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ABSTRACT
                This document discusses an action research project
undertaken to decrease inappropriate social behavior that was found to impede
normal school day functions during the Freshman Seminar program. The targeted
population consisted of ninth grade students in a suburb of a midwestern
metropolitan area. A student survey was used to document incidents of
disrespect; verbal abuse; inappropriate language; play fighting;
name-calling; and teasing. Analysis of the probable cause data revealed that
students lacked the skills and knowledge to change inappropriate behaviors.
Reviews of probable causes suggested that: unclear behavior expectations;
lack of social skills; student disengagement; and traditional discipline
methods were reasons why students acted inappropriately. Implementation of
several strategies combined with an analysis of the problem setting resulted
in an increased curricular emphasis on interpersonal skill development and
teacher modeling of appropriate behaviors. Post intervention data revealed a
decrease in some of the inappropriate behaviors and in student referrals
written for inappropriate behavior. (Contains 31 references.) (JDM)

DECREASING INAPPROPRIATE SOCIAL BEHAVIOR IN
FRESHMAN SEMINAR THROUGH THE USE OF
INTERPERSONAL SKILLS TRAINING

Peter Quinn

An Action Research Project Submitted to the graduate Faculty of the

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# ABSTRACT

This action research project describes a project for decreasing inappropriate social behavior, which impedes normal school day functions during the Freshman Seminar program. The targeted population consisted of ninth grade students in a suburb of a major midwestern metropolitan area. The problems of disrespect, verbal abuse, inappropriate language, play fighting, name-calling, and "roasting" were documented through a student survey.

Analysis of probable cause data revealed that students lacked the skills and knowledge to change inappropriate behaviors. Reviews of probable causes by knowledgeable others suggested that unclear behavior expectations, lack of social skills, student disengagement, and traditional discipline methods are why students act inappropriately.

A review of solution strategies suggested by knowledgeable others, combined with an analysis of the problem setting, resulted in an increased curricular emphasis on interpersonal skill development, and teacher modeling of appropriate behavior.

Post intervention data indicated a decrease in some of the inappropriate social behaviors, and a decrease in the number of student referrals written.

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# CHAPTER 1

## PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONTEXT

### General Statement of Problem

The students of the targeted ninth grade class exhibit inappropriate social behavior in the Freshman Seminar program, which impedes normal school day functions. Behaviors include disrespect, verbal abuse, play fighting, name calling, "roasting," and inappropriate language. Evidence for the existence of the problem includes records that document discipline referrals to the Discipline Office, student survey, and teacher observation.

### Immediate Problem Context

The target site is a high school district serving two communities located in a western suburb of a major midwestern metropolitan area. This single school district has an enrollment of 2,727 students in grades 9-12. The school enrollment is 61.4 % White, 26.7% African American, 5.1% Multi-Ethnic, 4.9% Asian and Pacific Islander, 2.9% Hispanic, and 0.1% Native American. The population includes 13.9% low income students who are receiving public aid, may live in institutions for neglected or delinquent children, may be supported in foster homes with public funds, or may be eligible to receive free or reduced-price lunches. Four tenths of a percent of the students are Limited-English-Proficient (LEP) students who are eligible for transitional bilingual

education. The attendance rate is 91.7%, student mobility is 13.3%, chronic truancy is 8.3% and the graduation rate is 94.8% (School report card, 1999).

The target school offers more than 200 courses in nine divisions of study. Students are required to take a minimum of 43 credits to graduate including the following requirements: 6 credits in English, 4 credits in math, 4 credits in history, 2 credits in science, 7 credits in physical education and 1 credit in foreign language, fine and performing arts, applied arts, computer proficiency, driver education, consumer education, and health education. These requirements allow students to take at least 13 elective courses in areas of individual interest or need. Class periods are 50 minutes in length with a 5-minute passing period between classes.

Over 90% of the graduates of the Class of 1999 enrolled in more than 191 different colleges, universities, community colleges, and trade or technical schools. There were 27 semifinalists and 27 commended students in the National Merit Scholarship competition, 5 semifinalists in the National Achievement Scholarship Program for academically able African American students, and 3 students in the National Hispanic Scholars Program. Of the student population, 69.5% took the American College Test (ACT) earning an average score of 22.8 while those taking the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) averaged a score of 1173. In May of 1999, 343 students participated by taking 637 Advanced Placement Exams with 85% earning scores of 3, 4, or 5 (School report card, 1999).

There are 201 certified faculty members and 222 non-certified staff members. The faculty are 86.7% White, 9.4% African American, 3.1% Hispanic, and 0.8% Asian/Pacific Islander; 52.2% are female and 47.8% are male. The faculty's average

teaching experience is 16.7 years with 19.0% holding bachelor's degrees and 81.0% with a master's degree and above. The faculty is organized in nine different divisions each with a division head and secretary. There are 12 dean counselors who support approximately 230 students each, and two discipline deans. The average administrator salary is $97,278, and the average teacher salary is $63,215. The regular education teacher to student ratio is 19.0/1. The teaching staff to student ratio is 16.9:1. The individual cost per pupil is $11,723 (School report card, 1999).

The campus is centrally located in the community on 4 ½ city blocks with the physical building covering two city blocks. While the school has a history of 128 years of education, the current building was constructed in 1905 with multiple additions in the 1920s, 1950s, and 1960s. Today's building is a four-story brick structure, which includes a field house, gymnasiums, and two swimming pools. There are two student cafeterias on the first floor and a staff cafeteria on the second floor. The library is located on the second and third floor with extensive computer access available. In addition to the main auditorium, there is a little theater and a TV studio that supports a local cable student news program. There are eight computer labs with MAC and PC platforms. Many building improvements have been made over the last several years including locker room renovations, science lab upgrades, new field house floor, and a new welcoming center. In addition to the computer labs, 11 classrooms have been outfitted with student computers, and every staff member has his or her own computer. All classrooms have access to an internal network and external access to the Internet. A Technology Learning Center (TLC) provides training and assistance for the increasing flow of technology.

The school also offers 80 clubs and activities for student participation ranging from Chess Team to Stage Crew. A faculty member who oversees the day to day operation sponsors each club and activity. Athletically, students can participate on over 30 different levels of athletic teams. During its 127 years of operation, the school has won 41 athletic state titles, and countless state and national awards from various clubs and activity groups. The residing communities have always been very supportive of the school's academic and extracurricular endeavors.

