FRAGRANCES

AND THE COLLEGE CLASSROOM
FRAGRANCE SENSITIVITY

Fragrances are the substances that give perfumes, body care, laundry, cleaning, air freshener and other consumer products their scent.

In the United States, fragrances are essentially legally unregulated. Manufacturers are not required to disclose ingredients, and formulations are considered trade secrets. The International Fragrance Association lists almost 4000 individual compounds contained in consumer fragrances. Many fragrances contain allergens, respiratory irritants, asthma triggers, hormone disruptors, neurotoxins, even carcinogens.

When people react acutely to fragrances, we speak of fragrance sensitivity. Acute reactions can range from mere psychological irritation to serious, even life-threatening physical reactions such as inability to breathe. Fragrance sensitivity is often an aspect of chemical sensitivity – sensitivity to chemical compounds that are common in the modern environment, such as fragrances, paints, flame retardants, pesticides, cleaning products and petrochemical fumes.

Fragrance and chemical sensitivities are not allergies and cannot be treated by allergy-suppressing medications. The only effective treatment is avoidance of trigger substances.
The American Lung Association lists the following symptoms that may be experienced by fragrance sensitive individuals:

- Nausea
- Weakness
- Malaise
- Loss of Appetite
- Upper respiratory symptoms
- Difficulty with concentration
- Numbness
- Shortness of breath
- Skin Irritation

Dizziness, eye irritation, “brain fog”, rapid heartbeats and migraine headaches are also common reactions.
HOW WIDESPREAD IS FRAGRANCE SENSITIVITY?

A study published in Air Quality, Atmosphere & Health in 2016 (Steinemann, Fragranced consumer products: exposures and effects from emissions) reported:

• roughly 1/3 of the US population experiences adverse health effects from fragrance exposure
• 15% of those surveyed report having lost workdays or even a job due to fragrance exposure
• More than 50% would prefer workplaces and other public spaces to be fragrance free
• 23% report getting sick from being near someone who wears fragrances.

Steinemann (2018) estimates that the prevalence of chemical sensitivity in the United States has more than doubled in the last decade, and that 55 million Americans suffer from the condition.
WHY ARE FRAGRANCES A PROBLEM IN THE COLLEGE CLASSROOM?

• Students who are sensitive to fragrances cannot control who sits down next to them. When classrooms are filled to capacity, keeping a distance from others is not a choice. Even in a classroom that offers plenty of buffer space, the presence of a single student in the class who wears strong cologne and/or scented clothes can be enough to trigger acute symptoms. In a smaller classroom space, a single or just a few fragrance users can dominate the entire classroom air.

• Just like second-hand smoke, fragrances do not respect “individual air space”. Wearing fragrances forces those around you to breathe the fragrances - they cannot choose not to breathe.

• When fragrances cause cognitive difficulties, learning becomes difficult or impossible. A common exposure symptom is “brain fog”, which is lack of mental clarity, an inability to focus and memory problems.
WHY ARE FRAGRANCES A PROBLEM IN THE COLLEGE CLASSROOM?

• Students in a classroom are essentially a captive audience. They are expected to remain in their seat for the duration of the class. When a student experiences ill effects due to another student's (or teacher's) fragrance, they may feel compelled to remain and suffer in silence. The primary symptoms are then exacerbated by a stress response - anxiety due to a feeling of being trapped and unable to leave.

• A student in this situation will not be able to learn. As the pattern repeats, it creates a negative feedback cycle where even the thought of having to go to class may trigger anxiety and panic attacks. This may lead to failure in the class or even dropping out of college.

• Teachers are a captive audience as well. Teachers have to hold their classes and cannot simply leave when fragrances worn by students make them sick. When fragrances impair the teacher’s cognitive functions, the quality of instruction may suffer.
A VOLUNTARY REQUEST

This is not a mandatory policy, just a voluntary request.

By wearing strong fragrances or clothes scented by perfumed laundry detergents and/or dryer sheets to class, you may be negatively affecting the academic success of other students, or the ability of the teacher to teach. Fragrance sensitivity is not an allergy, and there is no treatment except avoiding exposure.

To create a safe environment for everyone, please abstain from wearing scents to class, such as perfumes, colognes, and other scented personal care products, and wear unscented clothes.

Thank you :)}