD – STUDENT IS NOT READILY COMPLIANT**                      **Explain the POTENTIAL CONSEQUENCES.** (e.g., *Those who are not properly masked will be directed to leave the class. No one will be allowed to remain while not in compliance. Note that non-compliance can result in disciplinary referrals to the Dean of Students Office as well*).
- If a Personal Responsibility Ambassador is available, you might seek their assistance:  
<https://studentaffairs.msu.edu/ambassador/index.html>.
- FOURTH – STUDENT REFUSES TO LEAVE/COMPLY**                      **GIVE the student options that include an OFFER to call the NEXT HIGHEST AUTHORITY.** (You have three options right now: you can put on an appropriate mask in the appropriate way, you can leave the classroom and come back when you have an appropriate mask, or you can refuse, in which case I will call the police.
- FINALLY – IF NEEDED**                      **LEAVE THE ROOM AND CALL 911** – Consider requesting a plain-clothed officer.

### ALWAYS

- Be kind and offer unconditional positive regard (e.g., are you OK?)
- Assume good intentions (e.g., did you forget your mask?)
- State why you are addressing the situation/enforcing the standard (what got your attention)
- Identify the specific behavior that is problematic
- Document the situation as directed to ensure there is a record of the event
- Be mindful of your positional authority and the relationships/identities involved

### NEVER

- Argue with, swear at, insult, touch/hit, or chase a student
- Confiscate items (e.g., alcohol, drugs, paraphernalia, guns, knives)
- Confront someone in a small enclosed space (e.g., elevator)
- Confront someone when **you** are emotionally upset or angry
- Make assumptions about people's reason for non-compliance

**REMINDER:** Only 7% of what you communicate is through words. Your approach and demeanor are critical, so **remain calm at every step (fake it if you must)**. Take solace in that you will have the final say, eventually.

A persistent, assertive, and polite approach will communicate your resolve to gain compliance and will likely result in a positive outcome. If at any time you feel as if you are losing your composure, step away from the scene and ask for assistance.