## The Surrounding Community

The high school serves two distinct communities located just west of a large urban city. The larger community in which the school is located was settled in the 1840s and incorporated in 1902. This community celebrates the diversity of its population with an urban/suburban lifestyle. It has a population of 53,648 in a 4.5 square mile area. The ethnic makeup of the community is 74.8% White, 18.0% African American, and 7.2% other races with a median age of 33.8. The median family income is $51,737. The median home value is $184,000 and rental rates range form $450 -$1300. The local government consists of a president, six trustees, a clerk, and a manager. There are 8 financial institutions, 3 fire station, 2 hospitals, 1 main library with two branches, 53 places of worship, and 16 parks including a conservatory, 2 swimming pools and an indoor ice rink. In addition to the main police station there are seven resident officers and several satellite stations. There is a single elementary district and several private schools in the community as well. Residents of this community are mostly a white-collar work force. With access to two rapid transit lines, one commuter rail line, and several

bus routes, residents have easy access to the downtown financial area, and most suburban work headquarters (Local village internet site, 1999).

The local school district is comprised of seven elected officials who meet with the high schools administrative staff on a monthly basis. Officials are elected to three-year terms with a president and vice president overseeing the board.

The second community was settled in the 1830s and was incorporated in 1880. It is an affluent community of white-collar workers. It is primarily a residential area with several religious and educational institutions. It has a population of 11,329 in a 2.5 square mile area. The ethnic makeup of the community is 94.6% White, 3.0% Asian/Pacific Islander, 1.5% African American, and 0.9% other races. The median family income is $96,038. The median home value is $359,035. The local government consists of a president, six trustees, a clerk, and an administrator. There are 5 financial institutions, 1 fire station, a police station, 1 library, 8 places of worship, and 7 parks. There is a single elementary district, 2 universities, and a nearby community college. The community has access to 1 rapid transit line, 1 commuter rail line, and several bus routes (Local village internet site, 1999).

In addition to the five active parent organizations in the school, the citizens in the communities are also very involved in school issues. In 1997, both communities voted "yes" to a referendum that has been crucial in updating the school for the next century. The Youth Township in cooperation with the high school helps to meet the needs of students with many programs ranging form intramural sports to music. There are also many special programs providing assistance, counseling, and alternatives for troubled,

low-income, and neglected children. However, with all these special programs and wonderful facilities in place why is it that student discipline problems continue to grow?

## National Context of Problem

Student behavior has always been an issue that challenges educators. Whether it is lack of respect, boisterous hallway shouting, name-calling, or bullying, students do not always act according to educators' guidelines of appropriate behavior. With behavior problems comes the issue of discipline. A 1995 Gallup Poll, as reported by Elam and Rose (1995), indicated that lack of discipline was the number one problem that Americans feel the local public schools face. "Teachers, parents, and administrators remain caught between a multiplicity of never ending data and yearly statistics on the importance of discipline in the classroom and its relationship to self-concept, social skills and learning" (Gill & Hayes-Butler, 1988, p. 2). Discipline problems in America are on the rise, and schools simply reflect society in many ways. The rise of violence, the disrespect for authority, the media, and violence are influences that affect behavior in schools.

Schools are facing increasing problems these days. It is a different student that walks into the front doors everyday. In discussing the1990s student, Dillion notes:

Teachers today are working with a different kind of student... Parents more and more frequently admit that they cannot control their children. Many even abandon them. Many students act as free agents. They do not live at home, and they are not responsible to anyone. They have few personal restraints. The number of students placed on permanent suspension from school for misbehavior

or maladjustment is increasing. The age of those being suspended is decreasing. Growing numbers of elementary students are out of school because they are disruptive to the teaching-learning process. The growing clarity of students' rights of due process has taken away traditional discipline strategies in which many teachers found security, and many teachers are without skill to replace them. (as cited in Curwin & Mendler, 1988, pp. 3-4)

Our current adolescents are learning to talk back, to be angry, and to be explosive and violent. Therefore, today's teachers must search for more effective means of disciplining their students (Harmin, 1995). The burden of handling disciplinary problems has led to significant teacher stress and attrition, and reduced student academic achievement (Charles, 1996).

CHAPTER 2

PROBLEM DOCUMENTATION

Problem Evidence

In order to document the extent of inappropriate student behavior in Freshman .

Seminar, anecdotal records consisting of referrals to the discipline office, a student

survey (see Appendix A), and teacher observations over a three-week period of time were

noted.

During the three-week observation period, 15 discipline referrals were written for

inappropriate student behavior for the 53 students involved in the project. School policy

states that behavior problems be addressed initially by a teacher/student conference.

"roasting"
7%

play fighting
20%

verbal abuse
40%
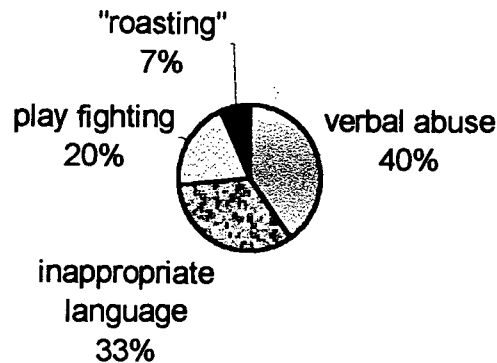
inappropriate
language
33%

Figure 1. Discipline referrals and percentages per category.

Of the 15 referrals written, 6 were for verbal abuse. Verbal abuse meaning those

students verbally attack one another. In all six situations, the students had been warned on

several occasions about their actions prior to the referral. It should be noted that two of

the six referrals were for the same student. Five of the referrals were for inappropriate

language. For example, swear words being the most common use of unsuitable language.

Two of the 15 referrals were written for play fighting. Unfortunately what the teacher-

researcher discovered is that a fine line exists between play fighting and real fighting. In

both instances, the male students involved were only joking, although aggressive,

physical behavior was displayed. Finally, 1 referral was written for "roasting." While

not a "normal" term to describe student behavior, the teacher-researcher came to realize

that students use the term specifically to describe a situation where one person makes fun

of another person. In other words, the goal is to "burn" someone, thus the catch all

word—roasting.

