

Guidance for dealing with classroom disruptions

The overwhelming majority of classes at UBC proceed exactly as they should, but on very rare occasions disruptions of one sort or another may occur. (Here, we define a ‘disruption’ as an interruption by a person or persons that interrupts the instructor’s planned flow of the class for a period of time).

This document aims to give succinct, practical advice to faculty and TAs as to how they can respond in the different circumstances in which these may occur, and how to provide support to students who may have found such disruptions particularly upsetting or triggering.

(Additional resources are available to support faculty in navigating issues that may arise during a course, covering topics including difficult conversations in a classroom setting, dealing with microaggressions, or navigating complex classroom dynamics¹).

1. Class disrupted by outside group

There have been occasions where classes have been disrupted by an outside group entering a class unannounced, often a large lecture theatre, and conducting a ‘peaceful protest’ to disrupt the class and draw students’ attention to their issue (e.g. the Save Old Growth disruptions in 2021W2) with announcements / flyers etc. In such cases:

- Ascertain the purpose of the groups’ interruption (“Why are you coming into my class?”) to reassure students that there is no threat to their safety.
- The instructor may choose to engage with the group and offer them a few minutes to speak to the class to share their message, either at this point in the class, at the end of the class, or at the start of a subsequent class.
- The instructor may choose to engage with the group and ask them to leave the premises. If the request to vacate the classroom is not complied with, the instructor should advise the group that they will be calling Campus Security. You should know the number or have it programmed in your phone - **604-822-2222**.
- If the disruption persists more than a few minutes, call Campus Security
- If protestors are not cooperative with the instructor and the class cannot safely resume, the instructor should dismiss the class for the day
- All incidents of classroom disruption, however they play out, should be reported to Campus Security by calling 604-822-2222 or reported via the online form at <https://security.ubc.ca/contact-us/incident-reporting/>

2. Class disrupted by students in the class

It may be the case that the planned disruption to a class comes from a group of students in the class. In such cases:

- Request that the students not disrupt the class, offer time to discuss issues / concerns with them after / outside class time.
- Remind students that the University has a Respectful Environment Statement², which all members of the community – faculty, staff, and students – are expected to uphold. In particular, the excerpt “freedom of expression ... must be exercised responsibly” is relevant.

¹ https://inclusiveteaching.ctlt.ubc.ca/resources/resources-for-faculty/?fwp_card_filter_facet=throughout-term

² <https://hr.ubc.ca/sites/default/files/documents/UBC-Statement-on-Respectful-Environment.pdf>

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- If they continue to disrupt the class, ask them to leave.
- If the disruption persists more than a minute or two, call Campus Security: you should know the number or have it programmed in your phone - **604-822-2222**.
- Following the class, if the interruption to class has been disruptive to the point of contravening the Respectful Environment policy, report the incident to your Department Head. They can liaise with the faculty Dean's Office and the Student Conduct Office³ regarding what, if any, action to pursue as a consequence.

3. Unannounced arrival of campus security and / or police of jurisdiction

On very rare occasions, campus security or the police of jurisdiction may enter a class unannounced associated with an active investigation which may include concern for the safety of one or more individuals believed to be in the class. While all efforts are made to provide advanced notice of these activities, there may not always be time to inform the instructor / class lead ahead of time. In such cases:

- Comply with the request for them to look for / ask for the student(s) concerned.
- Reassure the class after the incident as best you can, given the circumstances of this type of unannounced disruption. Bear in mind that these types of disruptions may be particularly distressing for students and give them space to discuss the disruption.
- If Campus Security were not present, report the incident to them after the class via 604-822-2222 or the online e-portal reporting platform <https://security.ubc.ca/contact-us/incident-reporting/>

4. Potentially dangerous incidents

It is very unlikely that you would ever encounter an active threat at UBC. If this does happen and, in your judgement at the time, there is a potentially dangerous situation in a classroom context that poses a threat to the safety of students or instructors, call 911 first, then call Campus Security when safe to do so.

5. Online class intrusions / disruptions (aka 'Zoom bombing')

Disruptions may occur in online class meetings, either from students in the class or others who have gained access via the meeting link. In such cases:

- As soon as you can, halt the person's audio, video, shared screen, etc. In some cases, you may need to remove the individual from the meeting,
- If using Zoom, use the security controls (the shield icon on the bottom) to quickly disallow participants from sharing video, audio, and screens. There is an option to remove one or more participants there as well. Please see Zoom's in-meeting security options⁴ for more information.

³ <https://students.ubc.ca/campus-life/student-code-conduct>

⁴ <https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/360041848151>

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As general guidance for all such incidents:

- After the disruption has ended, acknowledge the incident and its disruptive and potentially upsetting impacts immediately. Different groups of students may be differentially impacted by these disruptions.
- Depending on the nature of the incident, it may be appropriate to end the class early rather than trying to go on as if it had not happened.
- You might offer to stay to discuss with students if they wish. Where possible, make time for students to come talk with you about the incident later if they choose, or to further discuss the incident in class.
- Follow up with information about supports students can access if needed: make sure you are familiar with the Green Folder and other resources to support students in distress⁵.
- Report the incident to your unit's head/director as soon as possible after it occurs, and report the incident to Campus Security by calling 604-822-2222.

Further information on emergency preparedness procedures is available at

<https://ready.ubc.ca/take-action/>

⁵ <https://facultystaff.students.ubc.ca/health-wellbeing/assisting-students-distress>