

Teaching in a disruptive classroom

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Anyone who teaches a large group of students has probably experienced undesirable student behaviors. I taught the introductory college biology course at Syracuse University, and several hundred students attended each lecture.

Marvin Druger, Syracuse University, shares his college teaching experiences and how to deal with inappropriate behavior in an article published in the 2008 *Journal of Natural Resources and Life Sciences Education*.

Druger never paid much attention to inappropriate student behavior in his class, assuming that most students were paying attention and taking notes. One day, after lecture, a disgruntled young man approached him and complained about other students talking in class. This comment made Druger aware that there was a problem that required his attention.

"After observation, I learned that text messaging, talking on cells phones and with other students, drawing pictures in notebooks, doing other homework, reading a book, and sleeping were all occurring during my lecture," explains Druger.

Druger decided to send an email message to the students about misbehavior to all the students in the course. He made the students aware that he had complaints from students who are distracted by these inappropriate behaviors.

Part of the email message said, "If you are one of the few disruptive

students that I'm talking about, please think about your behavior and modify it. I'm trying to enrich your life, and it's frustrating to see that a few students in the class seem not to care."

The week after sending the email to all the students in the large class, the results were very gratifying. "Students had stopped being disruptive and were attentively listening to the lecture and taking notes," said Druger.

It seems that an effective way to handle student misbehavior in a lecture class is to simply be very direct with the students. Once students think about their behavior and realize that it is inappropriate, they will likely cooperate. It is a matter of reaching into the adult component of the student's mind.

Directly appealing to students and explaining the reasoning for your class policies can resolve problems. Try it and see.

Source: American Society of Agronomy

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