

Dealing with Disruptive and Disturbing Student Behavior

*Counseling Services
UNM Student Health and Counseling
(SHAC)*

Harry Linneman, Ph.D.
Director

Problematic Student Behavior

Faculty and Staff Often Deal with:

- > Disruptive Behavior
- > Disturbing Behavior
- > Behavior may that have elements of both

Goals

- ◉ Define Disruptive and Disturbing Student behaviors
- ◉ Discuss the obligation to deal with the behaviors
- ◉ Offer suggestions about handling various types of behavior
- ◉ Share examples from the audience about “real life” situations

What is Disruptive Behavior?

Behavior that interferes with the
educational process of other students

OR

Behavior that prevents faculty or staff from
performing their professional
responsibilities

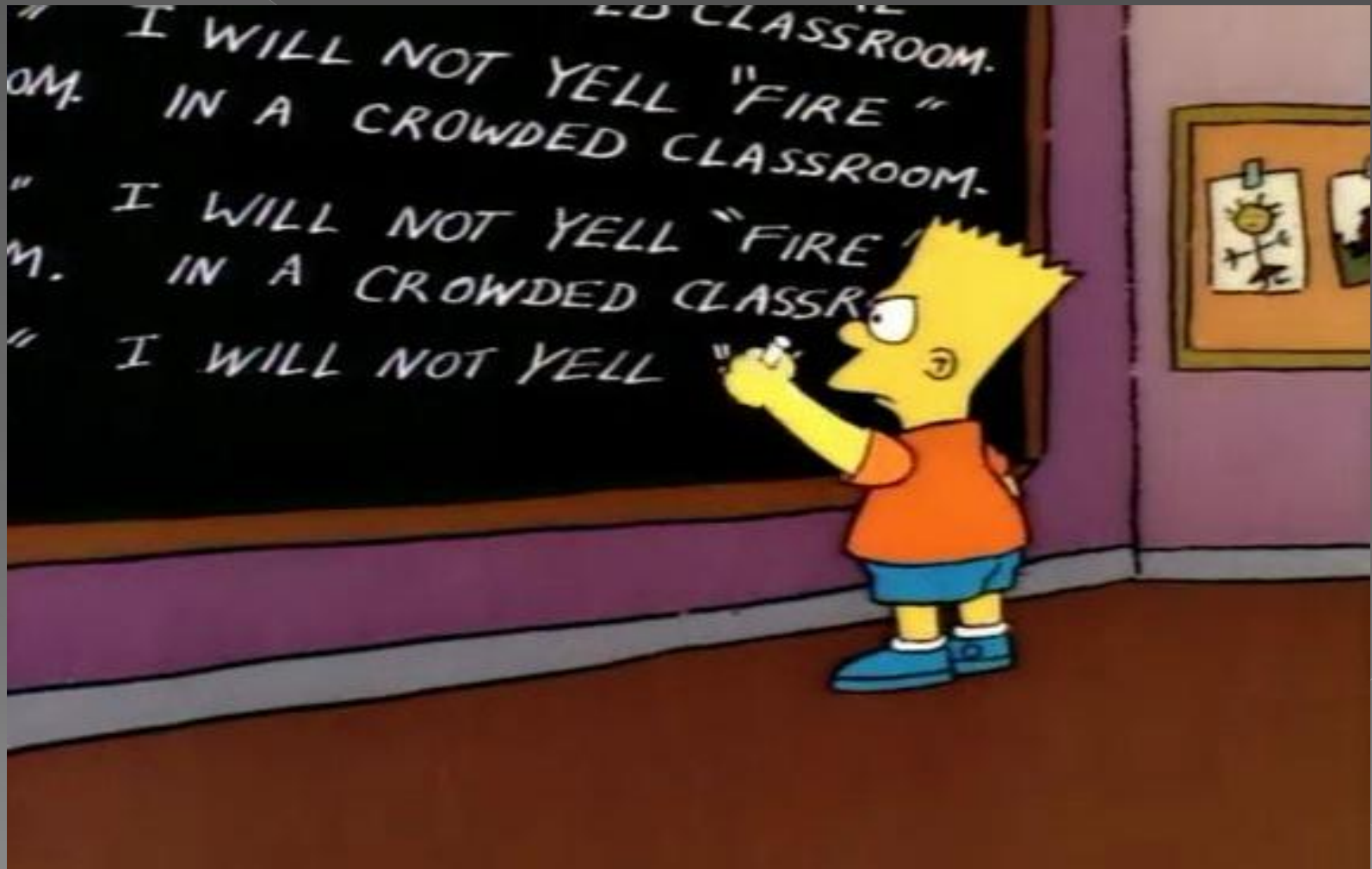
Examples of Disruptive Behavior

- ◉ Physically confronts another person
- ◉ Verbally abuses another person
- ◉ Physically destroys or damages property

