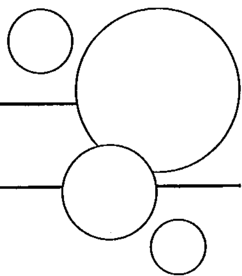


APPENDIX E

What Are Ground Rules and How Can We Use Them?

Ground rules help to maintain a productive classroom climate by clearly articulating a set of expected behaviors for classroom conduct, especially for discussions. Ground rules can be set by the instructor or created by the students themselves (some people believe that students adhere more to ground rules they have played a role in creating). Ground rules should reflect the objectives of the course. For example, if an objective of the course is for students to enlist evidence to support an opinion, a ground rule could reinforce that goal; if a goal is for students to connect content material to personal experiences, then ground rules that protect privacy and create a safe environment for sharing personal information are important.

Ground rules should be established at the beginning of a course, and the instructor should explain the purpose they serve (for example, to ensure that discussions are spirited and passionate without descending into argumentation, that everyone is heard, and that participants work together toward greater understanding rather than contribute disjointed pieces). Some instructors ask students to sign a contract based on the ground rules; others simply discuss and agree to the ground rules informally. It is important for instructors to remind students of these ground rules periodically, particularly if problems occur (for example,

students cutting one another off in discussion or making inappropriate personal comments). Instructors should also be sure to hold students accountable to these rules, for example, by exacting a small penalty for infractions (this can be done in a lighthearted way, perhaps by asking students who violate the rules to contribute a dollar to a class party fund), by factoring conduct during discussions into a participation grade for the course, or by pulling aside and talking to students whose conduct violates the agreed-upon rules.

For sample ground rules, see Exhibit E.1, and for a method for helping students create their own ground rules, see Exhibit E.2.

Exhibit E.1. Sample Ground Rules

For Discussions

Listen actively and attentively.
Ask for clarification if you are confused.
Do not interrupt one another.
Challenge one another, but do so respectfully.
Critique ideas, not people.
Do not offer opinions without supporting evidence.
Avoid put-downs (even humorous ones).
Take responsibility for the quality of the discussion.
Build on one another's comments; work toward shared understanding.
Always have your book or readings in front of you.
Do not monopolize discussion.
Speak from your own experience, without generalizing.
If you are offended by anything said during discussion, acknowledge it immediately.
Consider anything that is said in class strictly confidential.

For Lectures

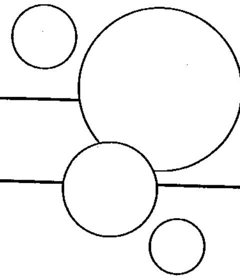
Arrive on time.
Turn your cell phone off.

Use laptops only for legitimate class activities (note-taking, assigned tasks).
Do not leave class early without okaying it with the instructor in advance.
Ask questions if you are confused.
Try not to distract or annoy your classmates.

Exhibit E.2. A Method for Helping Students Create Their Own Ground Rules

1. Ask students to think about the best group discussions in which they have participated and reflect on what made these discussions so satisfying.
2. Next, ask students to think about the worst group discussions in which they have participated and reflect on what made these discussions so unsatisfactory.
3. For each of the positive characteristics identified, ask students to suggest three things the group could do to ensure that these characteristics are present.
4. For each of the negative characteristics identified, ask students to suggest three things the group could do to ensure that these characteristics are not present.
5. Use students' suggestions to draft a set of ground rules to which you all agree, and distribute them in writing.
6. Periodically ask the class to reflect on whether the ground rules established at the beginning of the semester are working, and make adjustments as necessary.

SOURCE: Brookfield & Preskill (2005).



APPENDIX F

What Are Exam Wrappers and How Can We Use Them?

All too often when students receive back a graded exam, they focus on a single feature—the score they earned. Although this focus on "the grade" is understandable, it can lead students to miss out on several learning opportunities that such an assessment can provide:

- Identifying their own individual areas of strength and weakness to guide further study
- Reflecting on the adequacy of their preparation time and the appropriateness of their study strategies
- Characterizing the nature of their errors to find any recurring patterns that could be addressed

So to encourage students to process their graded exams more deeply, instructors can use *exam wrappers*, short handouts that students complete when an exam is turned back to them. Exam wrappers direct students to review and analyze their performance (and the instructor's feedback) with an eye toward adapting their future learning.

One way to use exam wrappers is to ask students to complete the handout when they get back their graded exams. This way,

1. If there are only two or three people on an elevator, each person usually leans against the walls. If a fourth person boards the elevator, the four corners are normally occupied.

