

FACULTY FOCUS

Special Report

10 Effective Classroom Management Techniques Every Faculty Member Should Know

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10 Effective Classroom Management Techniques Every Faculty Member Should Know

Effective classroom management is much more than just administering corrective measures when a student misbehaves; it's about developing proactive ways to prevent problems from occurring in the first place while creating a positive learning environment.

Establishing that climate for learning is one of the most challenging aspects of teaching, and one of the most difficult skills to master. For those new to the profession, failure to set the right tone will greatly hinder your effectiveness as a teacher. Indeed, even experienced faculty may sometimes feel frustrated by classroom management issues. Strategies that worked for years suddenly become ineffective in the face of some of the challenges today's students bring with them to the classroom.

Brought to you by *The Teaching Professor*, this special report features 10 proven classroom management techniques from those on the front lines who've met the challenges head-on and developed creative responses that work with today's students. This report will teach you practical ways to create favorable conditions for learning, including how to:

- Get the semester off on the right foot
- Prevent cheating
- Incorporate classroom management principles into the syllabus
- Handle students who participate too much
- Establish relationships with students
- Use a contract to help get students to accept responsibility
- Employ humor to create conditions conducive to learning

The goal of *10 Effective Classroom Management Techniques Every Faculty Member Should Know* is to provide actionable strategies and no-nonsense solutions for creating a positive learning environment – whether you're a seasoned educator or someone who's just starting out.

Maryellen Weimer
Editor
The Teaching Professor

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How to Get Wet without Plunging In: Creative Ways to Start Class

By *Patty Kohler-Evans*

Starting a lecture can be challenging: getting everyone seated, attentive, and ready to move forward with the content can take several minutes. I have found that sometimes it feels abrupt and disjointed, especially when it has been a week since the last class meeting, so I've been working on strategies that help me get a class going without wasting time and that get all the students engaged and ready to learn. I now begin each lesson with a creative review of the last week's materials. The reviews involve a variety of techniques for getting students to reflect on previous content and ready to move on to new information. They also help with building relationships, a critical component of teacher-student interactions. Here are some of the strategies that I think work best to accomplish these goals.

Who's Your Partner?

Using sticky-back name tags, I put three or four names that go together on the tags. Some examples are John, Paul, Ringo, and George, or Bill, Chelsea, and Hillary. I then randomly put the name tags on the backs of students. The students are allowed to find their partners by asking only yes and no questions. When they find the rest of their group, I have them work on a short review assignment. This can be a list of questions from the previous week's content or a reflection or anything that requires that they work together. The process of finding the rest of the group takes

only a few minutes and gets students active and focused.

Piece the Puzzle

For this activity I break the content from the last lecture into four or five sections. Then I take key points from each section and make them into jigsaw puzzles, one puzzle for each

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section, with five or six pieces per puzzle. I jumble the pieces and give a set of puzzles to each group of students. I generally make each set of puzzles on a different color of paper and put the jumbled pieces in a Ziploc bag. Each group completes all the puzzles. This requires them to categorize previously learned information. I like to engage in competition for prizes from the local dollar store. The first table to complete all the puzzles correctly wins the prize. Another variation is to give each student a piece of a puzzle and have the student locate the other four or five students who have pieces to the

same puzzle—I don't make the puzzles different colors in this case.

Roundtable Review

With this activity, I have students get out a sheet of paper and write a list of numbers from one to ten. Then I instruct them to put one important idea from the previous lecture on the first line. The paper is passed to the person on the left. Each time the paper is passed, the person receiving the paper writes a different idea. After a few minutes I call time, and the papers go back to the original owner. This represents a collection of ideas for future review and study.