Teacher observations revealed an interesting pattern to these 15 referrals. In all

the situations except one of the play fighting referrals, the students implicated were

repeatedly talked to, warned and cautioned about their behavior. Several students had

five and six warnings. The pattern that began to emerge was that students were lacking

the necessary skills to deal with these behaviors. Fifty-three students completed the

survey (see Appendix A) in mid September 2000.
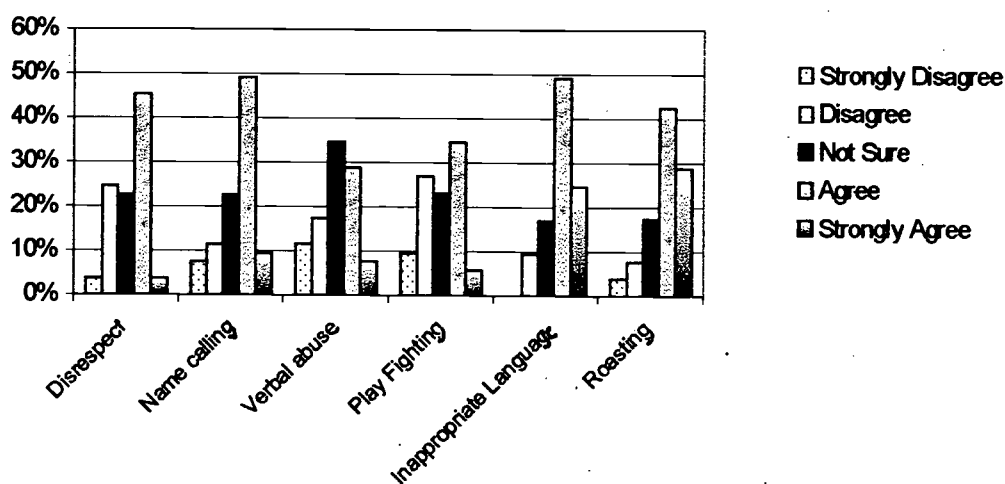


Figure 2. Student perceptions of inappropriate behaviors.

Evidence from 53 student surveys further indicates the existence of inappropriate

social behaviors in Freshman Seminar. On the issue of disrespect, 45 % of the

respondents agreed that the behavior was observable. Forty nine percent agreed that

name-calling was also an observable behavior. While 35 % of the respondents were not

sure if verbal abuse was an issue, 29 % did agree that it was an issue. Students were

mixed on play fighting. Twenty seven percent disagreed, 23 % were not sure, but 35 % did agree that the behavior was observable in Freshman Seminar. Students were firm concerning their responses regarding inappropriate language. Forty nine percent agreed, while 25 % strongly agreed that inappropriate language was discernible. Students responded similarly on the issue of "roasting." Forty two percent agreed, while 29 % strongly agreed that "roasting" was an observable behavior.
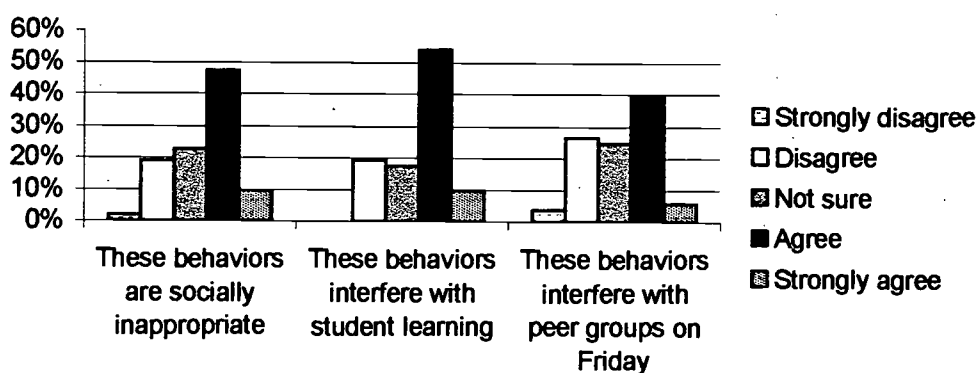


Figure 3. Students' perceptions of how inappropriate behaviors affect learning.

Each of the three parts of Figure 3 asked students a specific question regarding the inappropriate behaviors from Figure 2. The first group of bars on the left in Figure 3 indicates whether students found the behaviors in Figure 2 to be socially inappropriate. Forty-seven percent agreed that the behaviors are socially inappropriate. The middle set of bars shows that 54% of the surveyed students agree that the behaviors from Figure 2 interfere with student learning. The third set of bars on the right asked students if they felt that the inappropriate behavior interfered with peer group meetings. While 26% disagreed and 25% were not sure, 40% did agree that the inappropriate behaviors are a

distraction. In other words, students were firm in believing that the inappropriate

behaviors identified in Figure 2 are problematic. Figure 4 highlights an interesting aspect

on student accountability.



6% 4%

19%

46%

25%

■ strongly disagree
⊠ disagree
▤ not sure
■ agree
☐ strongly agree
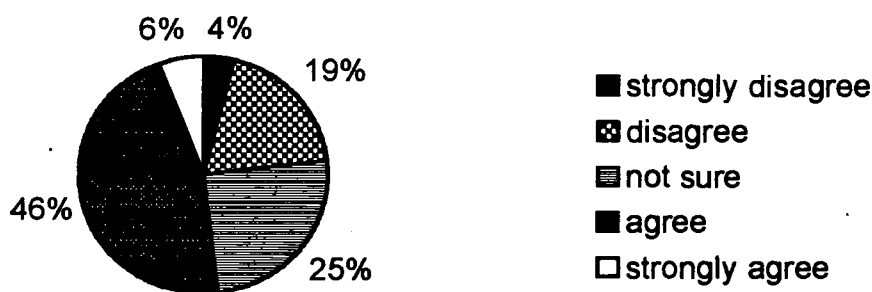
Figure 4. Percentages of students' who cope with inappropriate behaviors.

Figure 4 represents the percentages of students who effectively cope with

inappropriate behaviors listed in Figure 2. Of the 52 students who responded, 4%

strongly disagreed while 6% disagreed that students do not effectively deal with

inappropriate behaviors. An overwhelming 46% agreed, while 19% strongly agreed that

students effectively deal with inappropriate behaviors. This piece of evidence is

significant because the majority of the participants acknowledge that they are not part of

the problem. In a sense the participants have contradicted themselves. As was pointed

out in Figures 1, 2, & 3, and teacher observations, students showed and acknowledged the

existence of problematic behaviors. However, Figure 4 basically refutes the existence of

any problems with inappropriate behaviors. This trend is apparent in the figures that follow.