Examples of Disruptive Behavior

- ⦿ Interrupts the classroom process by:
 - > Making remarks out of turn
 - > Taking over the lecture
 - > Dominating classroom discussion
 - > Using cell phone, pager, or other electronic devices in the class
 - > Being consistently late to class or leaving early
 - > Making excessive noise (e.g., shuffling paper or books)

Examples of Disruptive Behavior

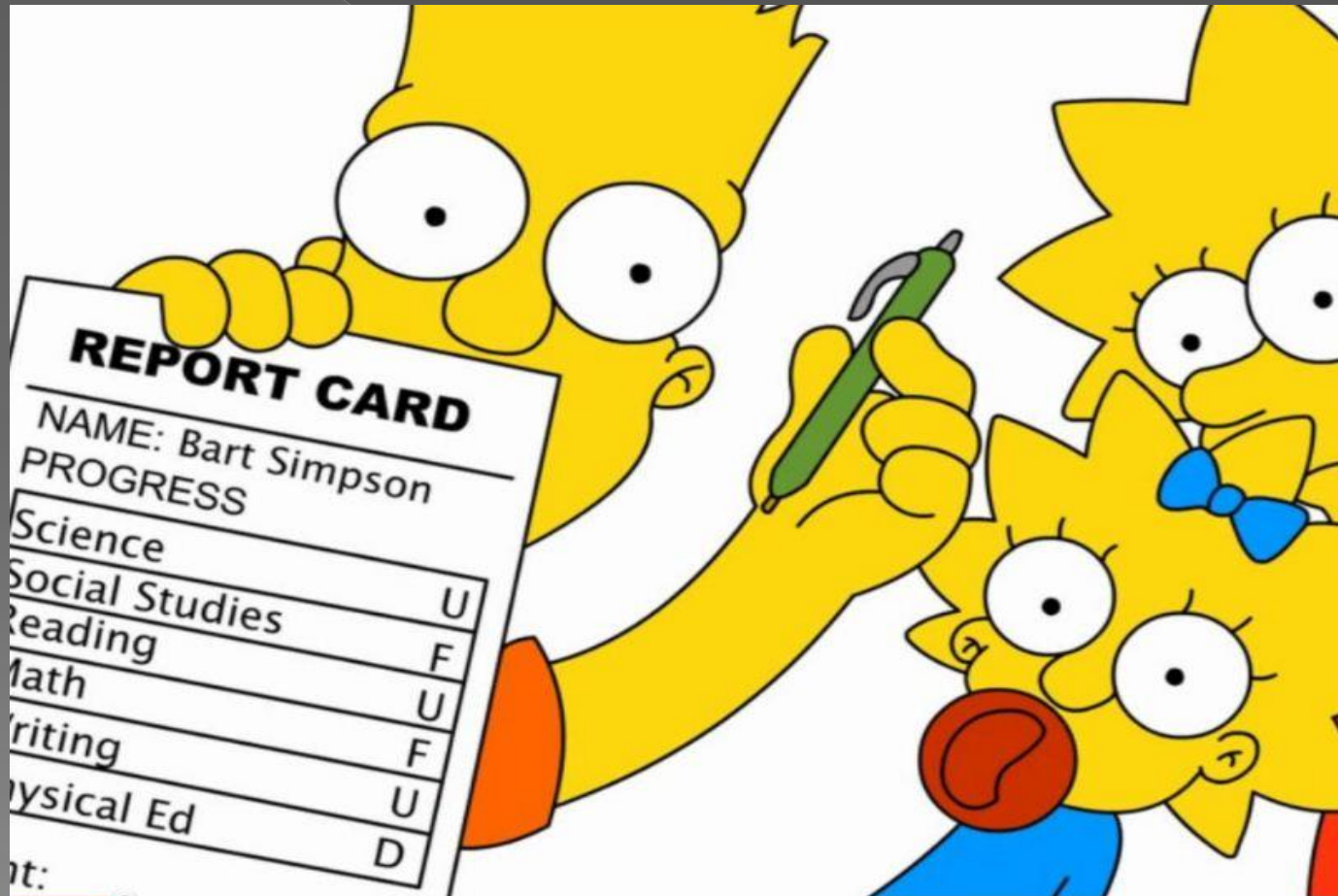


What is Disturbing Behavior?