I have found that the preparation for these activities takes very little time and that the results are very worthwhile. My students anticipate the activities, and I look forward to having the students in a place where they are ready to learn. 🍀

Making a Syllabus More Than a Contract

By Roxanne Cullen

For years I've introduced my course syllabus by saying, "This is your contract for the course." And all too often the document read more like a contract than a true representation of my conceptualization of the course. So I revised my introductory composition course syllabus in an attempt to create a more learner-centered academic experience. Although these elements have been at the core of my teaching, my syllabus did not necessarily make them explicit or clearly articulate their function to the students. Based on advice I found in several resources regarding the syllabus, I came to see that a teacher needs to consider the ways a syllabus can be useful to students. My goal was to make my syllabus more than the standard contract between my students and me. I wanted it to become a tool for learning.

I began by analyzing my syllabus using a rubric that I developed with a colleague based upon principles of learner-centered pedagogy. The original design of the rubric was as a tool for administrators to determine the degree of learner-centeredness in a department or unit based upon a review of course syllabi. The rubric has three main categories, each with several subcategories. The main category, **Community**, includes subcategories that relate to the accessibility of the teacher, the presence of learning rationale, and evidence of collaboration. In the category **Power and Control**, the subcategories focus on teacher and student roles; use of

outside resources, and the general focus of the syllabus: Does it focus on policies and procedures or is it weighted toward student learning outcomes? Is there opportunity for negotiation of policies, procedures, assignment choice, etc.? In the category **Evaluation and Assessment**, the subcategories examine the use of grades, the feedback mechanisms employed, types of evaluation, learning outcomes, and opportunities for revising or redoing assignments.

A review of my syllabus inspired me to revise. I made several changes to emphasize the concept of community. Although I have always provided rationales for assignments when I talked about them in class, I added a rationale statement for assignments in the syllabus. I also provided rationales for all policies and procedures so that they would look less like arbitrary laws set down by the teacher and more as though they served enhanced learning. I also incorporated more teamwork and collaborative projects, again with a rationale tied to learning outcomes. Finally, I made an effort throughout to disclose information about myself, mostly in regard to my experience as a composition teacher and a writer.

The most significant change I made was in the area of power and control. Instead of establishing an attendance policy, class participation rules, or penalties for late work, I indicated that all of these would be negotiated by the class. Because the course is populated by first-semester students,

I was reluctant to share much more power than that.

My former one-page syllabus was now 10 pages and included a short philosophical statement on learning to write along with writing- and learning-related justifications for every policy and procedure. In an effort to make the syllabus a working part of the course in which students discovered for themselves what they needed to know about the course, I had them write their first essay on the syllabus. I asked them to consider things like their expectations of the class, what they thought my expectations were, what they thought they knew about me, and what their roles and responsibilities included.

I was actually eager to read the essays. In some respects, I felt that my work was being evaluated by them, which provided an interesting twist on power and control. Their essays became another feedback mechanism for me. Equally if not more interesting was the conversation among the students as they prepared to write. I use WebCT, so I suggested to students that they use the discussion board tool as a prewriting strategy. The discussion was lively and, I believe, productive. Even students who had been reluctant to participate in class discussions about the syllabus weighed in online with great authority regarding their interpretation of it.

My syllabus is still a work in progress. Most important, at this point, is the tone my new syllabus has set for the semester. Making the first essay a response to the syllabus has focused more thought and time on it than in any of my previous classes. It has served as a catalyst for discussion, for setting goals, and for discussing writing. It has focused our attention on learning and made every aspect of the course intentional. This syllabus is much more than the standard contract between my students and me. 🍀

Conditions Associated with Classroom Conflict

By Maryellen Weimer

Students can and do regularly disrupt the classroom. Sometimes they are openly hostile, challenging the teacher's authority and objecting to course requirements and classroom policies. More often, the conflict grows out of their inattentiveness and passivity. They arrive late, leave early, talk during class, and don't even bother to hide their boredom.

Faculty researchers (reference below) wondered whether characteristics of courses and instructors might be associated with conflict. They also wondered whether instructors' preparation and caring attitude toward students related to the presence or absence of students' disruptive behaviors. And they were curious as to how instructors went about resolving conflict and whether they perceived the techniques they used as being successful.

