The following case studies come from a series entitled “Disruptive Student Behavior” from the Profhacker blog at the Chronicle of Higher Education website (http://chronicle.com/), which detail possible classroom scenarios that faculty may potentially face. The original blog posts include caveats for each scenario, additional context, and many include responses from seasoned faculty. However, for this document we have stripped away everything except the actual case studies. Below is a comprehensive listing of case studies that focus on in-class situations, pulled from this series and presented in the following categories:

- The Talkative
- The Chatterers
- The Barely Clothed
- The inappropriately clothed
- The Smelly
- The Bullies
- The Entitled
- The Disrespecters
- The Twarters

The Talkative (The Case of Know-it-All Nancy)

SCENARIO: You plan to facilitate a discussion in your class about readings that you assigned. As students enter the room and settle into their seats, you can feel the buzz in the air. They are excited. They want to discuss the subject. You begin class by asking a very open-ended question, a question designed to allow the students to take the subject in an area that interests them. The first student who responds to your question, a question that is barely out of your mouth, is Nancy, or as her classmates call her, “Know-it-all-Nancy.” Nancy is a smart young woman who often has very smart things to say about the subject at hand. She answers your question with great precision, citing arguments from sources you did not require her to read. You know from experience that if you stand by quietly and let her finish, class would be over and no one else would have had a chance to speak. So, you cut her off—politely—to get other students involved in the discussion. You ask another question, directed at another student. Nancy answers.

The Chatterers (Chatty Cathy and her BFF Conversational Carl)

SCENARIO: You are lecturing in a course that requires some lecture. You don’t lecture at every class session; you often have class sessions that center around group activities or discussion. You have a friendly approach to your students, and they are comfortable in the course and with you. But on this day, as you do your best to present to students information that they need, you notice Chatty Cathy and her friend Conversational Carl talking, openly and loudly. It is clear by their body language, their laughter, and the words you overhear that they are not discussing course content. You make eye contact, alerting them to the fact that you recognize their discussion and that you want it to stop. So, you cut her off—politely—to get other students involved in the discussion. You ask another question, directed at another student. Nancy answers.
The Barely Clothed (Too Much Skin)

SCENARIO [male version]: Class is in session. Being the constructivist professor you are, you walk around the room as you Lecture or guide your students in their tasks for that day. You notice a small group of students huddled over a computer trying to stifle their laughter. You approach the group to see what they are viewing on the screen, and it’s then you realize they are not laughing at something on the computer; they are using the screen as a shield to hide their laughter. You look up to see what they are laughing at, and it’s then you see the heavy-set young man at the front of the classroom leaning across a desk talking to another student. He has leaned so far forward that his pants (sans belt) have slipped …. they haven’t just slipped below his shorts (if he had been wearing shorts), but his low-rider jeans have slipped so far down his body he’s sharing his backside all with the rest of the class. The laughter escalates as other students catch on. He doesn’t seem to recognize that the students are laughing at him. You feel you have lost control of the situation.

SCENARIO [female version]: Class is in session. You are standing at the front of the classroom lecturing. The door opens and a young woman enters. It’s hard not to notice her entrance: she’s wearing white thigh-high boots, a white miniskirt that could rival the length of her underwear, and a sheer white tube top (and she could get away with wearing these clothes in a different setting). You don’t want to stare at her, and nor do the other 35 male and female students in the room. But it’s hard to look away. You shake off the distraction and get on with your lecture. The other students, however, cannot (or choose not) to shake off the distraction of the woman in white. She seems oblivious to the commotion she’s caused. You feel you’ve lost control of the situation.