2. Being in a crowded elevator would be a breach of our personal "space." We would feel very uncomfortable and move or get off the elevator at the next stop.

3. When more than four people are on an elevator, the occupants begin to follow a complex set of rules for behavior. Everyone turns to face the door. Hands, purses, and briefcases hang down in front of the body. People usually scrunch up, rounding their shoulders, so that they take up as little space as possible.

4. People don't touch each other in any way unless the elevator becomes very crowded, and then they only touch at the shoulders or upper arms. If you see an overcrowded elevator, you will probably choose to wait for the next one.

5. Everyone usually looks at the floor indicator located above the door.

6. It is unusual for people (who are strangers) to speak to each other in an elevator unless they are sharing some kind of similar experience (such as a conference). People who do know each other will usually speak softly. When a group of people enter the elevator and do not follow these rules, other occupants usually feel very uncomfortable.

Chapter 13

Dealing with Student Problems and Problem Students (There's Almost Always at Least One!)

There isn't a teacher in the world who hasn't had to deal with student problems and problem students. Somehow it is reassuring to know that you are not alone in having a particular problem and that the problem is probably not due solely to your own inadequacy as a teacher. This chapter discusses some common problems that teachers at all levels face, and it suggests some strategies to try. I organized the chapter into three categories of problems, ranging from those directly related to the academic side of teaching, to those stemming from the fact that we are working with humans engaged in the process of learning.

First, a word of general advice: It is human nature to perceive the problem as the student; but before focusing on changing the student's behavior, take a few moments to look at what you are doing that might be related to the student's behavior. Interpersonal problems involve at least two people.

INTELLECTUAL/ACADEMIC PROBLEMS

The problems examined in this section arise from things that affect how people learn and what happens when they have difficulties doing it.

Aggressive, Challenging Students

There are many reasons why one or more students might be inclined to be aggressive and always challenging what is said in class. The most desirable reason might be that they are interested in the topic and have a lot of prior experience or knowledge to contribute, even if that prior knowledge is actually wrong. Or they might be challenging you because there is genuine disagreement about a particular topic and they're flexing their academic mental muscles against someone (you) who is very knowledgeable in the area. You usually can tell the difference between these students and those who convey, both verbally and nonverbally, hostility toward you and the whole enterprise. Sometimes the attitude is not so much hostility as a challenge to your authority.

Faced with the first of these two alternatives, you should be pleased! Consider this a "teachable moment." By disagreeing or always adding their two cents, these students are giving you an opportunity to accomplish two very important teaching tasks. The first is to delve more deeply into the logic behind the facts and principles that sometimes pass for content in students' minds. Rather than blindly accepting everything you say, students should try to reconcile new information with their preconceptions. They should be asking for greater depth, more examples, more explanation. These challenging students are out in the forefront of that student push. The second teaching task that these students are allowing you to do is to model what it means to be a critical thinker in the face of challenges to your ideas. In what passes for political dissent these days, students seldom have the opportunity to see two individuals actually discuss together rather than talk past one another about a controversial point. When students challenge you, you can demonstrate scholarly debate, including careful listening, thoughtful reflection, respectful disagreement, and reasonable compromise where appropriate.

Later in this chapter, in the section on emotional problems, I discuss students who are hostile or angry about everything.

Students Who Want the Truth and Students Who Believe that Everything is Relative

You just gave a superb lecture comparing two competing theories. A student comes up after class and says, "That was a great lecture, but which theory is right?"

All too many students feel that the teacher's task is to tell them the facts and larger truths and the student's task is to listen to the truth,

learn it, and be able to give it back on exams. This conception seemed to William Perry of Harvard University to be particularly common among first-year students.

Perry (1981) suggested that individual differences in student responses to teaching may be conceptualized in terms of stages of cognitive development. Students at the earliest stages have a dualistic view of knowledge. They think that things are either true or false, right or wrong. They believe that the teacher knows the truth, and that the student's job is to learn the truth. Students in the middle stages have learned that authorities differ. They accept the idea that there seems to be no settled truth, and that everyone has a right to his or her own opinions. This stage is succeeded by the recognition that some opinions and generalizations are better supported than others, and that the student's task is to learn the criteria needed for evaluating the validity of assertions in different subject matter fields. Students in the final stages are ready to commit to values, beliefs, and goals, and to make decisions and act on their values, despite their lack of complete certainty.

