

One of the common errors that faculty make when encountering a student of concern is to bend (sometimes to the point of breaking) the academic and behavioral standards to which other students are expected to adhere. Multiple times each year, the **Behavioral Assessment Team (BAT)** receives reports of inappropriate, irresponsible, and disruptive student behavior that faculty have quietly observed for extended periods of time with little or no substantive effort made to reduce it.



The motivation to avoid holding students of concern accountable has a number of possible origins, including:

- the faculty member hoping the behavior would cease on its own;
- being unsure how to handle the situation or who to contact;
- fearing some form of legal or physical retaliation from the student; or
- believing that upholding established standards and policies will cause emotional pain to an already fragile or unstable student.

The student may also seek to further heighten a faculty member's reluctance to adhere to established criteria and norms by suggesting that the faculty member is uncaring, rigid, punitive, or "making it worse." In reality, negotiations and compromises that allow disruptive students to avoid accountability typically serve only as uneasy truces that delay necessary decisions and exacerbate outcomes.

What Can Faculty Do?

To provide support to, and a rationale for, the decision to consistently apply academic standards and policies with students of concern, faculty should remind themselves:

- **Mental health professionals regard setting and enforcing reasonable behavioral limits as therapeutically desirable.** Holding students accountable frequently encourages them to enter counseling to address the underlying issues that are behind the behavioral problems.
- **Accountability is essential to treating and managing disruptive, impulsive individuals.** Students who act in ways that distress and alarm those around them frequently lack the necessary internal controls to bring their behavior into alignment with the standards of a higher education environment, and they sometimes display considerable indifference regarding the negative impact of their behavior on those around them. Accountability is not used to punish but to increase safety and to protect the emotional rights and needs of those who witness their behavior.
- **Physical and psychological disabilities are not legitimate excuses for disruptive behavior on a college campus.** Prevailing law recognizes that students with disabilities can be held to the same reasonable behavioral standards as individuals without disabilities, even if a violation of institutional rules is the result of a disability. This practice accords each student with the dignity of a presumption that they have at least some personal accountability for their actions.