The inappropriately clothed (T-shirt Slogan)

Scenario #1: You are teaching a general education class at your institution, a mid-sized public institution that is (almost) open access. The student body is diverse in both age, race, gender, and socio-economic status. The class is fairly large (50+ students) and you are in a tiered classroom. The content of that day’s lecture is not controversial or politically charged. Students are alternately dozing off or taking notes as you work through that day’s lesson. A student comes into the classroom late, and as the door is at the front of the room, you and all the students turn to look as she noisily walks in the door. You notice her t-shirt. As she walks up the steps to the top of the tiered classroom, other students notice her t-shirt, too. You hear gasps erupting from many students. What’s she wearing? A t-shirt with images of aborted fetuses on it. On the back? “I’m pro-life!”

Scenario #2: You are teaching a course in your major area, and during the previous class session, you informally discussed national politics. Even though you are careful to not let your own political biases affect the class, most students assume your political leanings. You are at a more selective institution than the institution in scenario #1, but you are still a public university. Your student body does have racial diversity, but most of the students come from middle- to upper-class families. As you stand at the front of the room before class begins, male and female students file in talking and laughing. You notice the t-shirt on one man about the same time another student does. What’s he wearing? A t-shirt with a likeness of President Obama kneeling. The slogan says, “Obama sucks but does he sw*ll*w?”
The Smelly (What’s that smell?)

SCENARIO: Before class begins, Lethargic Larry/Laura walks by, and you notice a rather pungent, unusual smell. You realize that the smell comes from alcohol or marijuana. Laura/Larry meanders to a seat in the back and sits quietly, placing the correct book and notebook on the desk. He/she looks just as attentive as other students in the class, which is not saying too much. A couple of students who sit near Larry/Laura notice the smell, too, and start giggling. One whispers something to another student sitting away from Laura/Larry, who also lets out a snicker. It stops there, but these students keep glancing at Larry/Laura, who sits there not taking notes and not participating (which is not unusual for many students in the room).

EXTENDED SCENARIO: Lethargic Laura/Larry shows up for the fourth time smelling like marijuana or alcohol. Students who sit near him or her roll their eyes and move away as Larry/Laura grabs the same desk in the back. A couple cough loudly while a couple more hold their noses and look at each other.

The Bullies (Bill the Cop and the busy bees)

SCENARIO: You are new professor, just a year or so out of graduate school, at a small liberal arts college with a diverse student population. You teach a small course (15-20 students) that is discussion-based. You assess student learning by quizzes, essays, and journal submissions. One of these students is a retired police officer, Bill, who “encourages” his classmates to give him their study notes so, as he puts it, “we can all be on the same page.” You sense he intimidates the other students—by his former profession, which he speaks about frequently, but also his size and demeanor—but they hand over their notes. You ask your department chair how to handle the situation. Your chair says to ignore the case, as the “students need to learn to handle these situations.” You feel conflicted. What do you do?

SCENARIO: You are an experienced educator at a regional state university where the student population is not very diverse. You are teaching a large class (over 50 students). You expect a lot of conversation, movement, and collaboration among all students, as this is a hands-on course. In fact, you strive to group and regroup students at each class session, so they are frequently working with new people. However, you notice that a small group of men and women—the Busy Bees—dominate class-wide discussion and they refuse to participate in collaborative work that is not conducted with their friends. Additionally, when students outside this group are speaking to the entire class, those inside the group will interrupt the speakers, laugh loudly at something not relevant to the on-going conversation, or they will talk to one another, thereby ignoring the speaker completely. Several students have complained about the intimidation and the lack of respect they feel around the “inside group.” You ask the “Busy Bees” to recognize how they are coming across to their peers, and how they might consider modifying their behavior. The Busy Bees demand that you provide them with names and exact complaints so they can corroborate your assessment, as they feel they have been “giving” to those who are not as fortunate as they are. What do you do?
The Entitled (Students of the rich and famous)

SCENARIO: She emails you the day classes begin and states that she won’t be able to attend the first two weeks of classes because she’s on a family vacation in Europe. Additionally, she says, the week before the holiday break isn’t really good for her either because she’s traveling to Africa to go on Safari during that time. The final exam time might be iffy, too, but she’ll let you know. Can you, she asks, send her all your notes and PowerPoint presentations so she can do the work on her own?

