Disruptive Students

Definition of the “disruptive student”:
- Attention-getter
- Dominates class discussion
- Input is often tangential (i.e. doesn’t contribute in a productive way)
- Discussion has to be restarted after s/he stops talking
- Does not know s/he is off the mark classmates roll eyes when he talks

Solving and/or Preventing the Problem:
1. Ask students in class to create guidelines for discussion.
2. Define class conduct in the syllabus and sanctions for misconduct.
3. Pull students aside after class and let them know other students need to share the opinions, comments, questions, etc.
4. If problem persists talk about it openly with the class:
   1. “What are the good things happening with the mechanics of our discussion?”
   2. “What can we do to improve?” (Typically, other class members politely mention that all voices should be heard.)
5. Divide the class into partners or small groups for discussion with a tight deadline.
6. In a private conversation ask the student whether the class seems to be going well, share your personal philosophy of class discussions, and discuss strategies that will allow others to freely share comments.
   1. Divide discussion time by number of students; limit comments to that time.
   2. Invite them to come to you with written comments they didn’t get to talk about.
   3. Give lots of positive feedback.
7. Examine and/or re-evaluate ground rules for participation.
   1. Participation = contributes in ways that promotes the engagement of others.
   2. Encourage students to develop strategies that empower participation abilities.
8. Reserve a small corner of the white/chalk board for off-subject comments that you will come back to later. After a few trips to “the bin” students get the point.

Resources:
- UC Berkeley Center for Teaching & Learning: http://teaching.berkeley.edu
- University of Delaware Center for Teaching & Learning: http://cte.udel.edu
- University of Oklahoma Learning & Teaching Program: http://www.ou.edu/teach.html
- James Madison University Counseling & Student Development Center: https://www.jmu.edu/osarp/handbook/JMU-student-life/student-wellness/CSDC.shtml
- Ferris State University Faculty Center for Teaching & Learning: ferris state university faculty center for teaching & learning

1 These ideas were derived from discussion on the POD listserv in September 2006.