To find answers to these questions and to document whether the differences between hostile and inattentive conflict were real, they surveyed a national sample of psychology professors. Faculty who completed a 71-item questionnaire were asked to answer while thinking about a single course they had taught recently in which they experienced a high level of student conflict.

Analysis of the survey results documented a number of important findings. First, the hypothesis about there being two different kinds of conflict was confirmed. Second, "we found that the amount of conflict that faculty reported was actually

unrelated to many characteristics of courses or instructors." (p. 183)

In other words, things like the instructor's gender, race, age, years of teaching experience, full-time versus part-time status, and class size did not relate to the amount of reported conflict. These findings are at odds

Hostile conflict—as in challenging, open resistance—was found to be related to “whether faculty expressed care toward students, communicated respect, behaved sensitively, and remained warm and engaged.”

with some previous research that has documented that students tend to challenge the authority of female professors and faculty of color more often than they challenge white male faculty. Other research results do not find correlations between instructor characteristics and such things as student ratings of instructor effectiveness.

However, these researchers did find some interesting correlations between instructional methods and conflict. For example, “the use of lecture correlated directly with inattentive classroom conflict. On the other hand, using discussion or active

learning related inversely with inattentive classroom conflict.” (p. 182)

Hostile conflict—as in challenging, open resistance—was found to be related to “whether faculty expressed care toward students, communicated respect, behaved sensitively, and remained warm and engaged.” (p. 184) Faculty who did not approach students in these ways reported higher levels of conflict. And these faculty behaviors were also found to be most effective at reducing conflict. The researchers describe these methods as “working alliances” and report results that suggest faculty build them when they attend “to the emotional bonds that exist in the classroom,” when they promote “a common sense of purpose when teaching,” and when students are treated respectfully despite agreements. (p. 185) Even though more than 61 percent of this sample reported that they ignored conflict and the behaviors associated with it, this strategy was related to poorer outcomes.

In sum, based on these findings, faculty are well advised, yet again, to take seriously their relationships with students. In this case it seems that an ounce of prevention may well be worth the pound of cure.

Reference: Meyers, S.A., Bender, J., Hill, E.K., and Thomas, S.Y. (2006). How do faculty experience and respond to classroom conflict? *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*, 18 (3), 180–187. 🍀

Getting to Know You: The Importance of Establishing Relationships

By *Patty Kohler-Evans*

About two or three semesters ago, I conducted an informal experiment with two of my classes. With one, on the first night of class, I asked students their names and major courses of study. I introduced myself in much the same way, with a brief statement about my chosen field. With the other class, I spent time during the first and second class sessions on activities designed to acquaint students with each other and establish how we would conduct the class. I used what I learned about students that first night throughout the rest of the course. When I compared feedback from the two classes, I was amazed at the differences between the two. For example, one student from the second class noted that these activities made the class more “user friendly.” He left class looking forward to the rest of the semester.

I’d like to share some of the activities I used to get students connected with each other and with me.

What’s in a name?

When students introduce themselves, I ask them to tell us their name and also to share what that name means, if they know that; to talk about the individual for whom they were named; and to indicate whether or not they like their name. I have also asked whether they live their name. For instance, my name, “Patricia,” means loyal. I tell students that fits because I am generally a

faithful friend. In some cases students don’t know what their name means. I have found that they are very willing to do some research to find out what it means and to then share that information with the rest of the class.

T-shirt collage

Sometimes I have students introduce themselves to each other by creating a T-shirt that represents who they are. I supply each student with a pre-drawn T-shirt pattern on a sheet of paper. I ask students to use magazine pictures, markers, crayons, etc., to design the shirt.

