Effective Strategies

Managing Disruptions in Online & In-Person Classrooms

Tips for Online Disruptions

- Know how to use the technology you will be delivering the course – zoom, webex, etc.
- Know how to mute someone
- Know how to control participants (making sure they are students in the course and not zoombombers or people logging in when they are not the student),
- Know how to structure assignments that steer away from "just" an opinion to an opinion backed up by something in the text/article/reading
- Give examples of proper discussion posts (how not to attack someone online based on their opinion/belief by why do they think this way or that way based on the course content.

Prevention for Online Disruptions

- **Should a disruption occur, consider muting the participant as swiftly as appropriate.** If the student is enrolled, email the student following the course, clarify why the student was muted, and remind them of appropriate conduct and expectations.

Prevention for Online Disruptions

- **Set the tone and the level of expectations.** If you model well written, concise and properly spell checked messages, it would be easier for you to require the same from your students.

Prevention for Online Disruptions

- **Manage your discussion forums.** Too many threads will make online learning frustrated. As this Online Institute demonstrated, you may not want to display the entire semester for the first week of your online class. Your students would be overwhelmed. Schedule a display of course content and your discussion forums will be a great idea you can use for interaction. Balance between student-centered and instructor-centered activities.

Establish online classroom norms

- Explain to students the importance of setting class norms, and that you would value their input

- Send students to *breakout groups* to make their own list of norms

- Return to whole group meeting to compare lists, and create a "final" list. (Of course, you may need to update it later)

- If students have a say in creating the rules, they will be more likely to follow them. I often find that students come up with many of the rules I'd have come up with anyway. In fact, they'll point out some issues you wouldn't have expected.

- You may want to give them guiding questions for their conversations. *What is appropriate dress for online meetings? When and how should we ask questions? Will we use hand signals?*

- In addition to meeting norms, establish norms for collaborative documents. I've found that most Google Drive arguments start when one student erases something another has written. So we established the rule that you can only *comment* on someone else's writing, unless they've given you permission to edit/erase.

- Be aware that norms will evolve. Having a "norms" check-in every Monday can provide structure to each week of online learning.

Prevention for In Person Disruptions

- **Use proximity.** If you stay at the front of the room the whole time, students know they can pursue other activities without you noticing. If possible, move around the room as you conduct class, standing close to students who are talking or texting—the closer you get, the less likely they are to continue that behavior.

- **Nip minor disruptions early** without getting into a big power struggle. One way to do this is to ask the student who is engaging in off-task behavior a content-based question to get her engaged in the lesson.

Prevention for In Person Disruptions

- **Avoid sarcasm.** Although many teachers believe this projects confidence, it actually looks more like weakness and in most cases, makes students lose respect for you. It can also be unclear: If a student is texting his buddy, a snarky comment like, "John, tell your girlfriend hi from us" will just be confusing. Along those same lines, **avoid publicly embarrassing students**.

- **Talking privately with the disruptive students** can make a big difference. Again, in an even tone, describe the behavior you're noticing, explain why it is a problem, and tell the student you'd like them to stop. In many cases, this is all that's needed to change behavior.

Final Reminders

- Dealing with a disruptive student online is similar to dealing with the same situation in a classroom setting don't call them out, but address.
- Tone is important both online and in person
- Sensitive Issues
- REAL LIFE. Kindness matters.
  - Students as well as you as the faculty member are dealing with life's realities

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