15%  2%  12%

■ strongly disagree
□ disagree
■ not sure
Ⅲ agree
☒ strongly agree

29%

42%
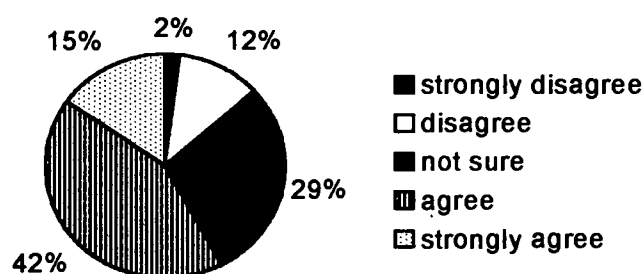
Figure 5. Percentages of students' who feel classroom rules are clearly defined

Figure 5 asks whether or not classroom rules are clearly defined. In this case classroom rules refer to the following: a) be on time, b) respect one another, and c) if you do not have anything nice to say, do not say it all. These rules were established the second week of school by the teacher/researcher and students. As was shown in Figure 4, students seem to be contradicting themselves. Of the 52 respondents, 42% agreed that rules are clearly defined. Fifteen percent strongly agreed, while a fair number, 29%, were not sure. While students acknowledge they know the rules, following them is another issue. Figures 6 and 7 bring the problem evidence around in a full circle, looking at positive and negative social behaviors as identified by the respondents.

**number of responses per category**

Figure 6. Positive social behaviors

Figure 6 looks at what the respondents consider the most positive social behavior

to be. Of the 53 surveys returned, only 28 surveys had this questioned answered. Seven

different positive behaviors were identified with the top three choices being respect,

friendliness, and kindness. What is gathered from this information is that students expect

to be treated in a certain way. However, earlier evidence shows that many students are

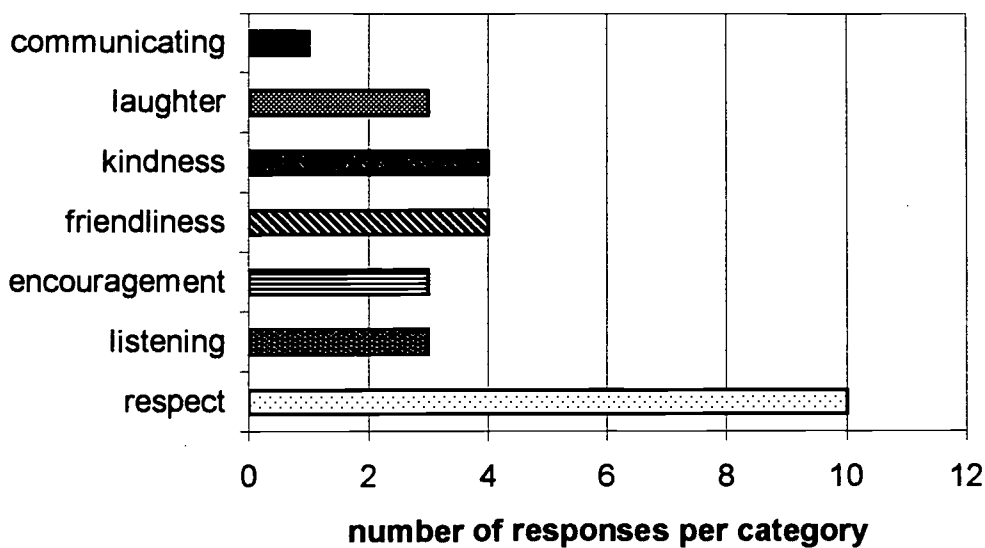not demonstrating positive treatment towards others.
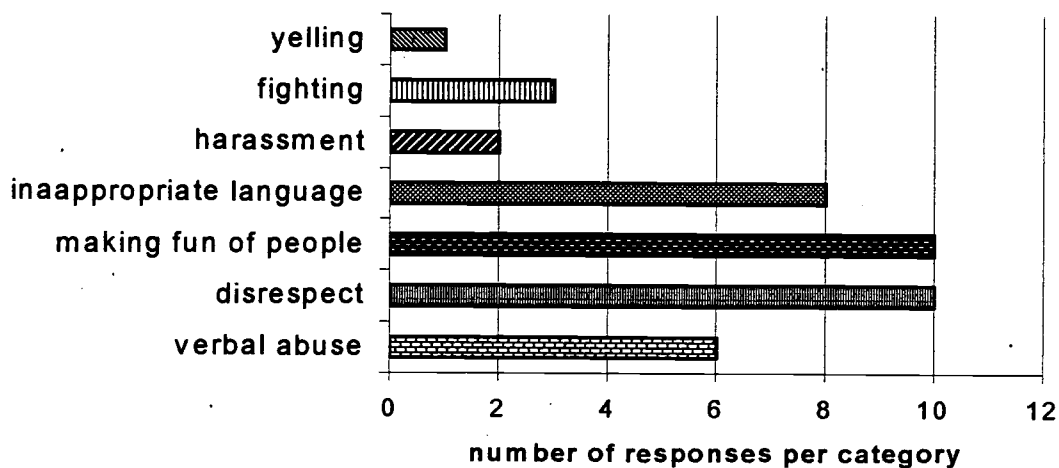
Figure 7. Negative social behaviors

Figure 7 looks at what the respondents consider the most negative social behavior

to be. Of the 53 surveys returned, 40 surveys identified seven negative social behaviors.

Twenty-five percent identified disrespect and making fun of people as negative

behaviors, while another 20% said inappropriate language was intolerable.   Students

clearly have a set of expectations of what behaviors are socially inappropriate.

The targeted behaviors of this paper-disrespect, name calling, verbal abuse,

"roasting," play fighting, and inappropriate language have both site based and literature-

based causes. It is the conclusion of the teacher-researcher that the cyclical nature of the

evidence presented shows that the targeted 9th grade students lack the skills and

knowledge necessary to change inappropriate behaviors. This chapter will look at four

causes that the teacher-researcher feels are associated with the inappropriate social

behaviors in the Freshman Seminar program.