Usually, I bring all the materials to class. Students tend to talk to each other about themselves as they are designing their T-shirts. I do a shirt too. I believe this shows students that I value this activity. Students seem to really enjoy doing this activity, and they usually work very hard to include multiple aspects of themselves in the collage. Students listen attentively when it’s time to share the T-shirt collages, and even at the end of the semester they still remember information about their classmates.

Identification of personal interests

In many of my classes, I ask students to share information about their personal interests and learning preferences. I use a questionnaire to obtain this information, and I tell students to only share what they are

comfortable having me know. A commercially available product that generates this information is the Learning Express-ways™ folder.

Asking for written feedback

I frequently ask for written comments at the end of lectures. Students may comment about the class, express a concern, or share other information. I respond to all comments in writing and return them at the next class. Sometimes I ask students to rate their understanding on a 1-to-10 scale, and sometimes I ask for a brief reflection.

Since I have started to invest more time in getting to know my students, I have noticed that my relationships with them have improved in numerous ways. When students come to me after the course has ended, I still remember their names and something about them. I have also noticed that I have more students asking questions about their chosen fields. They regularly tell me that they value the activities as well. I believe that the time invested in relationship building increases students’ motivation and commitment to the course. Recently, I overheard one student commenting to another about a group assignment that I had made. She was admonishing her fellow classmate to seek out other students who were different as a way to enrich the experience. Whether these examples are a direct result of the relationship building I can’t say for sure, but I am convinced that it does make a better climate for learning in my classes. 🍀

Those Students Who Participate Too Much

By Maryellen Weimer

What would we do without those few students who are always ready to speak—who make a stab at an answer when no one else will, who ask for clarification when they are confused, who even respond to things other students say in class? Most of those students we would like to clone. But then there are those who communicate to excess. They would answer every question if we let them. They would happily dominate every classroom discussion if allowed. We call these students the over-participants; in the research literature they are known as compulsive communicators, and researchers estimate that a bit more than 5 percent of students fall into this category.

The rest of the class loves and hates these classmates. They are loved because they take the pressure off everyone else. They are hated because they speak so much. Their endless contributions soon bore others. And they are hated because they make those who struggle to contribute feel woefully incompetent.

Their behavior also presents all sorts of problems for the teacher, who would love to call on somebody else, but often that familiar hand is the only one in the air. Generally over-participants are bright students. They care about the content and have the level of motivation a teacher would like to see in all students. But their determination to keep themselves always at the center of discussion tests in most of us the patience and commitment to participate.

Generally teachers do not rebuke the over-participant in public. Researchers in the study mentioned below asked students what they expected teachers to do about fellow classmates who over-participated. They found that students expect teachers to manage compulsive communicators through management strategies that are not rude or demeaning. Students “do not want to witness a fellow student subjected to negative sanctions when it comes to this particular transgression.” (p. 28)

When teachers do not address the problem, according to this research, students rate them lower on measures of credibility and affect or liking. In fact, doing nothing about compulsive communicators results in even more negative student perceptions than does addressing the problem punitively.

What’s the best advice, based on this research? Address the problem using positive and constructive communication strategies. It helps to have a discussion early in the course about the characteristics of effective discussion and teacher-student exchanges. If students are asked to describe those conversations that hold their attention and help them learn, they are usually quick to name the over-participation problem and state preferences for dialogue in which many people participate. Teachers should design participation activities that require the contributions of many: small groups presenting brief reports, sharing examples, or offering summaries.

It may be useful to talk privately with the student who is participating too much. It may help to make clear how and why too much communication from one student inhibits the learning of others. Perhaps the student could be encouraged to move his or her participation to the next level by not just answering questions, but asking them; by not just making comments, but specifically responding to things other students say in class.

Participation norms are established early in the course. If a teacher holds fast to hearing from lots of students right from the start, that norm will be established and can be maintained throughout the course.

