

The following handout was prepared by Bryna Clover, Chemistry department, UMD

Classroom Management

The key to dealing with snags and issues in the classroom is to avoid and preempt them all together. Here are a few tips and tricks to prevent common situations, and some ideas for managing if they do occur.

The Over-Participating Student

- While we're all quite excited to see students participating in class, every now and then you may find one student who needs to answer every question. When this occurs, other students become disengaged in the discussion and their learning is hindered.
- Of course it is important not to ignore this student, but it is equally important to get other students involved in discussion. This may be done by actually calling on students by name.
- If you notice that the student continues in this manner, it may be beneficial to actually talk to the student one-on-one. Communicate that you appreciate his input and contributions, but that it is also important for all students to have an opportunity to share their opinions. Ask the student to be aware of the other students and give them a chance to offer their input before answering himself.

Student Interruptions and Disruptions

- It is most important that you respond to inappropriate student actions. If these are ignored, the actions are only reinforced.
- The type of response can be one-on-one outside of class or a general remark to the entire class. Let your own personality and the situation guide the way in which you respond.
- Students that interrupt or shout in class should be made aware that such behavior is unacceptable. It is important to enforce this from the start of the semester.
- Disruptive students, for example those that are joking with friends, should also be addressed. This can be as simple as "Do you have something to share?" or, if it is an on-going offense, it may be important to discuss the situation with the student outside of class.
- It is also very important to respond to offensive remarks. You should make it clear that such comments will not be tolerated. Again, the exact method of dealing with the offense may depend on the situation and your personality.

Adapted from the "Difficult Students" section of the Rutgers Teaching Assistant Handbook. <http://taproject.rutgers.edu/publications/TAPhandbook.php3#difficult> Accessed 12.02.09

The paper "Preventing and Managing Classroom Incivilities" (A. Miguel, 2009) offers many suggestions to develop an appropriate classroom dynamic, and how to deal with disruptions and incivilities.

<http://soa.asee.org/paper/conference/paper-view.cfm?id=10749> Accessed 12.02.09

Note that some suggestions (for example how to deal with students who demand a make-up assignment) do not actually follow our guidelines in the department. Be aware of this as you read through this document.

The UMD Teaching Resource Guide offers guidance when dealing with seriously disruptive and threatening students. Please see page 35 of the Teaching Resource Guide for this information, which is also found in the Student Conduct Code. It is also important to discuss the situation with your advisor and/or teacher whom you are assisting.

Center for Teaching Excellence, University of Maryland. Teaching Resource Guide. <http://www.cte.umd.edu/TRG.pdf> 2009. Accessed 12.02.09

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Time Management in the Classroom

In both laboratory and discussion sessions, time management is very important. Students are very aware of the time (especially when they only have 10 minutes to trek across campus!), and they expect classes to begin and end promptly.

Discussion Sections

- It is important to plan your lesson plan so as to only take the allotted time period.
- It is also easy to eliminate one or two practice problems if you notice you are running behind in your lesson.
- Also, if you had planned to work in small groups and have a shortage of time, it is usually possible to work as a large “group” and do a practice problem on the board together, taking less time.
- If there are few “left-over” questions from an individual student, direct this student to make an appointment with you, visit you in your office hours, or even use the small time between discussion sections to answer these questions.

Labs

- Lab sessions can often be very stressful on both you as the TA and your students as far as time management goes. It is essential to get through a certain amount of information and collect necessary data to complete the lab report in the assigned time block. Often, labs are scheduled back to back, and so students cannot spend any extra time in the classroom.
- It is important to preempt any difficult and confusing spots in the lab procedure. This means you need to read and be aware of these before the lab begins and advise students on appropriate actions at those moments in the lab. This is often beneficial to note in your pre-lab lectures.
- For labs to run smoothly, it is important that students prepare for lab and understand the general procedure. If you notice that students are struggling along and do not seem to be aware of what they are supposed to be doing, you may want to address this with them, noting that lab preparation is a requirement, and the purpose of pre-lab quizzes.
- As you walk through the lab, note how groups are using their time. Labs seem to be the one time students lose track of time, so you may need to remind them of it now and then.
- Advise groups to multi-task. For example, often two people in a group can make a solution while the others are preparing the equipment.
- Sometimes particular groups struggle with answering the guided inquiry questions and lose a lot of time at these steps. Be aware of those groups, and when possible help lead them through the questions. (But don't give them the answers!)

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Other Lab-Based Snags

- Every now and then, equipment will just not work. This is very rare and is often more a case of user-error. If a student tells you that an instrument is not working, be sure to go over the instrument yourself. If you find that this is really the case, send a student for help at the lower division stock room.
- You may also encounter the group that just manages to make a large mistake somewhere in the procedure and obtain poor (or no) results.
 - This can be stressful, and the key to keep the students calm is for you to stay calm.
 - Often, labs are short enough that the procedure can be repeated before the end of the class.
 - If this is not possible, it is important to contact the lab instructor following the class. In certain situations, the students may be able to use their poor results and explain what went wrong in their report. At other times, it may be necessary for the students to use the data from another group. Just remember (and remind them) this is not the end of the world.