

Dealing with Classroom Incivilities

Monopolizing Students
Sideline Conversations
Unengaged Students
Early Departure
Late Arrival
Phones
Noisy
Rude



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INTRODUCTION

Disruptive, rude, and troublesome behavior has become increasingly prevalent in the college classroom. This publication has been developed to provide background on incivility, as well as to suggest techniques for preventing and/or coping with it. The goal is to enhance your classroom management skills, so you can create a civil environment that allows all students to learn and participate freely.

Broadly defined as repeated, continuous, or multiple student behaviors that prevent an instructor from teaching and/or student from learning (Akers), incivility is the opposite of courtesy, politeness, respect, and consideration (Rookstool 2). LCC defines disruptive behavior as the disruption or obstruction of teaching, research, administration, disciplinary proceedings, other College activities, including its public service functions on or off campus, or of other authorized non-College activities when the conduct occurs on College premises.

Not only do these troublesome behaviors disrupt and negatively affect the overall learning environment for the students in the classroom, but they may also contribute to an instructor's stress and discontent. Although individual faculty interpretations and perceptions determine what s/he considers uncivil behavior (Holladay), the following are typical examples (Holladay; Reed; and Rookstool 2):

- arriving late and leaving early
- engaging in sideline conversations
- reading the newspaper
- doing other coursework
- sleeping
- text messaging
- ringing cell phones and/or taking calls during class
- monopolizing classroom discussions
- ridiculing the instructor
- being argumentative and/or confrontational
- submitting assignments late and requesting frivolous deadline extensions
- wearing distracting attire



PROACTIVELY ADDRESSING INCIVILITY

According to the literature, civility is best encouraged by clarifying expectations. Consequently, proactively avoid problems by clarifying your expectations and course policies on the first day of class. The most appropriate way to do this is on the syllabus since it is a contract between you and your students. In addition to referring to LCC's "Student General Rules and Guidelines" and the "Student Code of Conduct" at http://www.lcc.edu/catalog/policies_procedures/studentrulesguidelines.aspx and/or department-level policies listed on the Official Course Syllabus, you could enumerate your course policies on your section syllabus. You might include your policies and/or LCC's policies on...

- attendance and consequences for missed classes
- tardiness
- missed deadlines/exams and procedures for making up exams or missed course work
- how/when to contact you when students will be late or absent
- use of cell phones, etc. At LCC, the use of all phones during class is prohibited.

Additionally, you could include a "statement of civility" in your syllabus. The following example is required on all syllabi at Eastfield College in Dallas, Texas:

"Since every student is entitled to full participation in class without interruption, all students are expected to be in class and prepared to begin on time. All pagers, wireless phones, electronic games, radios, tape or CD players or other devices that generate sound must be turned off when you enter the classroom. Disruption of class, whether by latecomers, noisy devices or inconsiderate behavior will not be tolerated. Repeated violations will be penalized and may result in expulsion from class." (Rookstool 31).

Within the first two weeks, you might also consider the following suggestions to encourage civility.

1. Discuss your "ground rules" – or, better yet, have the students develop them so they feel ownership for them. For ideas on how to have the students develop "ground rules," see the CTE's Teaching Tip, "Establishing Ground Rules on the First (or Second) Day of Class" at <http://www.lcc.edu/cte/resources/teachingtips/tip13.aspx>
2. Connect with your students by learning their names and getting to know them through Icebreakers. For ideas on Icebreaker Activities, see the CTE's Teaching Tip, "What's in a Name? Strategies for Remembering Students' Names" at http://www.lcc.edu/cte/resources/teachingtips/whats_in_a_name.aspx
3. During class, stand up and/or walk around the room. Keep in mind that wherever you are is the front of the room, so try to stand at the back of the room as well as the front.
4. Be extra firm on all matters the first day and week to set the "tone." You can always be more flexible later, but it's difficult to do the reverse.
5. Use good-natured humor and avoid sarcasm.
6. Change classroom activities frequently and give 10 minute breaks every 50 minutes.
7. Do not ignore disruptive behavior. Act early and quickly, otherwise you can "lose control," (not that you want all of it, but you want some).
8. Keep regular office hours and/or invite students to email you with questions and concerns.
9. Seek ongoing feedback from students using Classroom Assessment Techniques (CATs). For more information on obtaining ongoing student feedback, see the CTE's Self-Paced Online Workshop entitled "Early Semester Student Feedback Techniques" at http://www.lcc.edu/cte/resources/self_paced/early_student_feedback/ or the CTE's Teaching Tip on "Classroom Assessment Techniques" at <http://www.lcc.edu/cte/resources/teachingtips/cats.aspx>
10. Model the appropriate behavior. If you value punctuality, arrive ahead of time and be prepared before class begins. If you want papers turned in on time, promptly return them, etc.

Again, many problems can be thwarted by using the proactive measures discussed above. Nevertheless, troublesome behaviors will undoubtedly occur. Following, are several categories of uncivil behavior and strategies for addressing them.

RESPONDING TO INTERRUPTIONS

(e.g., arriving late, leaving early, packing up early/noisy, answering cell phones, etc.)