Reference: McPherson, M. B., and Liang, Y. (2007). Students’ reactions to teachers’ management of compulsive communicators. *Communication Education*, 56 (1), 18-33. 🍀

10 Things to Make the First Day (and the Rest) of the Semester Successful

By Mary C. Clement

I like to arrive in the classroom well before the students. It gives me time to get things organized. I create an entrance table (I use chairs or desks if there's no table) that holds handouts for students to pick up. From day one the students learn the routine: they arrive, pick up handouts on the entrance table, and read the screen for instructions. They know what to do, and it saves time. Here's how I recommend introducing the routine on day one.

1. Post your name and the name and section of the class on the screen, so that when students walk in they know that they are in the right place.

2. Write "welcome" on the screen and have directions that tell students what they need to do immediately. Example: "As you enter, please tell me your name. Then pick up a syllabus, a card, and a folder from the entrance table. Fold the card so that it will stand on your desk, and write your first name on it in BIG letters. Add your last name and major in smaller print. Write your name on the tab of the folder, (last name first, then first name). Read the syllabus until class starts." [Note: By asking students to tell you their name as they enter, you can hear how the name is pronounced, and avoid the embarrassment of pronouncing it for the first time yourself.]

3. When it's time for class to start—start class! Late arrivals can catch up by reading the screen.

4. For classes of 25 or less, I have students do brief, 10-second introductions. I tell them there will be a verbal quiz after all the introductions and that they can win stars if they know who is who. (Have fun with this, but remember that these are adults and college is not like junior high.)

5. For larger classes, I have students introduce themselves to three or four people around them, and then we might do "stand-ups"—stand up if you are a Spanish major, stand up if you are an education major, and so on. I explain that students need to know each other for our small group work, and in case they have a question.

6. I collect the file folders and put them alphabetically by student name into a big plastic carrying case. When students need to turn in assignments, they find the box on the entrance table and they put their papers in their respective folders. When papers are graded, they can pull their graded tests or assignments from their folders. The beauty of this system is that time is never wasted by passing out papers. For small classes, I put handouts in the folders of absent students.

7. After the introductions and the explanation of the folder and box system, I turn to the "Today we will" list that I've written on the board, posted on a large paper flip-chart, or projected on the screen. I like to actually write this list on the board, so I can return to it even while projecting my notes. A "today we will" list outlines my plan for the day. For example, for the first day, my "today we will list" says:

- See screen for instruction for card and folder.
- Introductions
- Turn in folders
- Go over syllabus completely
- Mini-lecture on _____
- Interest inventory
- Do you know what to read/do before the next class?

Note: The "today we will" list lets me walk around the room, teach from the projection system, and then look at the list for what I should do next. I tend not to forget things if I have the list. As the semester progresses, the "today we will" list might contain warm-up questions that then appear as test questions. The list helps students who arrive late or leave early see what they have missed.

8. The mini-lesson/mini-lecture—whether it's a short overview of the first reading assignment, some sample problems, or 10 interesting questions students will be able to answer at the end of the course, I strongly recommend doing some course content on the first day. For classes that last longer than 50 minutes, I include a short student activity. I also think it's important to begin with course material on day one so that students begin to see who you are and how you teach. Since I teach courses in teacher education, I often talk about my teaching career. I

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include a few stories about how times have changed and about how some things in teaching never change.

9. Interest inventories are great for the first day of class. An interest inventory is just a short list of questions about students' backgrounds and interests. It may assess their prior learning as well. In addition to name and major, students can write about a hobby, interest, or goal. Do not be too personal. You can have them answer several questions

about content—maybe solve a problem, write a short paragraph or answer specific questions. Finally open-ended questions are useful:

- What are your goals after graduation?
- What has a teacher done in the past that helped you to learn _____ ?
- Is there anything else that you want me to know about you and your course of study?

You can always add one fun question:

- If your song played when you entered the room, what would that song be?

