

CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT TIP SHEET

Is that a Threat?

THE OFFICE OF STUDENT CONDUCT AND JUDICIAL AFFAIRS

Langara.
THE COLLEGE OF HIGHER LEARNING.

Many instructors encounter situations outside their range of experience. One of those situations is where student complaints turn to threats – or what might be a threat - leading to worries about classroom safety and security.

Keep in mind that students have a right to complain, and some exercise this right more than others. They may complain about your teaching style; your marking; your instructional material, or any number of things. Most people who receive these types of complaints feel unsettled.

But when does a complaint cross the line into a threat?

The dictionary defines a threat as: a declaration of the intention to inflict harm, pain, or misery. The key word here is intention. Not all objectionable comments or complaints are a declaration of the intention to cause harm, even if they come across that way.

Comments like: “I’m going to report you.” “I’m going to go to the media.” “I’m going to sue you.” “I’m going to get you fired” may feel like a threat, but instructors are best not to take this personally and regard it only as information.

Students can report issues of concern if they wish, but their concerns will always be considered or rejected based on the facts. Trust your professional integrity. The best response to these kinds of claims is: “Our purpose here is to see if we can resolve this situation. Only you can decide if you want to pursue other avenues.”

“You’ll be sorry about this.” “You’d better watch out.” “I’ll make you pay for this” would usually be considered veiled threats. Without a declaration of intent to cause harm, these comments are generally intended to intimidate and have you, as the receiver, retreat. Best advice in situations like this is: don’t bite, don’t respond, end the conversation and report it.

To end a conversation that is not going well, say: “Thank you for your point of view. I’ll give the matter some thought and someone from the College will get back to you.” Then stand up, open the door and say: “I have some other business to attend to now, but thank you for speaking to me.”

Huffing and puffing, swearing, slamming things, aggressive looks and postures all feel very threatening to the average person. But like veiled threats, their usual purpose is to intimidate rather than send a message about an intention to cause harm. Follow the same advice as above.

Most of us know that “I’m going to wait in the alley and break your legs” would be considered a direct threat, as would, “you’re dead,” “my friend is going to take care of you,” “I’ll put you 6 feet under.” In situations like this, seek out Langara security personnel immediately and report the incident.

Campus Security

604.562.1011 *or* local 5270 *or* 4444 from any internal phone *or* use a YELLOW emergency phone. If possible, enter these numbers in the speed dial of both your desk and cell phones.