Sixteen years after Perry's article was published, Barbara Hofer (1997) found that dualists were rare at the University of Michigan, where she conducted her research. Rather, college students were more likely to believe that multiple perspectives are equally valid. Students like those studied by Hofer might be the very students who challenge everything that you or any other authority says. How should you respond to the challenge?

Unfortunately, we sometimes play into the hands of these students with the kinds of teaching and testing we do. If all we ever do is deliver information in a clean and neat format, if all we ever use are tests where there really is only one right answer, why should the students believe differently? Or, if we don't critique ideas or give them feedback when their points are less than coherent or correct, why should they bother to think more deeply? Here is one instance where we have to shoulder some of the blame for the problem.

Researchers like Perry and Hofer would agree that teachers need to help students understand how knowledge is arrived at in their own disciplines, what counts as evidence, and how to read critically and evaluate knowledge claims. For development in such epistemological beliefs, students need to debate and discuss issues in which competing ideas are challenged and defended; they need to write journals and papers that are responded to by the teacher or by peers. Most important of all, they need good models of how to think about the quandaries that are a constant in higher-level thinking and learning. As I said in the previous section, they need to see how you deal with contradictions and inconsistencies,

how you solve problems when you don't have enough information, how you cope with the frustration of never being sure of the "right" answer.

Students Who are Underprepared for the Course or Struggling

Sometimes students come into our classes without the appropriate background. Perhaps they didn't have the right prerequisites, or they didn't apply themselves diligently in their previous courses. It really doesn't do you or them any good to rail against their previous efforts or castigate them for imagined or real previous failures. That was then; this is now. What are you going to do with them now?

If the gaps in students' background can be remedied by pointing students toward supplemental or remedial resources, that's a good first step. It puts the students back in charge of their own learning, which is a good source of motivation, especially for those who are behind through no fault of their own. These days a lot of remediation can be made available electronically. Resources available on the Internet might be helpful for basic skill development, such as math skills or writing skills. Alternatively, you can prepare tutorials on the most commonly occurring deficits that you've seen in students in prior semesters. Your department may even want to create a common Website that helps students with key skills needed in all courses in the discipline or that provides definitions, examples, and activities to practice the basics of the discipline. You also can put materials or alternative textbooks on reserve in the library or online for those students who may not have had the appropriate content in prerequisite courses. Include sample questions or old exams to help them decide whether they understand well enough to go on.

You know the value of working with someone else when you're having problems. So, if you can, encourage students to form study groups to work together throughout the semester, not just when there's a test coming. The hardest part of this for students is finding a time to get together. A colleague of mine who teaches a mega-course (500 students) set up an electronic matchmaker that allows students to indicate when they're free to study and in which part of town they live. Such a system helps struggling students find others who are not struggling and are willing to help them as a way of earning extra credit (all instructor certified, of course). Another way of providing help is to set up a class discussion board where students can post questions and get responses from other students or from the instructor. If enough students ask the same question, you might create a FAQs page with the best solution to the problem and make it available to everyone, including future classes.

Some students are having trouble that requires additional help. I give quizzes and tests early in the term to help students identify and diagnose their difficulties. I invite those who do not do as well as they hoped to come in to see me. When they do, I ask them for their own assessment of the cause of their difficulty and try to offer helpful suggestions. Usually, I also ask some specific questions:

"Have you missed any classes?"

"Do you study the assignments before class?"

"How do you study?" (This may lead to a discussion of learning strategies; see Chapter 20 "Teaching Students How to Become More Strategic and Self-Regulated Learners.")

"What kind of notes do you take?" (I usually ask to see them.)

"Do you discuss the class with classmates—asking questions, explaining, summarizing?"

Sometimes I refer students to other resources on campus, such as a student learning support center. I keep learning-center handouts in my office to provide to students who might need a nudge. If they see how helpful such folks can be, they might be more inclined to go and see them. I check with students later to see whether they tried any of my suggestions, and I watch later performance to see if further help is needed.

Individualized Teaching and Mentoring

Here I want to discuss interactions dealing with larger issues of students' educational and personal development. The potentially most fruitful and most appropriate interpretation of educational counseling is the one least often defined explicitly and most neglected. Even in classes of 40 to 60 students, it is difficult for the learning process to include the meeting of a maturing and a mature intellect. Too frequently, students must be content to listen to lectures and pursue readings aimed at some abstract notion of "the student."