Behavior that indicates that the student is in distress.

- ◉ Whether or not caused in part by his/her school situation, academic performance often will suffer.

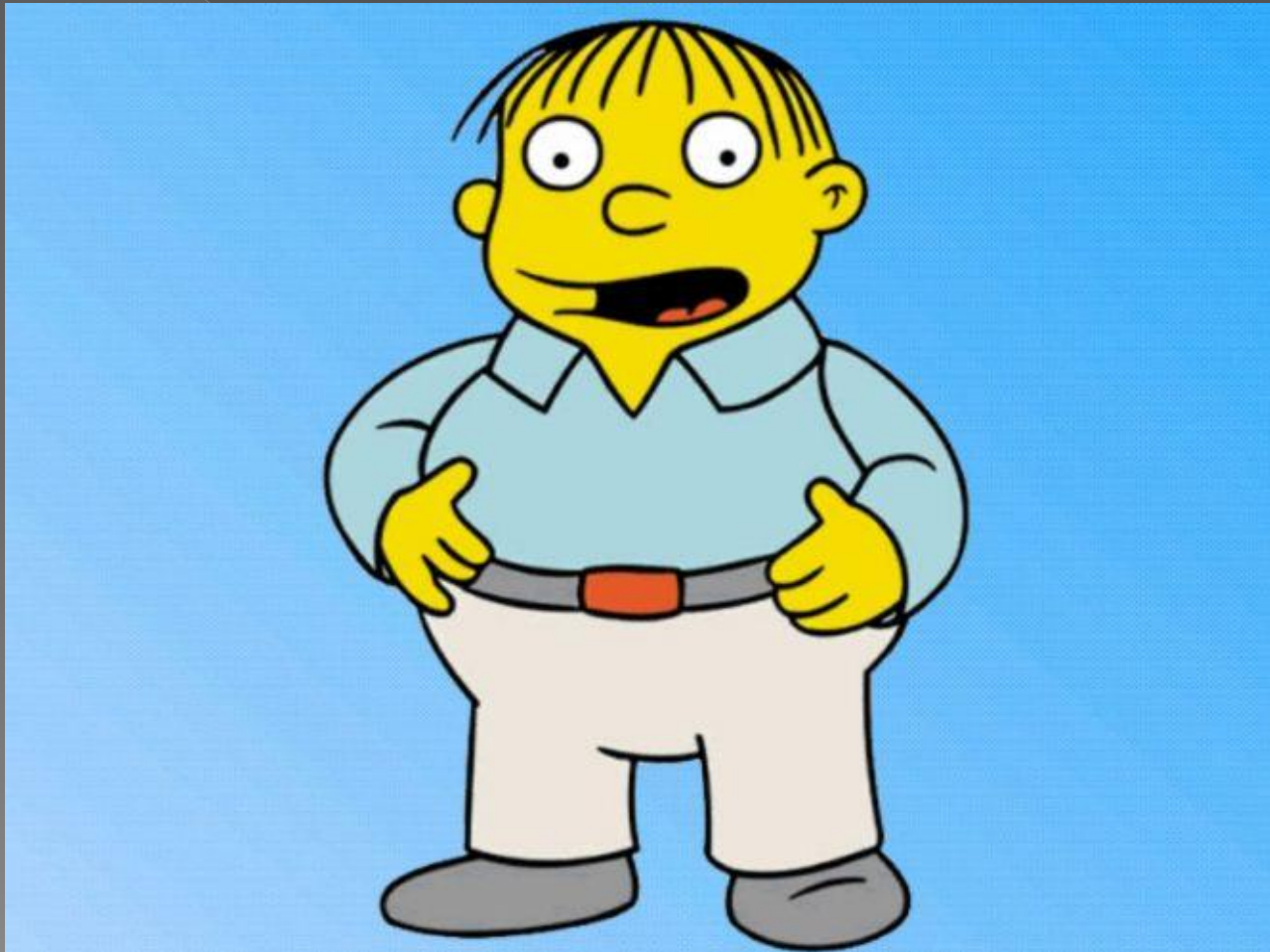
Disturbing Behavior Affects Academic Performance