Probable Causes

Unclear Behavior Expectations

Two particular areas exist at the target school that gets students into trouble. First off, many of the rules are poorly developed. It is difficult for students to navigate through the maze of rules and regulations when in many instances the rules are not clearly defined, and remain even more ambiguous after explanation. Teachers also find it frustrating to handle situations consistently and fairly, because not all the rules are enforced on a regular basis by administration and staff. The end result is that teachers and students really do not understand the meanings of all the rules, and it is the students who get into trouble. "A major detriment to good school discipline is the inconsistency in policies and approaches used to deal with problems. Issues of inconsistency arise over interpretations of rules and policies, and how the punishment is administered" (Lordon, 1983, p. 59).

Schmidt (1989) states that trust between students and staff is broken, not because of a direct action, but because of unclear expectations and miscommunication. Too often inconsistency in policies and approaches results in a major detriment to good school discipline. Often time's confusion and misunderstanding are the disruptive forces in the school setting.

The adage that rules are meant to be broken does not hold up well in the school setting. Rules and students do not always mix real well because students see school rules as too intrusive. However according to Kohn (1991), children are more likely to adhere to a rule if its rationale. Children are more accepting of discipline based on reason rather than the totalitarian approach. According to Keung:

Wertham (1963) pointed out the importance of the legitimacy of rules in schools both from the pupil's and teacher's point of view. He concluded in a study of American high school pupils that if pupils perceive rules as illegitimate ones, the enforcement of rules by teachers may provoke an unintended and unanticipated response that may precipitate confrontation. (1992, p. 30)

Korinek (1993) declared that rules that are inadequately developed can lead to behavior problems. Problems like disrespect, verbal abuse, "roasting," and inappropriate language result from students not getting the proper direction needed to improve negative behavior.

## Lack of Proper Social Skills

Another cause of inappropriate behavior in Freshman Seminar is the lack of proper social skills (i.e. listening, respect, and "roasting"). Social skill development in children is critical to their ability to properly function in every aspect of society. Forbes (1996) states that deficient social skills led to higher incidences of juvenile delinquency, poor peer relationships, and dropping out of school among students. Students who lack social skills tend to have negative experiences in school. They alienate themselves by acting out, not listening, and using inappropriate language. These students find it difficult not to "goof off," and the end result is that many of these students become isolated in the school setting. Their only recourse is to draw attention to themselves.

Another issue with these students is that the deficiency in social skills also leads to poor peer relationships. These students find it difficult to get along with peers because the inappropriate behavior compromises their relationships.

"Black & Downs (1992) urge administrators to regard disciplinary referrals as opportunities to teach students valuable social skills that will promote success in future employment as well as in school" (Gaustad, 1992, p. 2). Many times problem behavior occurs because students simply do not know how to act.

Kohn (1991) suggests that conversations should focus on endorsing positive social behaviors instead of concentrating on how to curb negative ones. Students would have the opportunity to have good things reinforced about them.

Again according to Kohn (1991), many students who lack proper social skills do not find this type of instruction at home. Missing is the modeling of altruism, nurturance, and warmth, and the opportunities to practice caring for others. Schools are the likely main ingredient where students receive proper support for development.

Traditional Teacher-Based Strategies

Traditional strategies tend to reflect the more punitive approach to disciplining students. Korinek (1993, p. 264) stated that "traditional discipline systems focus on external control of students and often punitive measures to decrease inappropriate behavior. Shame, ridicule, sarcasm, humiliation, dwelling on past behavior, and exclusion are frequently associated with such systems, which are self-defeating and non-productive."

For example, Curwin and Mendler (1989) are quite critical of packaged discipline programs because they rely on power-based methods of control. Punishment is the main intervention or enforcement procedure, and little tolerance is given for rule violations. Teachers like these models because they rely on obedience, and telling students what to do requires very little change on the teacher's part.

Kauffman and Burbach (1997) discussed that administrators are as much at fault in responding in a reactive fashion by installing metal detectors, implementing "zero tolerance" programs, and increasing the number of security guards. Such responses according to Carlson and Dinkmeyer (1992) create an environment where power struggles exist between students and staff. Tomal (1999) stated that an enforcer mentality develops where disciplining is done much like a dictator who can be autocratic, self-righteous, and intimidating.

## Student Disengagement

Because students act inappropriately, have poor peer relationships, and lack social skills, students find it difficult to remain an active part of the school. Often times they are disinterested and lack involvement in school sponsored activities resulting in situations where their daily needs are unmet.

By nature, the second decade of life is characterized by a number of significant critical transitions (physiological, cognitive, social, and familial). "Peterson and Hamburg (1986) concurred that the transitions can be stressful, but they can also serve to stimulate growth by challenging the adolescent to extend and develop successful coping resources" (Koenig & Gladstone, 1998, p. 7).

"Allison and Sabatelli (1988) acknowledged that adolescents confront developmental challenge of individuation, developing sufficient separation from the family of origin in order to assume adult roles and responsibilities" (Crespi & Generali, 1995, p. 2). Furthermore, Ivey's (1991) cognitive development theory stated that one cannot truly become separate and autonomous unless a solid developmental foundation is established that is built through connections and attachments. Less individualized

adolescents react to conflict and tension in a variety of unhealthy ways (defensiveness, rebellion, and excessive conformity), which interfere with the ability to make mature decisions (Crespi & Generali, 1995).

Glasser (1986) claimed that all of our motivation comes from within ourselves. In his book Control Theory in the Classroom (1986), he declared "control theory is the belief that all of our behavior is our constant attempt to satisfy one or more of five basic needs (survival, belonging, power, freedom, and fun) that are written into our genetic structure" (p. 17).

Forbes (1996) stated that negative behavior was a result of individuals not having needs met in the environment in which the misbehavior occurred. Furthermore, the individuals do not posses the skills to respond appropriately to certain events in their surroundings. "Gordon (1974) states that coping mechanisms such as lying, cheating, conforming, submitting, and withdrawing are only visible signs of the student's anger, frustration, embarrassment, feelings of unworthiness, and vindictiveness" (Tauber, 1983, p. 53).

Children misbehave to attain one of four basic goals: attention, power, revenge, and inadequacy according to Carlson and Dinkmeyer (1992). It becomes easy for children to get caught up in a vicious cycle where they continually get what they want or get reinforcement by acting inappropriately. Children learn that acting inappropriately gets them many positive things. The problem with altering the cycle is that it is difficult to focus on the positive with children who continually misbehave.

Another problem with student disengagement according to Wayson and Lasley (1984) is that many schools have large numbers of phantom participants. These

participants function in the school setting but are rarely active in shaping the school's traditions. Therefore, student participation is utterly essential if students are to value the school and monitor their own behavior. Students must believe that the school is their own, and not someone else's.