In out-of-class interactions with students or as a student's academic advisor, you can supplement course-related learning with personalized learning that facilitates individuals' adjustment to college. This is particularly necessary for first-year students, to whom new intellectual spheres are being opened, usually at a time when they have taken a big step away from their families and communities. This is likely to be a time when a great many new assumptions and new ways of dealing with important ideas need to be digested. Educational counselors, because they have no commitment to covering a specific subject matter, can provide students with an opportunity to digest and integrate the intellectual experiences

they have been having. Far from being a chore to be assigned to the least successful faculty member, such a demanding responsibility is best undertaken by persons of broad intellectual interests and foundations who, at the same time, have strong pedagogical commitments. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) cite faculty student interactions as one of the key variables that has an impact on college student development.

This time, when students are making big strides toward greater independence from family and are trying to seek out models who can represent innovations of the adult role to which they aspire, is a time when there should be opportunities for close relationships with faculty members. The very characteristics of the large university throw obstacles in the way of such an experience. Educational counseling is one of the important means for achieving it. It seems probable that the most effective pattern for doing this would be for counselors to plan small-group meetings with the students assigned to them for counseling to provide an opportunity for the groups of new students coming from different parts of the state and country to exchange with each other and with a person of some intellectual maturity the impacts of their initial university experiences. A number of colleges and universities group first-year students into interest groups or seminars that meet regularly during the first term to help establish both academic and social support systems. We often think first of mentoring graduate students, but mentoring is a role you will have for students at all levels.

The problems of the older student entering college are in some ways similar to those of young first-year students despite the obvious differences in life experience. Both young and older students often feel some anxiety about their ability to carry out academic work successfully. The older students, however, may have even greater concerns about their ability to adapt to the college environment and to form helpful relationships with peers (most of whom are much younger and experience quite different social and recreational lives).

CLASS MANAGEMENT PROBLEMS

Sometimes the problems we have with students are really issues of policy or rule keeping. It's amazing how much effort some students will put into trying to get around the rules. The best way to save yourself time and effort in this area is to have fair policies that you state clearly in a readily available source (such as the syllabus or the class Website) and that you enforce consistently (but not inflexibly). Let's consider some specifics.

Attention Seekers and Students Who Dominate Discussions

In *The College Classroom*, Dick Mann (1970) and his graduate students describe eight clusters of students, one of which is "attention seekers." Attention seekers talk whether or not they have anything to say; they joke, show off, compliment the teacher or other students—they continually try to be noticed (Mann et al., 1970).

At the beginning of the term, when I am trying to get discussions started, I am grateful for the attention seekers. They help keep the discussion going. But as the class develops, both the other students and I tend to be disturbed by the students who talk too much and interfere with other students' chances to talk. What do I do then?

Usually I start by suggesting that I want to get everyone's ideas—that each student has a unique perspective and that it is important that we bring as many perspectives and ideas as possible to bear on the subject under discussion. If hands are raised to participate, I call first on those who haven't talked recently.

If the problem persists, I may suggest to the class that some people seem to participate much more than others and ask the whole class for suggestions about what might be done to give all students a chance to participate. Alternatively, I might ask two or three students to act as "process observers" for a day, to report at the end of the class or at the beginning of the next class on their observations of how the discussion went, what problems they noticed, and what suggestions they have. (I might even ask an attention seeker to be a process observer.) Another possibility is to audiotape or videotape a class and play back one or more portions at the next class period for student reactions.

If all else fails, I ask an attention seeker to see me outside class, and I mention that I'm concerned about the class discussions, and that although I appreciate the student's involvement, it would be helpful if he or she would hold back some of his or her comments until everyone else has been heard. Sometimes I phrase it like this: "The other students are starting to depend on you to do all the work, so let's make them speak up more." Put this way, the comment makes the two of us accomplices in furthering the education of the rest of the class!

Some dominant students are knowledgeable, fluent, and eager to contribute relevant information, contribute real insights, and solve problems. We prize such students; yet we must recognize the potential danger that other students will withdraw, feeling no need to participate because the dominant student is so brilliant or articulate that their own ideas and questions will seem weak and inadequate. Here, subgrouping may help, with the stipulation that each student must present his or her

question, idea, or reaction to the task of the group before beginning a general discussion.

In his newsletter *The University Teacher*, Harry Stanton (1992), consultant on higher education at the University of Tasmania, suggests that each student be given three matches or markers at the beginning of a class. Each time students speak, they must put down one of their markers, and when their markers are gone, their contributions are over for the day. Perhaps subgroups could pool their markers or one group could borrow or bargain for an extra marker for a really good idea that needs to be presented.

