

Classroom Management Strategies: Topics and Tips

Defining disruptive behavior

Penn State's definition:

“...an action or combination of actions by one or more individuals that unreasonably interferes with, hinders, obstructs, or prevents the operation of the University or infringes on the rights of others to freely participate in its programs and services.”¹

According to students and faculty, top disruptive actions include²:

- Students talking loudly³
- Sarcastic comments and nonverbal signs of disrespect from students⁴
- Unpredictable/highly emotional outbursts from one or two students

Classroom incivility: planning and prevention

- Practice immediacy:
 - Arrive to class early and chat informally with students
 - Present at a moderate pace; take time to pause, slow down
 - Listen to students carefully without signs of impatience
 - Learn students' names
- Be clear on expectations, due dates for tests and assignments
- Be clear on the kind of behavior you expect in class, and model that behavior⁵
 - Examples: starting class on time; returning papers/tests on time
- Plan to actively engage students in appropriate learning activities: e.g., discussion, group work, cases, video

Identifying disturbing or worrisome behaviors

- Questionable behavior (examples):
 - Unsolicited attempts to talk about unusual or controversial topics
 - “Inappropriate affect” e.g., talking louder than necessary to communicate
- Assessing whether these behaviors are risky or simply odd can be difficult:⁶
 - Talk to student one on one
 - Show concern; ask questions
 - Observe boundaries
 - You can get others involved to get more information
 - Time/energy spent now saves it later

¹ The Pennsylvania State University Code of Conduct, 2007. <http://studentaffairs.psu.edu/judicial/codeofconduct/>

² Boice, Bob; 1996. Classroom Incivilities. *Research in Higher Education* 37(4): 453-486.

³ Arizona Idol; Dean of Students Office, University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ.

⁴ Students on Incivility in the Classroom. *The Teaching Professor* 25(1): 4

⁵ Price, Christy; 2010. Solutions for Student Incivility. *The Teaching Professor* 24(7): 6-7.

⁶ Penn State Counseling and Psychological Services. *Worrisome student behaviors*.

http://www.sa.psu.edu/caps/assisting_students.shtml

What would you do?

It's a typical day in your class. As you lecture:

- A student strolls in 10 minutes late, the earliest arrival for the student all semester
- Several are absorbed in the newspaper
- Two students are talking to each other and laughing
- One has head back, eyes closed, and mouth open
- A cell phone rings

What might you do about all this?

For some recommendations, go to <[hyyp://www.ncsu.edu/felder-public/Columns/Dayswork.html](http://www.ncsu.edu/felder-public/Columns/Dayswork.html)>

From Richard Felder: <[hyyp://www.ncsu.edu/felder-public/Columns/Dayswork.html](http://www.ncsu.edu/felder-public/Columns/Dayswork.html)>

Resources

Example of clear instructor expectations for student behavior:

http://certi.mst.edu/documents/Contract_on_classroom_behavior1.pdf

PSU guidelines and procedures on disruptive behavior:

<http://studentaffairs.psu.edu/judicial/classdisrupt.shtml>

Recognizing and addressing worrisome student behaviors:

http://www.sa.psu.edu/caps/assisting_students.shtml

<http://www.psu.edu/oue/disruptions.pdf>

More tips on managing hot moments in the classroom:

<http://isites.harvard.edu/fs/html/icb.topic58474/hotmoments.html>