Disturbing Behavior

Distress may be mild, with only minimal impact on the student's performance

Mild Distress



Disturbing Behavior

- Distress can also extend to the severe levels, where there is potential for harm to the student or others

Severe Distress



Examples of Disturbing Behavior

- ◉ Student appears disheveled or has poor hygiene
- ◉ Has noticeable change in quality of work
- ◉ Appears disoriented/confused about time, place, or who he/she is
- ◉ Inappropriate verbal outbursts
- ◉ Bizarre written or verbal statements
- ◉ Inappropriate use of violent themes/subjects

Examples of Disturbing Behavior

- ◉ Written or verbal references to suicide
- ◉ Giving away personal belongings or prized possessions
- ◉ Significant changes in mood, especially depressed or lethargic mood
- ◉ Expresses feelings of helplessness or hopelessness
- ◉ Complains of problems sleeping or eating

Examples of Disturbing Behavior

- ◉ Dramatic weight loss or gain
- ◉ Appears isolated from friends, family, or classmates/colleagues
- ◉ Persistent unwanted contact with others
- ◉ Appears hyperactive or speaks very rapidly
- ◉ Suspected drug or alcohol abuse

Dealing with Disruptive Behavior

- ◉ Securing a safe environment is the top priority. If there are questions about immediate safety, call Police at 911
- ◉ Talk to the student, preferably in a private setting
- ◉ If there are concerns about violence or escalating behavior, ask a colleague, supervisor, or department chair to be present

Dealing with Disruptive Behavior

- ◉ Inform the student of the behavior that needs to change, a timeline for when the change needs to be made, and the consequences if the change does not occur.
- ◉ Follow through with the consequences if change does not occur
- ◉ Write out the above steps, and provide the student with a written copy , if possible

Dealing with Disruptive Behavior

- ◉ If the disruptive behavior is ongoing in a public setting (e.g., a classroom or a campus office):
 - > Verbally request that the behavior stop
 - > Verbally request that the student leave the setting if he/she does not stop
 - > Call Campus Police at 911 (from any campus phone)
 - > Consult the Dean of Students office about possible violations of the Code of Conduct

Dealing with Disturbing Behavior (Student in Distress)

- ◉ Speak with the student privately
- ◉ Let the student know that you are concerned about his or her welfare
- ◉ Express your concerns in nonjudgmental terms
- ◉ Maintain voice control
- ◉ Seek a “time out” if the behavior escalates

Dealing with Disturbing Behavior (Student in Distress)

- Tell the student you are willing to help
- Listen carefully
- Make a referral to the appropriate university department – give the name of a specific individual, if possible
- Emphasize that help for the student's concerns is available

Dealing with Disturbing Behavior (Student in Distress)

- ◉ Maintain clear boundaries and expectations – don't make promises you can't (or won't) keep
- ◉ Recognize your limits
- ◉ Do not promise confidentiality
- ◉ Do not personalize the problem
- ◉ Do not involve yourself beyond the limits of your time and/or skill

Resources

- Talk to your Supervisor, Department Chair, or College Dean about the student, for help in deciding upon appropriate action.

Resources

- Use the FIT line (277-SAFE or 277-4537) to consult with the Director of Counseling Services about a course of action

Resources

- Call the Dean of Students Conduct Officer (277-3361) to discuss whether the disruptive behavior falls under the Student Code of Conduct and should be reported.

Materials on OSET Website

Managing Difficult Student Behavior - Guidelines for Faculty and Staff

Information on identifying disturbing behavior, interventions, resources available, referral sheet, and other UNM relevant resources.

Materials on OSET Website

Crisis Intervention/Suicide Prevention

A checklist for changes in behavior for students and what these changes could mean. Also, actions for these changes.

Materials on OSET Website

**Responding to Students Expressing Clear
and Imminent DANGER TO SELF**

Information/interventions and resources
card.