Inattentive Students

Periodically, I have a class in which two or three students in the back of the room carry on their own conversations. This is annoying not only to me but to students sitting near them. What to do?

First consider whether the problem is with the material rather than with the students. Is the lecture material too difficult? Too easy? Does the topic of discussion arouse anxiety? If the answer to these questions is "no" and the behavior persists despite changes in topic or level of difficulty, what next?

My first attempt is typically to break the class into buzz groups assigned to work on some problem or to come up with a hypothesis, and to move around the room to see how the groups are progressing, making sure that I get to the group including the disruptive students to see that they are working on the group task. Usually this works, and sometimes this gets the students re-engaged in the class for the rest of the class period.

But suppose that in the next class period the same problem recurs? This time I might have the class write minute papers and call on one of the inattentive students to report what he or she has written, or alternatively I might call on someone seated near the inattentive group, centering activity toward that part of the classroom.

Another possibility is to announce that, because research evidence indicates that students who sit in front get better grades (you can explain why seeing an instructor's face and mouth improves attention and understanding), you have a policy of rotating seats periodically and next week you will expect those sitting in the back row to move to the front row and all other students to move back one row.

If all else fails, I might have a general class feedback discussion on what factors facilitated and what factors might have interfered with learning in the class thus far in the term. Alternatively, I might ask one

or more of the students to see me outside of class to ask them about their feelings about the class and to express my concern about not being able to teach in a way that captures their attention.

Students Who Come to Class Unprepared

There are often good reasons why students come to class unprepared, but some students are chronically unprepared for no apparent reason. What can we do? Here, I'll elaborate on the suggestions made in the chapters "Facilitating Discussion" and "How to Make Lectures More Effective."

In my introductory course I try to communicate from the beginning that I expect students to read the assignments before class. I announce that on the second day of class I will give a brief quiz based on the first lecture or discussion and the assignment for the second day of class. I give the quiz and then ask students to correct their own papers, indicating that this quiz had two purposes: to start the habit of reading the assignment before class, and to give them an idea of whether or not they were getting the main points of the assignment. I give a second quiz a week later and a longer one three weeks later. By this point I hope that my students have established a routine for keeping up with their assignments.

Such a procedure assumes that students know what is expected of them. One of the most common causes of underpreparation is that students don't really know what is expected. Often instructors say something like "You might want to look at the next chapter of the book before the next class," or they state that the next lecture will be on topic X but don't indicate that this is also the topic of the next reading. Giving students some questions to think about as they study the next assignment can help, as will announcement of an activity in the next class that depends on the assignment. One of the advantages of a well-written syllabus is that it communicates your expectations. You also need to communicate expectations by frequent use of phrases such as "As your assignment for today demonstrated" or questions such as "What does X (the textbook author) say about...?" or "What evidence from the assigned readings would support (or not support) your position?" I wrote a piece for the National Teaching Learning Forum entitled "The Scout's Motto: Be Prepared" (Svinicki, 2008) to offer a range of suggestions about this very problem. It really helped me to clarify for myself what I meant by being prepared for my class and sharing that with the students. You might find that even the definition of "read" varies from student to student and class to class.

The Flatterer, Disciple, Con Man (or Woman)

If you are new or somewhat insecure, it is tempting to respond positively to anyone who tells you that you are the best teacher he or she has ever had, or who is impressed with the depth of your knowledge and wants to learn more about your special research interests. Actually, you do not need to be new or insecure; we all relish compliments and interest in our work. Often such interest is genuine and can be genuinely enriching for both you and the student, but there are students for whom such an approach is a conscious strategy for winning better grades or getting exceptions from deadlines for papers or other requirements.

The real danger presented by such students is that you will begin to mistrust all students and lose compassion for students who really need an extension of time or some other indication of flexibility. I would rather be conned a couple of times than to turn off by cold rigidity a student who is in real need. Thus, my advice is to start with an assumption of honesty; nonetheless, in general, don't change the rules of the game unless you are willing to change them for everyone or unless you are convinced that there are reasonable grounds for a special exception.

