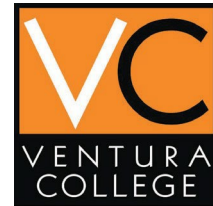


Appendix A: Confronting a Behavior of Concern



Addressing a “Behavior of Concern”

A difficult part of maintaining a productive academic environment is deciding what to do when confronted with emotional, behavioral or academic student conduct that raises concern or is not appropriate or conducive to either the individual or the group learning environment.

This typically will begin by having a planned conversation with the student... which usually produces anxiety on both sides. The following information is intended to assist you in dealing with a "behavior of concern"... whether it's academic dishonesty, disruptive classroom behavior, or the students emotional distress. This approach is only a suggestion, and there is ample room in our system for different personal styles. Respect and civility, however, are elements that should be present no matter what the style or approach.

PREPARATION

It is important to be able to succinctly and objectively describe the factors that have led you to be concerned. Be prepared with your facts... possibly in writing... before you meet with the student. Good questions to ask yourself at this stage are:

- What did I actually observe happening?
- Why am I concerned about this?
- What do I believe happened or is happening?
- What evidence do I have that supports that belief?
- Is there another plausible explanation or possible misinterpretation?
- Is there anyone else who has information about this incident?
- Is the expectation or situation covered in the syllabus or the *Student Code of Conduct*?
- Do I have everything I need in order to discuss this with the student?
- If this is a case of academic or behavior misconduct, how serious a violation do I believe it is?

SETTING UP THE MEETING

There are a number of ways to arrange to meet with students in these situations. Plan to meet in person. It is never effective to discuss sensitive issues on the phone or by e-mail.

- Approach the student(s) after class, when they are not in the presence of their classmates, and schedule a convenient time to meet
- Call or email the student and ask him/her to come in to talk with you
- Return a copy of an exam or assignment in question with no grade but with a note to set up a meeting
- Give the student a note in class that asks them to remain after or come to your office hours.

** It is not a good idea to ask a friend of the student to contact the student and have them call you. This just brings one more person into the mix.

Do not include your specific concern or suspicion. If asked, indicate that you have some concerns that you need to discuss with the student in private. You are not obligated to outline your concerns or suspicions on the phone or in the hallway. It is also unwise to put that information in an e-mail or phone message.

THE MEETING

The meeting should occur in a private and confidential place such as your office or an empty classroom where you will not be interrupted. If you are comfortable with the student it's not *necessary* to have another person with you... but always feel free to ask your Division Dean to join you if you wish. If you suspect any potential for violence do not meet the student alone in a closed office or classroom. An open office in the division office area or outside at a picnic table is a non-threatening and safe location for everyone. If you have any questions about your preparation prior to the meeting, call Dean of Students to assist you.

The most important element to keep in mind is that it is a behavior that is the issue, not whether the student is a good or bad person. Questions and statements that focus on behaviors are less likely to make people defensive.

- *"The remarks you make in class are inhibiting other students from expressing their opinions."*
not
- *"You are an ignorant bigot and intolerant of other people's opinions."*

This will increase the chances of a successful resolution at the conclusion of this meeting. Often the first few sentences set the tone for the remainder of the meeting. Examples of successful opening lines are given below. If nothing seems to fit your circumstances or if you would like to brainstorm ideas, chat with your Division Dean, Dean of Students, or a BICT Team member. In all cases, plan out your opening remarks before you meet with the student. It's best to only state what you know or have observed without making any interpretation.

Suggested Openings:

- I have heard you making insulting remarks in class when someone gives an opinion that differs from yours. Since there are fewer additional comments after that, it affects the flow of discussion in class.
- The papers you have been writing recently all revolve around suicide and harming yourself or others. This concerns me.
- You have missed the last three classes and this is unlike your previous attendance pattern. I am concerned about you.
- I have asked you to meet with me to talk about your last test. I saw you frequently looking at a piece of paper in your lap throughout the test period.
- During the grading process I noticed striking similarities between your paper (or test) and that of another student.
- I have reviewed your paper and I was struck by the differences between this and your previous work.
- As a part of grading your paper I checked the sources you cited, as well as some that I am aware of, and I was disturbed to find whole sections of another author's work, reprinted in your paper, without proper citation.

