

**Classroom Disruption Management:
A Causal-Preventive-Corrective Model**

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Introduction

Have you recently been inside of a college classroom? Of course you have, since you are a college instructor. If you have been teaching for many years, you may have noticed that the atmosphere in the classroom has changed and not for the better. If you are a new instructor, you probably are second guessing your chosen career or maybe you feel that you needed better preparation for managing the classroom. This paper explores the problem of classroom disruption and offers a solution for classroom disruptions.

The Classroom Disruption Problem

Classroom disruption is defined as behavior that a reasonable person would view as substantially or repeatedly interfering with conduct of a class. Generally, disruptive behavior interferes with the instructor's ability to conduct the class, or the ability of other students to profit from the instruction.

Do any of the following student behaviors sound familiar? Sleeping in class, inappropriate use of electronic devices, cell phones, or pagers, entering class late or leaving early (without permission), disputing authority and arguing with faculty and other students, packing up early, eating/drinking in class without permission, threats of any kind and/or harassment, and physical disruptions or physical altercations are examples of disruptive behavior. Students may not feel that there is anything wrong with the behaviors listed above. An assumption is that students understand classroom expectations, but the reality is that they do not.

Why not ignore the problem? Disruptive behavior is a problem that negatively impacts faculty, students, and university/college administration. Disruptive behavior plays a critical role in the success or failure of faculty teaching careers (Tom, 1998). Faculty well-being, comfort, and satisfaction can be directly impacted by the disruptive behavior of students. Faculty may become disillusioned and even dread teaching (Meyers, 2003). Classroom disruption contributes to additional faculty stress, discontent, and eventual burnout (Morrissette, 2001). Instructor concentration is negatively affected, so time and energy may be devoted to planning coping (survival) strategies rather than focusing on lecture material. The overall learning environment for students who are uninvolved in the disruptive behavior is negatively impacted. As a result, a hostile learning environment is created (McKinney, 2005). A poor learning environment has been identified as a reason for leaving college early (Seidman, 2005). Finally, the leaning and teaching capability of our institutions is restricted due to disruptive behavior (Feldmann, 2001).

How serious is the problem? The most recent report on violence statistics in the workplace for the years 1993-1999 issued by the Bureau of Justice Statistics of the U.S. Department of Justice, records 41,600 reported incidents of violence directed against college/university instructors (Duhart, 2001). However, the statistics do not allow one to

distinguish the number of assaults against faculty perpetrated by students from those perpetrated by co-workers or others. Furthermore, it is estimated that approximately 20 percent of students display active resistance to learning (Meyers, 2003).

A Solution for Classroom Disruptions

How can the problem of classroom disruption be solved? A solution involves the use of a causal-preventive-corrective model. First, the model explores causes of classroom disruption. Second, the model describes passive measures designed to prevent classroom disruption. Finally, the last focus, which is very active, involves correcting the situation and bringing order to the classroom.

Causes of Disruptive Behavior

What causes students to exhibit disruptive behavior or be difficult students? A review of the literature reveals myriad reasons for the disruptive behavior of students. Tom (1998) reports that the increasing cultural, social class, ethnic, lifestyle, and age diversity in the college population, coupled with changing cultural norms, may have created fuzziness in the definition of classroom etiquette. Clayton (2000) states that increasing numbers of students arrive ill-prepared, under motivated, and with expectations out of sync with the norm for a college classroom. Seidman (2005) and Schneider (1998) cite large classes as often leading to misbehavior. Bartlett (2004) describes students as less attentive and more combative. Clayton (2000) also views students as less attentive and seeing themselves as mistreated consumers. The student-as-consumer concept is also cited by Morrissette (2001). Whiteneck (2005) classifies difficult students into two types: resistant and reluctant. Reluctant students just do not want to be in the classroom and, therefore, are inclined to resent a course. Resistant students, by contrast, come into the class with a more or less open mind, but become resistant to the course content and/or the instructor's teaching style. Resistant students may become progressively agitated with the course until their frustration finally "boils over." Overall, Anderson (1999) concludes that an interaction of multiple factors could serve to predict classroom disruption.

Preventive Measures

Preventive measures deter problems before they arise and are intended to prevent an adverse event, such as students talking on cell phones during class, from occurring. They are integrated into the course and provide safeguards that are built into the classroom's routine procedures. A review of the literature led to the list of suggested preventive measures stated in Exhibit 1.