Students with Excuses

I believe that it is better to be taken in by a fraudulent excuse than to be seen as unfair in response to a legitimate excuse. Nonetheless, no one wants to be seen as so gullible that students come to rely on excuses rather than doing their assignments. Caron and colleagues (1992) studied excuse making and in their sample found that about two-thirds of their students admitted having made at least one false excuse while in college. From these students' reports it appears that fraudulent excuses were about as frequent as legitimate ones. In most cases, the excuse was used to gain more time for an assignment.

The Caron group's data do not give many clues about what one can do to prevent or detect false excuses. If the problem is one of time, you might build in checks on the progress of a paper or other assignment to reduce the tendency to put off work until the last minute. You could, for example, have students turn in an outline or bibliography sometime before a paper is due.

Sometimes I announce in the syllabus that there will be a graded series of penalties depending on how late a paper is, indicating that this tactic is to make up for the advantage that late students gain from having extra time to look up more sources, get comments and feedback from other students, and so forth. An alternative that I have not used, which might be more advantageous psychologically, is to offer a bonus for papers turned in early. It might also be wise to say in your syllabus that you want to be flexible about deadlines, you recognize that unforeseen events may prevent students from being able to meet a deadline, but in making exceptions you will require evidence supporting the request for an extension.

I think the best defense against excuses is a good offense—that is, a well-designed course that takes into consideration the fact that lives don't always run as planned. For example, in the chapter "The ABCs of Assigning Grades" I talked about the wisdom of allowing students to drop the lowest grade on a test, no questions asked. This avoids having to judge the truthfulness of student excuses for missed exams. Students rarely are willing to make excuses for continued absences without a good way to back up their claims. The message is therefore to think about ways to provide legitimate opportunities in case students mess up. If they don't, all the better for them. If they do, you've avoided having to act as judge and jury.

EMOTIONAL PROBLEMS

Now we come to the type of problems that are the most difficult for every teacher to face: those that involve emotional issues rather than the cold academic or managerial issues I've been describing up to this point.

Angry Students

Earlier I described students who are aggressive in challenging ideas. Some students, however, are actually angry at you or your authority and express their anger verbally or nonverbally in or out of class. What should you do with them?

Probably the most common strategy is to try to ignore them. This strategy often succeeds in avoiding a public confrontation and disruption of the class. But it may not result in better motivation and learning for the student, and sometimes it's hard to keep from reacting hostilely in return. Hostility would be a mistake because it doesn't provide a good model of how to deal with emotional situations, either for that student or for the rest of the class.

I try to forestall situations like this by becoming better acquainted with the student. If I have had students turn in minute papers or journals, I read the angry student's writings especially carefully to try to understand what the problem is. I may ask the student to come in to see me and discuss the paper. During this meeting I ask how the student

feels about the course, what things he enjoys, what topics might be interesting to him. (I use the masculine pronoun deliberately because these students are most likely to be males, although I have also encountered hostile female students.) Sometimes you will feel in such a conversation that you have to drag each word from the student, yet the student will accept your invitation to come in for another discussion. Sometimes you may need to invite a small group of students to meet with you (including the hostile student) in order to make the situation less threatening for the hostile student who hides fear with aggressiveness. Whatever your strategy, it seems to me important to let the student know that you recognize him as an individual, that you are committed to his learning, and that you are willing to listen and respond as constructively as possible.

What about overt hostility—the student who attacks your point of view during a lecture or class discussion, or the student who feels that your poor teaching or unfair grading caused his or her poor performance on a test? First of all, *listen* carefully and respectfully. Remember that nothing is more frustrating than to be interrupted before your argument or complaint has been heard. Next, acknowledge that there is a possibility that the student may be right or at least that there is some logic or evidence on his or her side. Recognize the student's feelings. Then you have at least three alternatives:

1. State your position as calmly and rationally as you can, recognizing that not everyone will agree. If the issue is one of substance, ask the class what evidence might be obtained to resolve or clarify the issue. Don't rely on your own authority or power to put the student down or to make it a win-lose situation. If the issue is one of judgment about grading, explain why you asked the question, what sort of thinking you were hoping to assess, and how students who did well went about answering the question. Acknowledge that your judgment may not be perfect, but point out that you have the responsibility to make the best judgment you can, and you have done so.

2. Present the issue to the class: "How do the rest of you feel about this?" This tactic has the obvious danger that either you or the aggressor may find no support and feel alienated from the class, but more often than not it will bring the issues and arguments for both sides into the open and be a useful experience in thinking for everyone. This might be a place to use the two-column method described in the chapter "Facilitating Discussion," listing on the board, without comments, the arguments on both sides.