10. Every good class has an introduction, a body, and a conclusion. I usually teach the mini-lesson, and then save the last six to eight minutes of class for the interest inventory and individual questions. This way, students don't have to wait on others to finish. I instruct students to turn in their interest inventory as they exit. As they are writing, I alphabetize their folders and put them in the box on the table. Another good closure is to ask if they know what to read/do before the next class, and if they know three people to ask about the assignment if they have a question.

Use 'Stuff Happens' Cards to Handle Student Excuses

By Maryellen Weimer

Students and excuses seem to go hand in hand. Sometimes the excuses result from real events and personal problems that legitimately prevent a student from being in class, completing an assignment on time, or doing what some other policy or procedure may stipulate. Not having the wisdom of Solomon, most faculty struggle to fairly adjudicate between the real and unreal reasons offered for noncompliance.

Professor Daniela A. Feenstra, who teaches a variety of business classes at Central Pennsylvania College, has developed an interesting way through this dilemma. On the first day of class she gives each student a "Stuff Happens" card. It's about the size of a business card and also includes the semester date and a place for the

student's name. In the syllabus (and in class) she explains that this is a student's "one time only" forgiveness card. If a student is late for class or might need a one-day extension on a paper, the student may trade the "Stuff Happens" card for this exception. Students don't have to get her approval or permission to use the card. Use of it is entirely at their discretion. However, each student gets only one card, which is not transferable and won't be replaced if lost.

If no "stuff happens" during a given a semester and a student follows all classroom policies and procedures, the "Stuff Happens" card may be traded in the last week of class for 20 bonus points.

Sometimes more than one "stuff happens" event may occur during the

semester. When it does and the student presents the excuse or excuses, the teacher once again faces the problems described at the beginning of the article. However, Professor Feenstra notes that the "Stuff Happens" card takes care of most emergency situations. It covers the conscientious student who may occasionally have a problem. Other students are probably going to need more instructor feedback anyway.

Humor: Getting a Handle on What's Appropriate

By Mary C. Clement

The contribution that humor makes to learning is well established in research. It is not that humor causes learning; rather, it helps to create conditions conducive to learning. It helps learners relax, alleviates stress, and often makes it easier for students and teachers to connect personally. The presence of humor in a classroom can be very beneficial.

But there are a couple of problems. First, faculty often don't think of themselves as funny—some are, but most academics would not make a living as stand-up comedians. In fact, any number of faculty cannot successfully tell a joke, even after carefully rehearsing the lines and easing their tension with liquid libations. So, how might a serious academic find his or her way to humor that works in the classroom?

And then there's the problem of propriety. Not all humor is appropriate, especially given the commitment of higher education to cultural respect, diversity, and equality. If you can't make jokes about ethnicity, politics, religion, or sex, is there anything left for one-liners?

Fortunately some recent research offers help on both fronts. For faculty who don't think they can be funny in the classroom, there is a wide range of different kinds of humor. Options abound. Early research (referenced below) identified seven different kinds of humor: funny stories, funny comments, jokes, professional humor, puns, cartoons, and riddles. And each of these kinds of humor can be employed with great creativity, such

as using weird names in math word problems; referring to aspects of content with humorous names, such as calling bacteria "baby beasties"; using different voices; wearing funny clothing; or telling stories about family or college days. The best news is that all of these kinds of humor have the same positive impact on learning environments.

The purpose of the study referenced below was to identify what students consider appropriate and inappropriate humor. Researchers did that by asking 284 undergraduates to list several examples of "appropriate and suitable" humor and then asking them to do the same for humor that was "offensive and/or not fitting for the class." The students had no trouble identifying examples in both categories.

This student sample generated 712 examples of appropriate teacher humor, which researchers placed in four different categories. The first, which contained almost half the listed examples, researchers called "related humor." This humor linked with course materials; examples included a physics instructor who regularly played with a Slinky to demonstrate certain physics principles or another who used course material in jokes: "What do you call someone who likes to go out a lot?" Answer: "Fungi."