QUESTIONING

Remember that the purpose of your meeting is to gather more information than you give. Ask your questions before you give too much information. Students often contradict what you know to be true and this gives you a clue as to the veracity of the rest of their statements.

There are a wide variety of questions that can and should be asked of students in these situations. The one element that all the questions need to have in common is that they focus on behaviors. Following are examples of three types of questions that may be effective:

open-ended questions (those that can't be answered with a yes or no) are often good to begin with:

- Why did you choose suicide as a topic for your paper?
- Why haven't you been attending class regularly?
- How did you prepare for this exam?
- How do you explain the similarities on these two papers?

closed-ended questions, specifically seeking a "yes" or "no", may be both necessary and important:

- Do you feel that you and all students should be allowed to express their opinions?
-

- Are you aware that you have violated the *Student Code of Conduct*?
- Did you look at the other student's paper during the test?
- Did you receive a copy of this paper from someone else?
- Did you copy this paper from another source?

directive statements are sometimes best used to get to the point:

- Please tell me where you found this source.
- Tell me how you solved this problem on the exam.

At some point in the conversation it will be clear to you that a misunderstanding has occurred, the student acknowledges a reason for your concern, or the student continues to deny the behavior even though you are not convinced.

Misunderstanding—Thank the student for helping to clarify the situation, consider how to restructure to avoid similar concerns in the future and move on.

Acknowledgement-- Some students will acknowledge the behavior but ask your understanding because of their "extraordinary circumstances". You can be sympathetic without being a pushover. Be aware that sympathy is a successful ploy frequently used by students. Other students will acknowledge the behavior and seek your assistance in correcting the situation. If it is a mental health issue be sure to refer the student to the Student Health Center. Make other helpful referrals as necessary but also make it clear that the student will be held accountable for the behavior.

Denial—Continue to ask questions until everything is very clear. Be sure to take accurate notes and confirm with the student that what you are writing is what they mean to say. Consider having the student write out their own statement. It is usually wise to stop the meeting at this point and tell the student you will investigate further and contact them again for resolution.

NOW WHAT??

At this point you must determine your next step.

- If you and the student have arrived at an impasse, this is the time to complete the BICT referral form and turnover all of your information to the BICT team and/or Division Dean for further investigation. Student Conduct violations can lead to a simple "warning" or progress to expulsion, as outlined by the *Disciplinary Procedure (AP 5520)*.
- If the behavior is minor, and one you feel you can, and should, handle within your own class structure you are, of course, free to do so.
- If the behavior involves intimidation or academic integrity (cheating or plagiarism) it is strongly suggested that you enforce your classroom sanctions as well as complete a BICT referral form so the behavior is documented to determine if any pattern exists or develops.
- Obviously, making referrals to various campus resources designed to assist the student would also be appropriate.

Sanctions will differ depending on how serious the misconduct or behavior was, how the class was informed of expectations regarding behavior and academic integrity, and the specific circumstances surrounding the incident. The other element that should be considered in sanctioning is the educational one. What needs to occur so that this student learns from this experience, receives the assistance they need, and does not engage in similar behaviors in the future? As a student learning institution, this is the intent of the BICT Team and "*Confronting a Behavior of Concern*".

The ultimate goal for any behavior intervention is to eliminate a destructive behavior and replace it with a constructive behavior. The role of an educator is to teach far more than merely their discipline. We teach students life skills through example, holding to high standards, and insisting upon accountability. A student will learn a better lesson by making a mistake and being held accountable than they will by talking their way out of the situation or being "let off the hook" because the teacher feels sorry for them.