3. Admit that you may have been wrong, and say that you will take time to reconsider and report back at the next class session. If the student really does have a good point, this will gain you respect and a reputation for fairness. If the student's argument was groundless, you may gain the reputation of being easy to influence and have an increasing crowd of students asking for changes in their grades.

What about the student who comes into your office all charged up to attack your grading of what was clearly a "very good exam paper"? Again, the first step is to listen. Get the student to state his or her rationale. As suggested in the chapter "Assessing, Testing, and Evaluating," you may gain some time to think if you previously announced that students who have questions or complaints about grading of their tests should bring a written explanation to your office of their point of view and the rationale for their request for a higher grade.

But, once again, don't be so defensive about your grading that you fail to make an adjustment if the student has a valid point. I have on rare occasions offered to ask another faculty member to read the paper or examination to get an independent judgment.

If you don't feel that the student has a valid point and your explanation is not convincing, you may simply have to say that, although the student may be right, you have to assign the grades in terms of what seem to you the appropriate criteria. If you have been clear about the rubric you use in grading, both before giving the assignment or test and when you returned the papers, grievances should be rare.

Discouraged, Ready-to-Give-Up Students

Often after the first few weeks you will spot some students who seem depressed and discouraged. Sometimes they come to class late or miss class; often their papers are constricted and lack any sense of enthusiasm or creativity. In my introductory classes, some students begin with great enthusiasm and energy and a few weeks later seem to have lost their energy. Interestingly, we spot the same phenomenon in our pro-seminar for beginning Ph.D. students. In both cases the transition to a new level of education brings demands greater than those students have experienced in the past. Often their familiar supports from family and friends are no longer available; they begin to doubt their own ability to achieve their goals.

There is a magic elixir for this problem that research has demonstrated to be surprisingly effective. This is to bring in students from the previous year who describe their experiences of frustration and self-doubt during their first year and report that they surmounted them and survived. The theory explaining why this works basically states that the task is to convince the discouraged students that their problems need

not be attributed to a lack of ability that cannot be changed but rather is a temporary problem. By developing more effective strategies, investing more effort, or simply becoming less worried, students are likely to achieve better results (Van Overwalle, Segebarth, & Goldchstein, 1989; Wilson & Linville, 1982).

Students with Emotional Reactions to Sensitive Topics

In almost every discipline there are some topics that will arouse strong feelings in some of your students. In a psychology class the sensitive topic might be "group differences in intelligence"; in biology it might be "evolution" or "animal experimentation"; in sociology it might be "the role of birth control and abortion in population policy." Often we are hesitant to open such topics up to discussion. But if the topic is relevant and important, it is probably wise to acknowledge the sensitivity of the topic, admit that it may be hard for some members of the class to feel free to contribute their ideas, and explain why the topic is relevant to the goals of the course. Comparing alternative approaches, perhaps by using the two-column method described in the chapter "Facilitating Discussion," may help students see the complexity of the issue.

When you are conducting the discussion of a sensitive topic, it is important to stress that each student should listen to other students with respect and try to understand their positions. You might ask a student to put into his or her own words what other students have said. If feelings are running high, you might cool things off by asking students to write for a couple of minutes on one thing they have learned or one point that needs to be considered. Having students write a short essay advocating a position opposed to their own is an effective way to open their minds.

Be sure to allocate enough time for adequate discussion. Students may be reluctant to participate until they feel that it is safe to speak honestly. Such fear of rejection also suggests that you schedule controversial topics late enough in the term to ensure that students have developed trust in you and in their classmates.

Dealing with Psychological Problems

At some point you will suspect that a student needs psychological counseling. Some of the signs are belligerence, moodiness, excessive worry, suspiciousness, helplessness, emotional outbursts, or depression.

Sometimes you will spot symptoms of drug or alcohol abuse. How do you get the student to the help needed?

The first step may be to get the student to talk to you. Usually you can do so by asking the student to come in, perhaps to discuss a paper or test. Typically the student is aware that things aren't going well, and you can simply ask, "How are things going?" or "What do you think is the reason for your problems?" Listen rather than intervening. After listening and expressing concern, you might then say, "What do you think you can do?" One alternative, probably the best, is to seek professional help. (Take the time to find out what is available before you need it.) If the student agrees that professional assistance might be a good idea, I've found that it helps to pick up the phone and say, "I'll call to see when they can see you." In fact, most counseling agencies will at least carry out an initial interview with any student who walks in. But the sense of commitment involved when a faculty member has called seems to make students more likely to follow through than if they simply agree that they'll go in. Even if the student does not immediately get professional help, your concern and support will be helpful, and awareness of the availability of professional help may be valuable later.