The second category was unrelated humor. These first two categories contained more than 90 percent of the examples students provided, although researchers note that there was overlap between the two categories.

Examples in this second category include some teasing of student groups or individual students, or some stereotypical student behavior such as procrastinating.

The remainder of the appropriate examples were self-disparaging humor in which the instructor made jokes or told stories that poked fun at or belittled him or herself. Then there was a very small category of unintentional or unplanned humor when something funny happened spontaneously in class.

Equally valuable in this research is the analysis of inappropriate humor, for which students offered 513 examples, which researchers again placed in four categories: disparaging humor targeting students, disparaging humor targeting others, offensive humor, and self-disparaging humor.

More than 40 percent of the examples fell into the first category where instructors disparaged students individually or collectively. Students were disparaged for their lack of intelligence, gender, or appearance, as well as for their opinions.

When the disparaging humor targeted others, it used stereotypes and such specific group characteristics as gender, race/ethnicity, or university affiliation. Some inappropriate humor examples were listed as offensive because they contained sexual material or vulgar verbal or nonverbal expressions, or they were too personal.

In conclusion, researchers encourage faculty to explore humor related to the course content. Students always considered it appropriate. Moreover, many reported that it helped them relate and recall important course information.

Reference: Wanzer, M. B., Frymier, A. B., Wojtaszczyk, A. M., and Smith, T. 2006. Appropriate and inappropriate uses of humor by teachers. *Communication Education* 55 (2): 178-96. 🍓

A Behavior Contract That Made a Difference

By Lori Norin and Tom Walton

It seemed that almost every day we would come back to our offices after our speech classes with a frown on our faces and the need to tell a story about the latest shenanigans that happened in class. A student “accidentally” showed an inappropriate image on a PowerPoint slide during his speech. A student walked in 20 minutes late during a classmate’s speech—with a pizza in one hand, a Mountain Dew in the other, and a cell phone on one ear. A student refused to give her speech as scheduled and dared us to do something about it.

Finally, one day we decided we had had enough. We created a list of behavioral expectations, which we asked students to sign, and thus was born the Speech Department Behavior Contract. Since then it has grown into a well-defined instrument that has had as much impact on student retention, success, and well-being as any other strategy we have added to the curriculum.

Initially the document contained 10 items—rudimentary things like students taking responsibility for reading the syllabus, signing the attendance sheet, taking the pretests and pre-assessments, meeting deadlines, etc., and understanding the consequences of making excuses for missing speeches. Even in its early format, the contract positively impacted retention and behavior in the classroom as observed by us and noted by our dean. Students told us that they appreciated the precise listing of their responsibilities because it made the rules and consequences clear.

At the end of each semester, we revise the document based on the events of the previous semester. For example, we added a statement concerning the campus electronic policy based on a serious plagiarism case that occurred in one of our sections. Once it became prevalent and blatant, we added a statement about text messaging in class. Some of our other colleagues are using contracts similar to ours, and they report the same positive effect. We hope that by sharing our contract, you will consider how it might help in creating an ideal learning environment in your classroom.

Classroom Ethics Contract

1. I received, read, and understand the department general syllabus for this course, including the attendance policy.
2. I understand failure to sign an attendance sheet at the appropriate time and date results in me being marked absent.
3. I verify that my professor has requested that I meet with him/her first should I have any concerns about the conduct of the course. If that meeting does not resolve the concerns, then my professor will recommend I meet with the department’s lead faculty member or department chair.
4. I understand that my professor expects respect from everyone in the classroom at all times. This includes rules about sleeping, inappropriate talking, rudeness, doing homework, answering cell

phones, and any disruptive behavior as defined by each professor, etc.

