

## RESPONDING TO DISRUPTIVE STUDENT BEHAVIOR IN MARKETING CLASSROOMS

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### ABSTRACT

Though far from a new problem, there is increasing concern today among college and university faculty members about disruptive student behavior (Clark & Springer, 2007a,b; Hirshy & Braxton, 2005; June, 2010). Disruptive behavior is misconduct that interferes with academic and administrative activities on campus. It includes overt acts as well as failures to perform that disrupt the flow of campus and classroom activity.

In the classroom, disruptive behavior is uncivil conduct that is inconsiderate of instructors and fellow students. Such behavior includes arriving late or leaving early in a distracting manner, conversing loudly and off-topic, making hostile and disrespectful comments, eating or sleeping during class, using cell phones and electronics for unauthorized purposes, insolent inattention, and generally directing attention away from the planned classroom activity. More extreme forms of disruptive behavior include verbal taunts and abuse, the sending of hostile or threatening emails, emotional outbursts, physical threats and assaults, vulgar or harassing behavior, willful damage to property, and acting under the influence of drugs or alcohol. Somewhere between is the behavior of students who seek to dominate class discussions, of students who make excessive and inappropriate demands for instructor time and attention, and of disengaged students who fail to participate.

Many believe that evolving norms toward a more informal society have contributed to an overarching decline in classroom decorum. The results are increased incidents of rude, distracting, and inattentive behavior. Other perceived origins include poor secondary school preparation, lack of parental training, a sense of entitlement, exposure to violence and combative behavior, and general disaffected-

ness with and distrust of formal authority and social institutions. Students additionally come to class bearing a variety of emotional difficulties from their home and personal lives.

Also at play is the wide diversity of students enrolled on today's college campuses, including increasing numbers with psychiatric disorders and whose self-management and behavior is variable depending on adjustments in and adherence to medication. The increased numbers are present for a variety of reasons, including legislative changes that have helped to retain and treat psychiatric patients in local communities, advances in psychotropic medications, and the inclusive and hospitable qualities of campuses (Amada, 1992). Though rare, recent incidents of shootings and other violence on campuses have called increasing attention to mental health issues among college students.

Responding to troublesome behavior is commonly identified as being among the most challenging aspects of being a professor (June, 2010; Sorcinelli, 1994). Appropriate response is important for marketing educators because disruptive student behavior is a major inhibitor of learning (Hirschy & Braxton, 2004; Seidman, 2005; Sorcinelli, 1994). Though the number of offenders is likely to be small, a few or even one student prone to disruption can change the entire climate of a class. Other students exposed to classroom incivilities and who are distracted during class spend less energy thinking critically during class time and become generally less engaged with the material. Evidence also suggests negative effects outside the classroom on student academic and intellectual development and commitment to education. Students who are frustrated with a chaotic classroom environment may feel isolated and that their values and attitudes do not fit with those of others students, or that their

educational goals are not supported. Retention and student success are thereby affected. Likewise, faculty members experience less productivity and can become demoralized (June, 2010).

On the other hand, appropriate and fairly applied behavioral standards are appreciated and supported by most students (Hirschy & Braxton, 2004). Education plays an important role in developing a civil society, engendering a sense of civic and social responsibility and aiding students in learning ways to contribute to the common good. Disruptive behavior undermines this role (Clark & Springer, 2007b).

Most faculty members as subject-matter specialists are not specifically trained and may feel ill prepared to handle disruptive and troublesome behavior (Seldman, 2005). Hirschy and Braxton (2004) suggest that the most effective teachers are skillful in using positive motivators (asking students if they understand, encouraging students they can do better) and expressing immediacies (making eye contact, showing students they care) as deterrents to disruptive behavior. Patterns of classroom disruptions are often established within the first few class meetings. Faculty members are in a position to structure the classroom learning environment. Their preparation, defined expectations and reinforcement of campus codes of conduct, pedagogical approaches, and readiness to intervene all can foster a classroom environment that supports respectful discourse and decorum.

The issue of classroom management within the university has historically received little focused attention. However, as tuition has become more expensive, and as the public and both federal and state lawmakers have called for more accountability, increasing attention has been placed on instructional effectiveness at all types of universities and colleges. As a result, many schools, including even research universities, now provide instructional advice for new instructors and for doctoral students in their graduate programs (e.g., Cook et al., 1996). Further, increasing numbers of doctoral students are seeking formal teacher training (Grasgreen, 2010).

In this special session it is suggested that classroom management can make a substantial difference in student learning and instructor evaluation. Proper management of the college/university classroom can provide the foundation for high standards of student engagement with course material and prevent disruptive behavior. Administrators play an important role by supporting faculty members, enforcing codes of conduct, adjudicating violations, and providing resources and infrastructure to foster a safe learning

environment (Hernandez & Fister, 2001; June, 2010; Sorcinelli, 1994).

Though disruptive student behavior is widely acknowledged in the literature as a common problem, instructors may be hesitant to discuss classroom disruption, finding the existence and prevalence of incivility in their classrooms professionally embarrassing and suggestive of some deficiency in their teaching (Clark & Springer, 2007a; Sorcinelli, 1994). As such, they may remain silent, reluctant to share with colleagues the details of classroom disruptions and incivilities and how they reacted. Further, they may neglect to utilize campus resources available for their support and which are designed to forestall escalation of problems. Such reticence can lead faculty to feel isolated, frustrated, and incompetent (Hernandez & Fister, 2001; June, 2010). However, there are at least three benefits to open discussion with colleagues and utilizing available resources:

- Effectively confronting uncivil and disruptive behavior enhances the learning environment, whereas failure to do so damages it.
- Challenging disruptive behavior can avert future disruptive behaviors from the same and other students. Conversely, the longer disruptive behavior is allowed to occur, the more acceptable and widespread it becomes and the more difficult it is to stop.
- As educators, we contribute to building a civil society predicated on awareness and practice of ethical and socially responsible behaviors.

This special session will engage participants in discussion of experiences with disruptive behavior and what actions were found effective (or ineffective) in preventing and mitigating troublesome behavior in the classroom. In this highly interactive special session, Kirti Sawhney Celly and Franck Vigneron will lead a discussion of instructor perceptions of good classroom management and effective responses to disruption and misconduct. They will share experiences and potential teaching techniques to heighten student engagement with learning. David Ackerman will share student perceptions of good classroom management and effective responses from students' points of view. He will discuss "the good, the bad, and the ugly" from student experiences and stories of instructors both who positively motivated and whose classes suffered from not managing disruptive behavior. Barbara Gross will discuss administrative resources in support of faculty members and students, and the implications of leaving student misconduct unaddressed or allowing it to escalate. Participants will be encouraged to share best practices from their own experiences and seek the group's input on how to deal with specific difficult situations.