

Culture Shock and Classroom Management (from the First-Year Writing Perspective) - 8/22/12

John M. Brentar, English Department

Attendance

- Especially in Freshman classes which are not elective (in other words, required, possibly developmental) classes, the need for attendance may not always be met by students.
- Therefore, an attendance policy is warranted.
- Check with your Department/Program, as there may be a departmental or programmatic attendance policy in place.
- If not, then the choice of a policy is yours. What are some of the key points in this regard?
 - As long as the policy is in writing (i.e. in the syllabus), is clearly stated, and is administered fairly and consistently, it should have the support of your chair/director and the administration.
 - It should specify the attendance requirement (i.e. allowable number of absences) and punishments for infractions (e.g. lowering of overall grade, etc.).
 - My recommendation is that the policy should also include a clause about tardiness (e.g. “every two instances of tardiness--defined as being five or more minutes late to class--will count as one absence”).

The Disengaged Student

- Another reaction in the aforementioned classes can be a lack of engagement in the class.
- Instructors need to use all of the tools at their disposal to counteract disengagement.
 - Countermeasures should be built into the syllabus, which can include in the overall grade breakdown points for class participation (with perhaps a rubric specifying what solid engagement looks like).
 - Merely knowing all students and calling them by their correct names is an effective tool.
 - Breaking the class period down into shorter segments in which various activities are deployed can act to keep students on task.
 - The activities should be of various types to appeal to as wide a range of learning styles as possible
 - Mini-lecture
 - Discussion, both in small group and in whole class formats
 - Multimedia presentations (while avoiding a slavish adherence to PowerPoint--nothing bores students faster).
 - Move around the room; the fixed position is a snoozer.
 - If someone appears off task, stand by that person (he or she will be forced to deal actively with your proximity).
- Texting in class presents a particular set of circumstances.
 - Again, an explicit policy should be written into the syllabus and enforced consistently.
 - There are dissenting opinions, though. Some instructors decide not to fight this battle, instead trusting that the well-programmed class will keep students on task.

The Disruptive Student

- The class dynamic can never be predicted. Most of the time, you will not have to deal with disruptive behavior. There is, however, the chance that students who are unfamiliar with the expected behaviors of a college student and who retain old high-school personae (e.g. the class clown) will use them and thereby disrupt the class.
- Again, your syllabus should contain a section defining civil behavior, uncivil behavior, and the latter's consequences.

- Some of the same techniques for the disengaged student can be employed here as well (e.g. standing right next to the student who is acting out usually is enough to quiet him or her).
- The disruptive student should be dealt with after the class if at all possible, away from the sight and earshot of other students.
- Do not get involved in an emotional confrontation with the student; even if you “win,” you still lose.
- When confronting the disruptive student, be clear about consequences if disruptive behavior continues and about which behaviors you expect.
- If the disruptive student continues/escalates his or her behavior, you have every right to ask him or her to leave class.
- Further, an option is to take the matter before the Student Judicial Board, which can levy specific sanctions when warranted.
- Finally, never accept a situation which might devolve into a violent one; in the worst case scenario, call the CSU Police at 216-687-2020 and request assistance.

Cheating (from the First-Year Writing perspective)

- The major act of academic dishonesty in FYW classes is plagiarism.
- Therefore, your syllabus should have a section defining plagiarism and the specific consequences for committing plagiarism in the class
- There are tools that can be used to promote academic honesty and to confirm suspected cases of plagiarism:
 - Turnitin.com (CSU has a site license--check out the Writing Center’s website for more info) can be used as a preventative tool, whereby students submit essays before turning them into their instructors, or *post facto* by instructors suspecting plagiarized work;
 - Google can also be used to identify whether idiosyncratic phrases may have been lifted from sources.
- Effective instruction should serve to avert opportunities for plagiarism:
 - If the student has been instructed in quoting, paraphrasing, and citing sources accurately and appropriately, unintentional plagiarism should not happen;
 - At the same time, your instruction should persuade the student of the academically honest route and dissuade him or her from the dishonest one, whether by carrot or stick.
- If you teach a hybrid or online class and use quizzes or tests, software such as Respondus is available that will lock students out of all other programs while the quiz or test is open.