Potential Suicides

The increasing concern with suicide risk among college students prompts a few words on the early recognition of the kinds of depressed states that accompany such risks. If you were to notice a sudden falling off of a particular student's faithfulness in attending class, you might want to inquire further, especially if you noted signs of neglect of personal grooming and hygiene, lethargy, and any marked weight changes, or a facial expression atypically gloomy or distressed. Your interest in the student should include concern with any other changes he or she has been experiencing, including major separations or losses and mood states. You should listen for talk of death or references to suicide or to getting one's personal and legal affairs in order.

Your major concern should not be to reach an accurate assessment of suicide risk. In fact, it is definitely not within your purview to become the student's counselor; that would be inappropriate, even unethical. But you are one of those in a position to recognize a change in the student. A student manifesting any of these characteristics is surely troubled and should be urged to seek whatever professional counseling is available. A good source for advice on college student mental health is the National Academic Advising Association (www.nacada.ksu.edu/Clearinghouse/Advisingissues/Mental-Health.htm). Their Website has materials for you

to consult, overviews of common problems faced by college students, and bibliographies dealing with various issues. Getting the student to a source of help should be your primary objective. On one occasion, I walked with a student to the clinic to be sure that he got there. On a couple of occasions when a student seemed unlikely to seek help, I asked the university health service to call the student in. Sometimes the idea that someone really cares is enough to get the student through the down times.

IN CONCLUSION

1. Don't duck controversy. Use it as an opportunity to model good problem-solving skills and critical thinking.
2. *Listen*, and get students to listen to one another.
3. Keep your cool. You don't have to respond immediately.
4. Paraphrase, question, and summarize, but delay suggesting alternatives until you are confident that you understand.
5. Talk to colleagues. Ask what they would do.
6. Remember that your problem students are human beings who have problems and need your sympathy and help—no matter how much you would like to strangle them.

Supplementary Reading

An excellent review of the attributional retraining research dealing with motivation of discouraged students is R. P. Perry, F. J. Hechter, V. H. Menec, and L. Weinberg, *A Review of Attributional Motivation and Performance in College Students from an Attributional Retraining Perspective*, Occasional Papers in Higher Education, Centre for Higher Education Research and Development, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada R3T 2N2.

Two interesting compilations of research and thinking on problems in classrooms are Steven M. Richardson's "Promoting Civility: A Teaching Challenge," no. 77, March 1999, and John Braxton and Alan Bayer's "Faculty and Student Classroom Improprieties: Creating a Civil Environment on Campus," no. 100, 2005, in the *New Directions for Teaching and Learning* series.

In A. W. Chickering, *The New American College* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1988), the chapter by Jane Shipton and Elizabeth Steltenpohl provides a useful perspective on the broad issues faced by academic advisors. The typical schedule of 15 minutes per advisee is clearly insufficient for planning an academic program in relation to lifelong goals.

In *Tools for Teaching* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009), Barbara Davis offers good practical advice in Chapter 44, "Holding Office Hours," and Chapter 45, "Academic Advising and Monitoring Undergraduates."

Also see Alice G. Reinarz and Eric R. White (eds.), "Teaching Through Academic Advising: A Faculty Perspective," *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, no. 62, 1995.

Chapter 7, "One-on-One Interactions with Students," in Anne Curzan and Lisa Damour's book *First Day to Final Grade* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), provides good advice on counseling students who have a variety of problems.

A helpful source is Mary Deane Sorcinelli's chapter "Dealing with Troublesome Behaviors in the Classroom," in K. W. Prichard and R. M. Sawyer (eds.), *Handbook of College Teaching: Theory and Applications* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1994).

Barbara Hofer and Paul Pintrich review the various theories about epistemological beliefs and learning in "The Development of Epistemological Theories: Beliefs About Knowledge and Knowing and Their Relation to Learning," *Review of Educational Research*, 1997, *67*, 88–140.

One particularly relevant reading is R. Harper and M. Peterson, "Mental Health Issues and College Students," *NACADA Clearinghouse of Academic Advising Resources*, 2005. Retrieved May 27, 2009 from www.nacada.ksu.edu/Clearinghouse/AdvisingIssues/Mental-Health.htm. This article particularly targets what advisors can do to recognize and help troubled students.