Other authors like Curwin and Mendler stated that "needs-based theories of behavior relate directly to many of the purported causes of school discipline problems, including student boredom, powerlessness, unclear limits, a lack of acceptable outlets for feelings, a reduced sense of security and stability, and attacks on student dignity" (cited in Korinek, 1993, p. 265). Furthermore, Carlson and Dinkmeyer (1992) asserted that discouragement or possessing a low self-esteem is the prevalent obstacle to learning, growth, and development. Therefore it is vitally important that students become a piece of the overall school puzzle, and have the opportunity to discover their own strengths and assets.

In order to decrease the inappropriate social behaviors in Freshman Seminar, a more positive approach to behavior is needed at the target school. This teacher-researcher believes that more positive based management techniques will help students display more appropriate behaviors.

CHAPTER 3

THE SOLUTION STRATEGY

Literature Review

The teacher-researcher will implement a positive discipline plan to reduce inappropriate social behavior in Freshman Seminar in the target high school based on the wide variety of positive discipline theorists. This chapter will explore two areas of divergent solution strategies: traditional teacher based strategies and non-traditional teacher-student based strategies. The word "teacher" is used loosely in that teachers may not be the ones creating the solutions, but they are the ones trying to put them into practice on a daily basis.

However, in looking at how to decrease the inappropriate social behavior in Freshman Seminar, the teacher-researcher decided that the best approach to the problem lay in the philosophy of positive discipline. What was discovered from the research was that positive discipline blends many strategies that focus on students, and how best to influence their behavior in a positive way. This approach to discipline is inclusive in that it looks at the whole environment of the school to discover if the climate is conducive to using positive rather than negative (traditional) approaches for improving student behavior.

Effective Leadership

Positive approach to discipline starts with effective leadership. Korinek (1993), Lordon (1983), and Wayson and Lasley (1984), stated that principals need to clarify expectations and articulate school values to every student. Rules, policies, and procedures need to be written down, explained carefully, and taught to every student. Merely publishing or posting rules does not give students a chance to learn about the culture of the school.

Fellmy (1983) and Short (1988) emphasized the importance of visibility of authority figures. High visibility of administrators and teachers has a positive impact on discipline. These figures often act as a deterrent against undesirable student behavior.

According to Wayson and Lasely (1984), principals have the greatest opportunity to shape the culture of their schools. Acting like "visionary" heroes, they can create, instill, and promote a culture that is supportive for both teachers and students. In order to accomplish this, Schmidt (1982) stated that every effort should be made to eliminate illogical and unreasonable regulations and policies, and instead make logical and reasonable rules that define the culture.

Korinek (1993) and Tauber (1983) discussed the importance of administrators making teachers aware of alternative discipline strategies, and that staff development activities should be designed to promote more positive approaches to behavior management.

Creating a Sense of Belonging

Literature showed that creating a sense of belonging for all students could go a long way towards establishing a climate of positive discipline. Involvement of students is

a crucial step towards a school with a positive climate. Involvement means actively including students on decision-making processes of the school. Students need to and want to be involved in shaping the culture of the school. Their involvement can range from being a student representative at board meetings, a student disciplinary officer, a peer leader, or a teacher's aide. By inviting students in on the decision-making process, students begin to feel that they "belong" to the school, the school "belongs" to them, and the school is worth "belonging to" (Kohn, 1991; Schmidt, 1983; Slee, 1988; Wayson & Lasley, 1984). The most important element in a school with a positive culture is the people. Establishing this civil climate relies on everyone, teachers and students alike, treating each other with consideration and respect. Investment in people results in effective change (Hansen & Childs, 1998; Kauffman & Burbach, 1997; Kohn, 1991). Children who observe caring and proper social behavior in their teachers are more likely to mirror that behavior. Warm, caring, empathic adults provide children with a compassionate, safe place in which to act (Sharan & Sharan, 1987). It is crucial for teachers to model the social and communication skills expected from students.

Schmidt (1989) pointed to several strategies to promote belonging in schools. Mutual respect and trust are both qualities of positive discipline that promote the importance of courtesy, civility, and responsibility in creating a positive school climate. Furthermore, it is important for schools to focus on student recognition and development as opposed to punishment and restrictions. "Trust among students and teachers is rewarded by appropriate and cooperative behavior that enhances the entire school and community" (p. 18). Research by Short (1988) showed that a student-centered

environment that promotes teacher-student interaction and student self-esteem and belongingness is more effective in reducing behavior problems than punishment.

By creating an environment of belonging, disciplining becomes more effective. Effective discipline comes from the heart and soul of the teacher based on the belief that teaching students to take responsibility for their behavior is as much the job of the teacher as is teaching history or math (Curwin & Mendler, 1989).

Teaching Social Skills

In laying the foundation for a positive discipline climate, an emphasis on teaching basic social skills needs to be a core part of the curriculum (Berman, 1990). Research has shown that actively teaching social skills in school is logical because children are in regular contact with their peers in a learning environment. "Buckleley and Cramer (1990) confirmed the findings that children can be helped by group social skills training in a school setting" (Forbes, 1996, p. 32). Furthermore, Kirsenbaum (1992) emphasized the need to allow students to experience the skills through activities, discussion, and projects that help internalize the skills.

Prosocial instruction should include training in cooperative conflict resolution, and in methods of achieving one's goals that do not require the use of force or manipulation (Kohn, 1991). According to Elliot and Gresham (1987), Holubec (1990), and Johnson and Johnson (1990) experiences in working together to successfully complete a task enhance social competencies, and the mastery of these social competencies is dependent on practice, and that social skills development dictates the future behavior of children (Forbes, 1996).

A management style that fosters positive behavior needs to be at the heart of the effort in order to create the desired climate. Forbes (1996) identified several studies regarding behavior management that indicate the "premise that students whose needs were being met and who felt safe, accepted, cared for, recognized, and who were engaged in school displayed more appropriate behaviors" (p. 29). What's more is that positive behavior management is proactive, preventative, and designed to foster self-control and increase appropriate student behavior according to Korinek (1993). Benefits include the following:

1. Less student isolation and alienation

2. Fewer suspensions and expulsions

3. Less violent behavior

4. Less disruptive classroom behavior

5. Improved morale among students and staff

6. Greater student achievement

By teaching appropriate social and academic behavior and responsible decision making, rather than punish undesirable behavior, schools can focus on the development of positive behavior. Punitive techniques produced only limited and short-term effects on inappropriate behavior.