SCENARIO: He tells you that he can’t take a test on the planned date because he has an appointment with his father who is, the student reminds you, the president of the Board of Regents for your university. He’d be happy to take the exam in a few weeks at some time that would be convenient for him.

The Disrespecters (You can’t teach!)

- You are a young professor, maybe your first or second year on the tenure-track. On the first day of class, a student asks you, “Are you old enough to teach this class?”
- On the first day of class, a student asks, “Are you gay” (or a derogatory term for homosexual)?
- You are teaching a fairly simple concept and a student yells out, “I don’t get this! You are a bad teacher!”
- You are working with the same fairly simple concept, and a student mutters (loud enough where you can hear her): “Who is he to be telling us about this stuff? What qualifications does he have?”
- You are new to a geographic area that is predominately one ethnicity and race, and you don’t share this with your new students. In class one day, as you are handing out a test, a student says to her neighbor, “She is just a [insert racial epithet here]. I don’t have to do what she says.”
- You are teaching in a large lecture hall and you notice that among the 100+ students in the room, a quarter of them are reading the student newspaper or playing with their cell phones.
- You are teaching the same 100+ student group in the large lecture hall. Twenty-five percent of the students are reading the newspaper and another 25 percent are taking with each other, conversations not related to the course content.
- You begin to notice a pattern in your class. You are lecturing (this is the typical mode of information dissimination for your discipline) and you recognize that students are leaving the class every 10 minutes. Only a handful of students remain in class at the end of the hour.
- You have a student who is straight from the Mark Waters Mean Girls film who says, “I don’t have to do your assignment because my dad is on the Board of Regents of this university.”
The Twarters (Feminism, immigration, and evolution)

SCENARIO: You teach a first-year writing course (20-25 students) where controversial subjects are often the topic of any given class session. In fact, you intentionally introduce “hot button” subjects into your class discussions, as you believe that students need to be able to argue more than one perspective of an issue. At the least, you think, students should be able to recognize that multiple perspectives exist and that they can find “common ground” between opponents of a complex issue. Students read an essay by a prominent female author about how women in the U.S. culture are “labeled” and conversely, how men do not have those same-type labels. Tina Thwarter is waiting for you as you begin class: “I’m not going to read this trash,” she says. “My dad says I don’t have to because I’m not [in staged whisper] a feminist. I’m here to learn about important things.”

SCENARIO: You are teaching a mid-sized lecture and discussion course (40-50 students) in political science / government. You are very cautious to never let your personal political beliefs sway the way you present material to your students. Yet students assume—given your profession (university professor) that you are a liberal. As part of the scheduled semester’s activities, you discuss immigration reform in the United States. The Arizona Bill 1070 is in the news, and you ask how this bill may or may not be relevant to other issues you’ve discussed in the course. (You are NOT in Arizona or any neighboring state.) Tony Thwarter says (with such conviction that all conversation stops), “I support this bill because White America should finally stand up and claim its rights... [illegals] don’t deserve anything that the rest of us have to pay for.” (It’s important to note that Tony used language that won’t be repeated in this space.) Many students seem to disagree with Tony (shifting in their seats, looking at one another), but no one says anything.

SCENARIO: You are teaching a large-lecture-type science course (100+ students). On the course schedule for that day is the evolution / creationism debate. You expect some students to be uncomfortable or to even be upset about the direction the discussion will take, as this type of discussion can challenge personally-held beliefs. Most students, however, will just ignore the parts of the discussion they don’t support. They understand that it’s your job—as their professor—to teach them something and they will remember testable information and move on (their personal beliefs in check). A few Tharters, however, decide that their beliefs are being trampled upon by an academic discussion that challenges faith. They stand up during your lecture and quote the Bible verses that explain how you are wrong. Many students seem to agree with the Tharters, but they stay seated, listening to the exchange. Other students seem to disagree with the vocal group, but also stay seated. No one is sure how to act or what to say.