

# Cell Phone Free Classroom A Success

By Mark James Miller, Feb. 24, 2017



“This classroom is a no cellphone zone,” I tell my students at the start of each semester. It rhymes so it’s easy to remember.

Just to be sure no one misses the point, this is reinforced by a large picture projected onto a screen at the front of the room that shows a cellphone with a big red line drawn through it: “Notice — No cellphone Zone” it proclaims. This is also placed in the course syllabus, along with a warning that anyone using their cellphone during class is subject to discipline, and possible removal from class.

In a previous column, I stated I was implementing a no cellphone policy in my classes and that I would report on how well it was working. This is the fifth semester it has been in place and it is working well.

While I do occasionally have to remind a student to put his or her cellphone away, and I display that notice at the start of each class meeting, the policy has met with only a little resistance, and inappropriate cellphone use in class has dwindled to virtually zero.

What’s the harm of students perusing their cellphone during class? While many people boast these days of being able to multitask, I am reminded of something I was told in junior high school: “You can’t study and watch television at the same time unless you have two heads.”

A student whose attention is focused on sending a text is definitely not listening to a lecture or to a class discussion. Studies show students who use their cellphones in

class take lower-quality notes, retain less information, and do worse on tests than students who refrain from using their phones during class time.

Even more problematic is the fact that a student using his/her cellphone in class also negatively affects other students. It distracts their attention from the lesson they are supposed to be working on, and tempts them to look at their cellphones as well.

Regarding student cellphone use during class time, one study shows 92 percent of the students surveyed reported using their cellphones to send text messages in class. The same survey indicated students admit to using their phones an average of 11 times per day in class. In another study, 80 percent of the students stated they use their phones at least once in each class period.

Researchers are reporting that as high as 60 percent of students are “smart-phone dependent” and there is an inverse relationship between the amount of time students spend on their cellphones and their grades. More cellphone time equates to lower grades, in other words.

It can also lead to being booted from class. When I originally implemented the zero-tolerance policy, one young man ostensibly stopped using his phone in class but then developed a bad habit of frequently leaving the classroom for longer and longer periods of time. At first I assumed he had a medical condition that required frequent trips to the restroom, but when these trips became more frequent I became suspicious. When I confronted him to ask why he left class for more than 30 minutes, he said, “I had to take an important call.”

At least he was honest. The call was obviously more important to him than the class, for he was removed forthwith. Luckily, his was an extreme case.

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