Wayson and Lasley (1984) stated that a sense of community is a desirable outcome of a positive management system. The result is that behavioral norms surround students with examples of acceptable behaviors and provide understated rewards and sanctions that encourage students to behave appropriately. The school climate is characterized by positive teacher-student and peer relationships, fulfillment of students'

personal and psychological needs, effective instruction, and a variety of techniques that encourage student self-control.

Carlson and Dinkmeyer (1992) declared it is more effective to develop self-esteem through discipline systems that emphasizes choices, chances to try again, and faith in the student's ability to learn from mistakes. These types of systems have the following aspects: a) they remove unwanted and inappropriate goals and their corresponding behavior, b) encourage and develop already existing goals and behavior, and c) initiate new behavioral responses and healthy goals. Most adults tend to focus on eliminating existing behaviors, where energy should be spent on working towards the above criteria. Modification takes time and encouragement.

<div align="center">Project Objective and Processes</div>

As a result of increased curricular emphasis on interpersonal skill development during the period of September 2000 to January 2001, the targeted Freshman Seminar students will decrease inappropriate social behavior as measured by disciplinary referrals, analysis of observation checklist, and teacher journal entries. In order to accomplish the project objective, the following steps are necessary:

1. Direct instruction addressing interpersonal skill development.

2. Instructional strategies that use peer groups

3. Establish climate of civility in Freshman Seminar.

<div align="center">Action Plan</div>

As a result of increased curricular emphasis on interpersonal skill development during the period of September 2000 to January 2001, the targeted Freshman Seminar students will decrease inappropriate social behavior as measured by disciplinary referrals,

analysis of observation checklist, and teacher journal entries. The plan consists of four parts. Part 1 is an attitude survey on student behavior. The survey looks to identify what types of social behaviors students find inappropriate. Part 2 consists of the direct teaching of interpersonal skills once a week during the month of October for 30-50 minutes (sample lesson in Appendix B). Students will be observed during seminar and task groups using an observation checklist and teacher journal. Part 3 focuses on the use of interpersonal skills during peer groups on Fridays. Students will participate in peer groups working on topics that reflect what is currently being discussed in the direct teaching within seminar (sample peer group lesson in Appendix C). Students will be observed in peer groups using an observation checklist and teacher journal. Part 4 looks at establishing a climate of civility within the seminar classroom. Teacher modeling of appropriate behavior, greeting students prior to entering classroom, and establishing rules and expectations with the students during the 1st and 2nd weeks of school. Civility will be monitored by using a teacher journal.

## Methods of Assessment

In order to assess the effects of the intervention, direct instruction of interpersonal skill development will occur in seminar. In addition, students will work in peer groups once a week throughout the intervention. Discussion topics for the peer groups will coincide with interpersonal skill lessons. A teacher journal will be kept as part of the assessment process.

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT RESULTS

Historical Description of the Intervention

The objective of the project was to decrease the inappropriate social behavior of

the targeted Freshman Seminar students. The plan consisted of four parts. Part 1 was an

attitude survey on student behavior. The survey looked at what types of social behaviors

students find appropriate and inappropriate, and how they, the students, cope with the

behaviors. Part 2 originally consisted of the direct teaching of interpersonal skills once a

week during the month of October. However, because of a scheduling conflict during the

month of October, the direct instruction of interpersonal skills carried over into the first

week of November. The social skills chosen for direct instruction included interacting,

cooperating, listening, and problem solving. Part 3 consisted of follow up to the direct

instruction with peer group meetings on Fridays. In order to reinforce the skills, the

targeted students participated in peer groups working on topics that reflected what was

being discussed in the direct instruction lessons. Students were observed using an

observation checklist and teacher journal. Part 4 consisted of establishing a climate of

civility within the seminar classroom. Classroom rules were established the 2nd week of

school. The teacher-researcher made it a point to model appropriate behavior, and greeted students at the door on a regular basis.

## Presentation and Analysis of Results

In order to prove the effectiveness of this positive discipline program on inappropriate social behavior, a weekly tally of social behaviors was maintained throughout the intervention, discipline referrals were kept track of, and a teacher observation journal was kept.

These data on social behaviors were tallied during the first and last week of the intervention.

| Behavior | Week of 10/02/00 | Week of 10/30/00 |
|---|---|---|
| Lack of manners | 4 | 2 |
| Disrespect | 3 | 1 |
| Not listening | 4 | 2 |
| Inappropriate language | 2 | 1 |
| Off-task | 1 | 0 |
| Name calling | 0 | 2 |

Figure 8. Categories of student behaviors and occurrences.

The intervention appears to have had a positive effect on most of the behaviors. There were a total of 14 observable occasions during the first week of the intervention. During the final week of intervention, the teacher-researcher observed only 8 occurrences of inappropriate behavior, a 47% decrease. All the categories but name calling showed a drop in the number of occurrences.

inappropriate
language
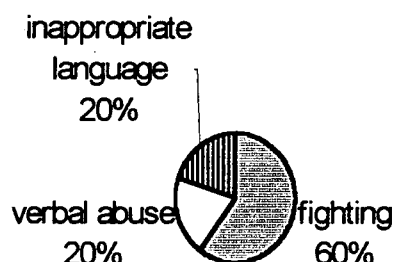20%

verbal abuse
20%

fighting
60%

Figure 9. Discipline referrals and percentages per category during intervention.

During the 4-week intervention period, five referrals were written for

inappropriate behavior for the 53 students involved in the project, a 67% decrease from

the 15 referrals written during the pre-intervention period (see Figure 1). Of the five

referrals written, one was for verbal abuse, an 83% decrease from the six pre-intervention

referrals. Three of the referrals were for fighting, up 33% from the pre-intervention

period. Of the five referrals written during this period, three were on students who had

been written up during the pre-intervention period.

Teacher-researcher journal entries support some of the positive effects of the

intervention as seen in Figure 8. Lack of manners (rudeness, not saying please or thank

you) was a noticeable problem when the intervention began. During both formal lesson

delivery and peer groups, teacher-researcher notes about general rudeness were taken.

The issue of disrespect was also prominent in the teacher-researcher journal. For

example, the difficulty in sharing ideas and opinions in some peer groups was noted.

