

**Experience of Students' Disruptive and Disrespectful Behavior  
Survey of Faculty Conducted by the ADVANCE Program  
March 2015  
Executive Summary**

**Introduction**

In fall 2014, the ADVANCE Program conducted a faculty survey to assess experiences of students' disruptive and disrespectful behavior in both undergraduate and graduate level courses within the past year. A sample of tenure track faculty (excluding those in the Medical School) was surveyed, including all women and underrepresented minority (URM) faculty and a random sample of white and Asian/Asian American men (stratified by rank and equal to the number of comparable white and Asian/Asian American women).

A total of 1,373 faculty were surveyed, and 797 responded (58% response rate). A total of 554 faculty reported that they had taught an undergraduate course in the past year; 548 reported that they had taught a graduate course within the same time period (365 reported both). The survey asked faculty about specific student behaviors in and outside class within the past year (asked separately for undergraduate and graduate students) that were directed at them and at other students. Faculty were also given the opportunity, in an open-ended format, to provide any other information they considered helpful.

Following is a brief summary of the study's findings. The full report can be found at:  
<http://advance.umich.edu/resources/ClassroomExperiencesReport.pdf>

**Faculty Experiences of Students' Disruptive and Disrespectful Behavior**

Data on faculty reports of students' disruptive and disrespectful behavior directed toward them were examined separately for undergraduate and graduate student behavior in and outside the classroom. Individual items of student to faculty behavior were combined to create four indexes for each of these conditions: inattentive rudeness, challenged expertise, showed disrespect, and expressed anger.

Of the four indexes, *inattentive rudeness* was reported most often in the classroom (90% of faculty reported such behavior in their undergraduate classes). Undergraduate classroom rates for the other indexes were as follows: *showed disrespect* 27%; *challenged expertise* 13%; and *expressed anger* 3%. Rates for graduate student behaviors were lower but reflected the same general pattern.

Undergraduate Students

Regression analyses revealed that some faculty, especially women, URM, and untenured faculty, are more likely to experience disrespectful and disruptive behavior from undergraduate students compared to their colleagues.

- White faculty and untenured faculty reported higher levels of *inattentive rudeness* in the undergraduate classroom.
- URM, women, and untenured faculty were more likely to report classroom experiences of *disrespect* by undergraduate students. Outside of class, both assistant and associate professors reported higher levels of *disrespect* and Asian/Asian-American faculty reported lower levels.
- URM faculty, particularly at the associate level, reported more instances of students *expressing anger* toward them.

- Women reported more instances of undergraduate students **challenging their expertise** both in and outside the classroom. Further, URM women faculty and associate professors reported higher levels of **being challenged** in undergraduate classrooms, and URM faculty at the associate professor level more often reported **challenges to expertise** outside the classroom.

#### Graduate Students

- Faculty at the assistant and associate levels, as well as social science faculty, reported more instances of disruptive and disorderly behavior from graduate students in the classroom.
- Social science faculty reported higher levels of **inattentive rudeness**.
- URM faculty and those in the social sciences reported more instances of **disrespect** and **challenges to expertise** from graduate students in class.
- Assistant and associate faculty also reported higher levels of **challenges to expertise** in the classroom, and associates reported higher levels of both **expertise challenges** and **disrespect** outside the classroom.
- Outside the classroom, Asian/Asian American women reported more **disrespect** from graduate students.

#### **Faculty Observations of Disrespectful and Disruptive Behavior between Students**

Faculty observations of 13 different behaviors enacted between students in their undergraduate and/or graduate level courses were grouped to correspond to the four previously constructed indexes and were assessed separately for undergraduate and graduate level classes. The largest percentage of faculty reported **inattentive rudeness** and **disrespect** between students in class (20% for undergraduates and 14% for graduates). Fewer witnessed students **challenging another students' expertise** or **anger expressed** between students. Most often identified as targets of any disrespectful or disruptive behavior were students of color and women. Also mentioned, but less frequently, were white, international, men, and sexual minority students as well as those defined by their religious affiliation and low-income status.

#### **Conclusions**

The findings from the data on students' disruptive and disrespectful behavior suggest that classroom experiences can be challenging at best -- and quite negative at worst -- for some faculty. In addition, many faculty must manage disruptive and disrespectful behavior exhibited between students in the classroom. While present for all faculty, the data make clear that certain faculty, especially underrepresented minority faculty, women, untenured faculty, and those in the social sciences, are more likely to be recipients of disruptive and disrespectful behavior from both undergraduate and graduate students. Similarly, students of color and women students are most likely to be targeted with such behavior from their peers.

Since these disruptive and disrespectful behaviors are disproportionately experienced by URM, female, and less senior faculty, it is particularly important that racial majority, male, and senior faculty understand that their colleagues are faced with different challenges in the classroom than they are. It is important to identify effective strategies for faculty to deal with these negative behaviors and to set more explicit norms with students about appropriate behavior in academic interactions with faculty and with other students.