5. I understand it is my responsibility to take the online content pre- and post-test(s) by the assigned date(s).
6. I understand it is my responsibility to complete the written pre- and post-assessment(s) by the assigned date (PRCA, Speech Anxiety, Listening).
7. I understand it is my responsibility to complete all assignments on time and that there are penalties for late assignments (if allowed) at each professor’s discretion.
8. I agree that if I don’t understand an assignment it is my responsibility to ask for clarification.
9. I understand my professor’s policy about being tardy and the consequences of not following his/her policy.
10. I understand the ramifications of missing a scheduled speaking day.
11. I understand that should I miss class it is my responsibility to get any handouts, etc.
12. I understand it is my responsibility to check my e-mail daily or weekly depending on my professor’s guidelines.
13. I understand it is my responsibility to follow directions and that failure to do so will result in a loss of points.
14. I understand it is my responsibility to read and follow the Electronic Communications Policy. The link is available at the bottom of the UA-Fort Smith homepage <http://www.uafortsmith.edu>.
15. I understand I should not enter the classroom during a student speech. I should wait to hear applause and then enter.
16. I understand that plagiarism of any kind will not be tolerated and may result in receiving a zero (0) for the assignment, withdrawal

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from the course, or suspension from the university.

17. I understand that cell phones must be turned off or turned to vibrate during class and that each professor may, at his/her discretion, enforce a consequence for any cell phone ringing or text messaging during class.
18. I understand that iPods and/or

MP3 players must be turned off during class and that each professor may, at his/her discretion, enforce a consequence for any music being played during class.

19. I read, understand, and agree to abide by the student handbook guidelines for classroom ethics.
20. I understand that each professor may add additional rules in writing to this depart-

mental document.

21. I understand that failure to sign this document does not exclude me from its requirements.

Student Signature:

Class Time:

_____ 

Preventing Cheating: Do Faculty Beliefs Make a Difference?

By Maryellen Weimer

“ We believe that student beliefs about their peers ... can influence misconduct, while faculty beliefs about student academic misconduct can influence efforts to prevent and challenge the misconduct.” (p. 1059) Said another way, the researchers (citation below) are afraid that if students think that a lot of their peers are cheating, it will increase the likelihood that they will cheat. And, if faculty believe that lots of students are cheating, they will do more to prevent it. Conversely, if faculty don't think academic dishonesty is much of a problem in their classes, they will do less to prevent it and make it easier for students to get away with it.

This study did reaffirm that cheating among students (at this institution), as reported by students, is widespread. More than 90 percent of the more than 400 students in this sample admitted that they had cheated at least once. The researchers pointed out that data on cheating that differentiates between if and how often are not generally reported.

“Looking at the data this way leads to a different conclusion from examination of overall misconduct rates.” (p. 1078)


The activity students reported doing least often was “improperly” acquiring or distributing exams. The activity they reported doing most often involved working with another student on material that would be submitted for grading when the instructor had not authorized collaboration with others. Results here replicated another finding documented by previous research: males reported more incidents of misconduct than females.

These researchers found that for every one of the 16 behaviors of academic dishonesty, students believed that their peers were engaging in those behaviors more often than their peers reported. The researchers worried that these inaccurate beliefs empower students to cheat more since they believe that “everyone else” is doing it.

Faculty in this study “overestimated

the actual frequency of misconduct.” (p. 1076) As for the actual hypotheses about faculty beliefs, they were verified. “Our results showed that faculty members who underestimate the frequency of misconduct very rarely take action to challenge students' misconduct.” (p. 1076) Their results also verified the reverse. Faculty who overestimated the extent of cheating were more solicitous in their efforts to prevent it.

Researchers advise that both faculty and students should be provided accurate information as to the extent of academic misconduct occurring at an institution. Faculty “need to send [the] message to students through prevention and detection efforts.” (p. 1076)

Reference: Hard, S. F., Conway, J. M., and Moran, A. C. (2006). Faculty and college student beliefs about the frequency of student academic misconduct. *Journal of Higher Education*, 77 (6), 1058-1080. 

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