Comments such as "That's stupid," or "I don't have to listen to you" were heard by the

teacher-researcher. Another pattern of behavior that the teacher-researcher observed in some students was poor listening. The pattern that emerged was that the students who did not listen were the ones who least connected to the lesson or the peer group. Comments ranging from "This doesn't pertain to me," to "Why do we have to learn about social skills?" were heard even after exhaustive directions were given. Such comments usually resulted in off-task behavior and a general lack of interest in what was going on. As the intervention progressed, the teacher-researcher journal notes reflected a better understanding on the part of the students about the importance of learning social skills. Students were more willing to listen to others' opinions, and in general were better at following directions.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the presentation and analysis of the data on teacher observations, discipline referrals, and teacher journal entries, the students' showed improvement in their behavior. The social skills learned in seminar and peer groups appear to have had a positive influence on the inappropriate social behavior. As a result, interaction amongst the students improved on several levels. Students' learned how to listen better, and became more accepting of differences of opinion. Their manners toward one another progressed from week to week, while their tolerance for diversity also improved. As students got to know one another better, mutual respect got healthier. Furthermore, the establishment of a civil classroom climate and eventual peer pressure may have positively affected the intervention.

The teacher-researcher enjoyed tackling the issue of inappropriate social behaviors of the targeted ninth grade class. The chosen intervention method of working

on social skills was worthwhile because so much of the research points to the lack of social skills amongst adolescents, and therefore, the importance of social skill development. So trying to teach the actual skills proved to be a formidable challenge for the teacher-researcher. While the action research project was generally positive, several recommendations and/or limitations might be useful to take into account on future projects: a) time, b) understanding, and c) better observation checklist.

Probably the main limitation to this project was time. The teacher-researcher believes that if social skill instruction is to have a profound, positive impact on students, then adequate time needs to be devoted to practicing them. The bottom line is that the students needed more time practicing the social skills. However, because of program and curricular constraints, students were not able to get enough practice.

It is important that students have a clear understanding of what is going to happen. Outline a clear plan for the students of the intended curricular focus, and do it early on. This teacher-researcher could have done a better job at conveying this information by discussing it more at the beginning of the school year.

The third recommendation is to design a more useful observation checklist. This particular project relied on teacher-researcher mobility. Several classrooms, as well as the immediate hallway, were utilized for peer groups. A more concise checklist would have been helpful as the teacher-researcher traveled between rooms and the hallway making observations.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Student Survey

**Directions:** Please answer the following questions as honestly and completely as you can. Your name is **NOT** required on this. Answer each statement according to the scale: strongly disagree=**SD**, disagree=**D**, not sure=**NS**, agree=**A**, and strongly agree=**SA**.

1. I see the following behaviors in Freshman Seminar.

| | SD | D | NS | A | SA |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| • Disrespect | 2 | 13 | 12 | 24 | 2 |
| • Name calling | 4 | 6 | 12 | 26 | 5 |
| • Verbal Abuse | 6 | 9 | 18 | 15 | 4 |
| • Play fighting | 5 | 14 | 12 | 18 | 3 |
| • Inappropriate language | 0 | 5 | 9 | 26 | 13 |
| • "Roasting" | 2 | 4 | 9 | 22 | 15 |

| | SD | D | NS | A | SA |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2. The above behaviors are socially inappropriate. | 1 | 10 | 12 | 25 | 5 |
| 3. The above behaviors interfere with student learning. | 0 | 10 | 9 | 28 | 5 |
| 4. The above behaviors interfere with peer groups. | 2 | 14 | 13 | 21 | 3 |
| 5. Students effectively deal with the above behaviors. | 2 | 10 | 13 | 24 | 3 |
| 6. Classroom rules are clearly defined. | 1 | 6 | 15 | 22 | 8 |

7. What do you consider the most **positive** social behavior to
   be?_____

8. What do you consider the most **negative** social behavior to
   be?_____

Appendix B

Sample Social Skill Lesson on Basic Interaction

I.  Objective
    - To teach students how to respect and work with others.
    - To teach student that human interaction transcends everything we do.

II. Materials:
    - Movie clip from "My Best Friend's Wedding".

III. Teach the Skill
    - Show clip from movie.
    - Create a t-chart for human interaction on the board with students.

IV. Practice the Skill
    - Students partner up and interview each other on the following topics:
      Hobbies
      Favorite food
      Travel interests
      Favorite movie
      Musical interests
      Someone you idol
      Sports/clubs
    - Once the interview is complete, each pair joins another pair and introduces one another.
    - Have volunteers come to the front of the room to introduce the person they interviewed.

V.  Observe the Skill
    - Take notes on what is going on.

VI. Reflect on the Skill
    - Have students write 3 or 4 sentences on what they thought of the activity.
    - Share written expression and discuss.

VII. Transfer Skill Outside Class
    - Think of ways you use interactions in all areas of your lives?
    - How can you improve?

Appendix C

Sample Peer Group Lesson on Problem Solving

Situation:      Rachel has come to talk to you about not being invited to the party all of
her friends are going to. She is very depressed.

I.      What is the problem?


II.      What are you alternatives in this situation?  BRAINSTORM here.

Alternatives                                              Pros                        Cons
a.

b.

c.

d.

e.

f.

g.

III.      What is your group's decision?


IV.      What is your group's plan of action going to be?

First Step:

Second Step:

Third Step:

V.      What are the outcomes that might happen as a result of your decision?

Appendix D

Consent to Participate in Research Study

Dear Parent or Guardian,

Your son or daughter will be participating in a research study as part of my graduate work that relates to social behavior in Freshman Seminar. I am writing to ask your permission for your son or daughter to take part in this effort.

Students will take a written survey and also participate in peer group discussions. The results of these surveys will be strictly confidential, and no mention of names will be used in the data collection process. If you have any questions concerning this project, please feel free to call me at (708) 434-3529.

Please fill out the information below and return it to Mr. Peter Quinn, Freshman Seminar Program.

Thank you for your cooperation!

Sincerely,


Peter Quinn


■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■

Check One:

_____I give permission for_____to participate in this research   study.

_____I do not give_____permission to participate in the research study.

Signed by student:_____

Signed by parent/guardian_____ Date_____

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| Signature: | Printed Name/Position/Title: Student/FBMP |
|---|---|
| Organization/Address: Saint Xavier University Attention: Esther Mosak 3700 West 103rd Street Chicago, IL 60655 | Telephone: 708-802-6214 / FAX: 708-802-6208 |
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