



The Two-Way Street of Civility

To begin, a pop quiz:

1. When responding to an e-mail from a student, which may seem off-task or tedious, do I respond with the same level of courtesy that I would extend to a colleague asking a similar question?
2. When I am in a meeting I find boring, do I text or answer e-mails on my computer or smartphone?
3. If I am unable to complete an assignment made by my department chair or immediate supervisor, do I justify my late submission with excuses (e.g., too busy, computer problems). Do I tend to accept the same justifications from my students?
4. In class, if a student disagrees with aspects of a presentation I am making on a topic about which I am fully knowledgeable, do I tend to become somewhat defensive and respond in an unkind or abrupt manner? Would I do the same to a colleague?
5. If I am scheduled to attend a professional conference related to my discipline, I will cancel my scheduled classes. Under what conditions am I willing to approve a student's request to miss class for what appears to be a valid reason (yet one that is not part of my attendance policy)?
6. Do I grade and return student work with the same level of timeliness that I expect from them?
7. Do I share anecdotes about my students with colleagues or other students that cast a negative light on their abilities, classroom performance, personalities, or integrity? Would I be offended if the same types of stories were being shared about my teaching?
8. Am I usually on time to the classes I teach? How do I respond to late arrivals by students?



“It's too much to expect in an academic setting that we should all agree, but it is not too much to expect discipline and unvarying civility”

**– John Howard,
Australian Prime Minister**

How did you do? Did some questions, which all focus on classroom civility, prompt a level of uneasiness? By exploring these questions, it is possible to sharpen the consistency with which we approach the issue of civility and the extent to which we hold our students and ourselves accountable.

There are a variety of definitions for civility, and its semantic counterpoint, incivility. Civil behavior is often defined to include politeness, good manners, decorum, the ability to reasonably disagree and resolve differences, and sensitivity to the needs of others (Peck, 2002). On the flip side, Feldmann (2001) defined academic incivility as “any action that interferes with a harmonious cooperative learning atmosphere in the classroom” (p. 137). This definition opens the door to a wide variety of behaviors and interactions that could originate from either students (e.g., leaving class early, dominating discussions, issuing hostile verbal attacks, using vulgarity, sleeping in class, voicing disapproving groans) or faculty, such as condescending negativism, inattentive planning, or personal disregard (Braxton & Mann, 2004; McKinne & Martin, 2010).

The issue of civility is gaining increased attention and interest in a variety of contexts (Peck, 2002; Trudel & Reio, 2011). In a recent publication, Twale and DeLuca (2008) asked readers to consider whether academia is a culture that promotes incivilities among faculty in the form of a bully culture (i.e., where senior faculty, or those with greater levels of academic status, exert their power and influence over junior or inexperienced faculty members). A reasonable question would be, To what degree does this bully culture extend to the relationships between faculty

and students? In all of these proposed scenarios of incivility (i.e., faculty-to-faculty, faculty-to-student, student-to-faculty), the goal should be for each of us to do our best to model relationships that promote not only accountability but also politeness, decorum, and sensitivity to the needs of others.

Strategies for Promoting Classroom Civility

Instructors can have a major role in setting and promoting the standards for civil behavior in the classroom. Consider the following approaches to creating a classroom climate where both faculty and students actively choose to treat one another with civility:

- Clearly delineate classroom expectations. This step begins the process of classroom civility (McKinne & Martin, 2010) and can be accomplished through classroom discussions and the content of the course syllabus. Although the syllabus cannot reasonably outline every possible scenario of civility, it can set the tone for the semester and reduces the likelihood of later misunderstandings.
- Consistently enforce expectations—and without hubris. Rules and expectations of civility should be designed to enhance the safety and collaborative spirit of the classroom. When you find it necessary to advise a student of times when his or her choice of behavior is outside these expectations, do it privately in a nonthreatening manner.
- Actively model behavior. Instructors need to consciously commit to demonstrating the civil patterns of behavior they wish to observe in their students. There will be times when it would be easy (and immediately satisfying) to lash out or to make a rude comment that expresses your feelings but also has the unfortunate effect of hurting someone else. Students will pay particular attention during these times to see how you respond and communicate. Make the most out of demonstrating the civility you wish to promote.
- Establish a personal accountability process. To maintain consistency between what we say (i.e., the things we expect from our students) and what we do (i.e., our behaviors in relation to our students), it is necessary to both develop an individual set of parameters to evaluate our actions and words and to engage in the assessment process. Self-reflection and/or feedback from a trusted colleague can be useful in this appraisal.

Travel the two-way street of civility: Demonstrate and practice the level of civility that you desire from your students!

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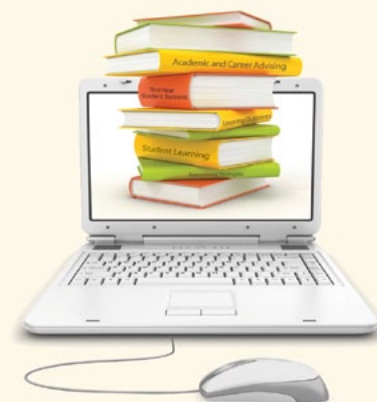


The First-Year Seminar: Designing, Implementing, and Assessing Courses to Support Student Learning and Success, Volume II: Instructor Training and Development
James E. Groccia and Mary Stuart Hunter

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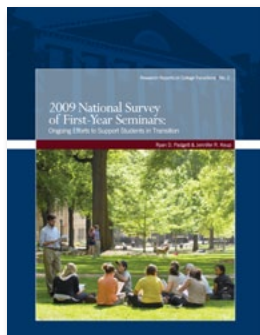
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Ryan D. Padgett and Jennifer R. Keup

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seminars. Drawn from a broad sample of colleges and universities from every institutional type, control, and size, the survey addresses topics including seminar characteristics and administration; student demographics; instructional roles, development, and compensation; and assessment. To learn more or order a copy, visit www.sc.edu/fye/publications.

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Demonstrating the Impact of First-Year Seminars on Student Outcomes. Concurrent session by Jennifer R. Keup, National Resource Center Director, at the 2012 ACPA Annual Convention, March 26, 11:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m. in Louisville, Kentucky.

Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) and High-Impact Practices: The Role of First-Year Seminars. Concurrent session by Taryn Ozuna and Jennifer R. Keup, National Resource Center Director, at the 2012 ACPA Annual Convention, March 27, 4:30-5:30 p.m. in Louisville, Kentucky.

Register at: www.sc.edu/fye/fys

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The Institute is designed to provide those charged with the task of delivering a successful first-year seminar with valuable information, fresh ideas, and some much-needed inspiration. Institute faculty will build a framework where participants can engage in discussions with colleagues, examine trends and practices connected to first-year seminars, and identify new strategies to ensure the success of first-year students.

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The Toolbox

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The Toolbox is an online professional development newsletter offering innovative learner-centered strategies for empowering college students to achieve greater success. The newsletter is published six times a year by the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition at the University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC.

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