The key to disruption prevention is setting clear guidelines at the start of each quarter or semester that aid in setting the tone in the classroom. Expectations should be detailed in the course syllabus and discussed with students. This investment of time will aid in keeping disruptions to a minimum and will hold students accountable to a clear and known standard.

Exhibit 1 Preventive Measures	
1.	Include course and behavior norms and expectations for students and instructors in syllabi.
2.	Discuss these norms and expectations on the first day of class. Tell students you expect that they will act appropriately, but that you always like to remind students of these norms.
3.	Serve as role models and exhibit the types of behavior expected from students.
4.	Share control and responsibility with students in the class asking them on the first day what the norms for classroom behavior should be, and adding their ideas to your list.
5.	Draw up a “contract” on classroom behavior and ask students to read and sign it the first week of class (this can also include that they agree to attend class, participate, and be prepared ...). In a survey, 57 percent of the students found the contract helpful.
6.	Use impression management and your status by dressing and acting professionally. Refer to yourself as “Doctor” or “professor” and have students do so as well (though for some faculty or in some circumstances it is more appropriate to reduce the status differences between you and your students).
7.	Be extra tough on all matters the first day and week to set the “tone.” You can always be flexible and nurturing later.
Source: McKinney (2005); Bartlett (2004)	

Corrective Measures

Corrective measures are measures taken to correct classroom disruption problems, once they have been detected. Such measures should be taken with caution after the reasons for classroom disruption have been analyzed. Suggested corrective measures based on a review of the literature are listed in Exhibit 2.

It is very important to immediately document each situation and the action taken. Keep your account of the situation analytical, factual, and free of emotional judgments. If possible instructors should use as many preventive measures as possible and, as a last resort, utilize corrective measures.

Conclusion

College classrooms are not the fun they used to be. Classroom disruption has negative consequences for all parties involved. The model of classroom disruption management summarized in this article attempts to present a solution to the problem of classroom disruption. This solution may help to retain both students and instructors.

Exhibit 2
Corrective Measures

1.	Talk with colleagues in your department (including your chair). How would they handle these situations? What do they see as normative? This gives you ideas for handling the situation, lets your chairperson know what is happening early on, and that you are trying to deal with it.
2.	Walk over to the talkative students and conduct class standing right next to them (“the Oprah Winfrey design”).
3.	Stop whatever you are doing and wait (as long as it takes) for students to quiet down while you look at the disruptive students. Then begin again.
4.	Note who the disruptive students are and speak to them after class or ask them to come to your office hours. Explain why/how you find them disruptive, find out why they are acting that way, ask them what they would be comfortable doing. Tell them what you want to do.
5.	Discuss the disruptive behavior in private outside of class with some of the concerned and nondisruptive students. Ask for their assistance in maintaining a positive classroom environment.
6.	On a given day when this behavior occurs change what you are doing. Break students in to groups for some work. Call on these and other students to come forward and lead discussion.
7.	Consider changing the structure of the whole class. Is it all lecture and/or do students need to be more active and involved? Rethink if/how what you do fits the students and the course. Use more diverse techniques to reach the disruptive students.
8.	Direct firm, but not derogatory, comments to the disruptive students during class. Ask if they have a comment or question. Ask them to be quiet. Let them know they are being unfair to their peers. Avoid a public blowup.
9.	Inform the student outside of class that their disruptive behavior does not fit your criteria for participation and that their grades will be lowered if it does not stop (this one can be tricky in terms of what your syllabus says and how you handle it).
10.	Spend some time in class discussing the whole situation openly and honestly with all the students. You may feel you should not “waste” class time doing this, but if class time is disrupted by students and this negatively affects your ability to work, teaching-learning is being harmed and the class time is already a waste.
11.	Ask the student(s) to leave the classroom for that class period.
12.	Inform the students that it is unfair to everyone for this behavior to continue and that you will not continue that class period until it stops. If it does not stop, tell the students you are leaving but they are still responsible for the material and welcome to come to your office hours. Leave.
13.	File charges about the student(s) with the grievance committee. Be sure to inform the student(s) first that you plan to do this.
14.	Inform students requesting recommendations that you will discuss their rude behavior in the recommendation. Suggest the students ask someone else.
Source: McKinney, (2005); Nadler, (2005); Schneider, (1998)	

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