1. Begin and end class on time. If you frequently let students out early, they will begin packing up before the class over.
2. Reserve some important points or classroom activities (i.e., Quizzes, assessment activities such as "One Minute Papers," writing exercises, distribute study guides or important handouts, etc.) until the end of class to minimize packing up early. (Nilson 47)
3. Use class time constructively. Make sure the content covered and the learning activities are crucial to attaining the learning outcomes. (Reed)
4. Early on, refer to LCC's policy on cell phones (e.g., the use of cell phones during class interferes with the instructional process and is therefore prohibited. Camera cell phones and video cell phones are prohibited in locker rooms and restrooms. See LCC's "Student General Rules and Guidelines" at http://www.lcc.edu/catalog/policies_procedures/studentrulesguidelines.aspx. In addition, you may want to include the following verbiage: All cell phones and electronic devices must be out of sight and turned off or set to courtesy mode before class begins. Students with a crisis should advise the instructor before class.



RESPONDING TO SIDELINE CONVERSATIONS

And other inattentive behaviors.

1. Maintain your composure and model civility when addressing offensive behavior. Don't embarrass students, but do address the behavior as soon as possible. Delaying your response may be interpreted as condoning the behavior.
2. Move closer to the talking students; as soon as they stop talking, instantly move away to reinforce desired behavior.
3. Rather than warn particular students, consider a general word of caution to the entire class (e.g., "We have too many conversations at the moment; let's all focus on the same topic.").
4. Try a long dramatic pause. If a dramatic pause doesn't work, say something general like "I really think everyone should pay attention to this because..." or "I am having difficulty concentrating while there is talking and your classmates might be as well, so please wait until the break or share your conversation with the rest of us."
5. Ask the disruptive student(s), preferably during the break or after class, to make an appointment to see you. Tell them how their talking is affecting the class.
6. Ask a nearby student a question so that the discussion is near the talkers.
7. Make eye contact with them.
8. Lower your voice. This causes them to become more obvious in contrast to the other students. Consequently, they may stop talking on their own, or other students may ask them to be quiet. (Pike and Arch 71)



RESPONDING TO MONOPOLIZING STUDENTS

And/or the domineering students.



1. Say: "That's an interesting point. Now let's see what other people think."
2. Give the monopolizing individual attention during breaks or before and after class.
3. Without turning your back on the students, prepare for the next activity (i.e., begin handing out papers, etc.). This signals to the student that you are ready to move on to another topic or activity.
4. Interject with a summary when students go off on a tangent and/or ask others to speak. (Silberman 30)
5. Take advantage of the monopolizers' pauses. While making eye contact, thank them and direct a question to someone else, preferably in another area of the room. (Pike and Arch 72)
6. Prior to asking a question, tell the students that you will be looking for 'X' number of hands before you select someone. And/or, when you pose a question, ask how many students have a response and call on someone (else) whose hand is up.
7. From time to time, suggest that only students who have not spoken answer a question addressed.
8. On occasion, distribute a certain number (e.g., three or four) of colored paperclips, tokens, or poker chips. Once a student makes a contribution to the discussion, they should put a clip out in front of them. Once they use up their allotted clips, they cannot talk any more. This might help the dominant students save some comments for later.
9. If you speak to a student outside of class regarding their behavior, tell him/her that as much as you appreciate their input, it would be helpful if they could hold some of their comments until others have been heard. (McKeachie 255)
10. Physically involve the monopolizer by giving him or her a task such as posting group responses on flip chart paper or the board, distributing handouts, etc.
11. If someone is monopolizing a small group, approach the group and kneel down so that you are at eye level. Make eye contact with each group member and remind the group that they have 'X' number of minutes left. Look directly at a specific group member and say "Please cover these two points (name them) and try to ensure that everyone in the group has contributed." (Pike and Arch 55-56)

RESPONDING TO UNENGAGED AND WITHDRAWN STUDENTS

1. Let students know in advance that everyone will be expected to answer questions and participate in discussions.
2. Make eye contact with inattentive students.
3. Stand near them from time to time, but don't hover.
4. Write every student's name on a 3x5 card. Shuffle the cards and have a student select a card. The person whose name is drawn answers the question and then they get to pick a card, and the process repeats. You may need to remind students that in the workplace they will be asked questions on a regular basis and they will be expected to respond.
5. Keep it interesting. Change teaching strategies from group discussion to individual written exercises or a video clip.
6. Give positive reinforcement for contributions.
7. If a student appears shy, make a point of getting to know him/her during breaks. You might even ask them a question about what is being discussed. If you are impressed with their response, you might ask if they would be willing to share this insight with the class after break.
8. For paired work, pair a shy or introverted student with a moderately outgoing student versus a dominant student.
9. On the first day of class, find out what special interests or hobbies students have and call upon the quiet student for comments in their area of expertise as appropriate. (McKeachie 6)
10. Ask the class to write "One Minute Papers" and ask the inattentive or shy students to share theirs aloud.

RESPONDING TO OTHER DIFFICULT BEHAVIORS

(e.g., asking unrelated questions, trying to trip you up, etc.)

1. If a student is trying to shoot you down or trip you up, consider acknowledging that this is a joint learning experience, and/or admit that you don't know the answer and redirect the question to the group or the individual who asked it.
2. If some students have a tendency to ask questions to get the class off track, designate a place on the board as the "Parking Lot" and list their questions there. Let them know that if there is time at the end, the questions will be addressed.
3. If a student is overtly hostile or resistant, realize that the hostility may be masking fear. Remember to maintain your civility and consider any of the following:
 - building upon what has been said versus disagreeing
 - allowing him or her to gracefully retreat from the confrontation
 - talking to him or her during the break
 - as a last resort, privately asking the individual to leave the class for the good of the group
4. If a student is openly griping, consider
 - pointing out what can and can't be changed
 - validating the point
 - indicating time pressures
 - indicating that you'll discuss the problem with the student privately.

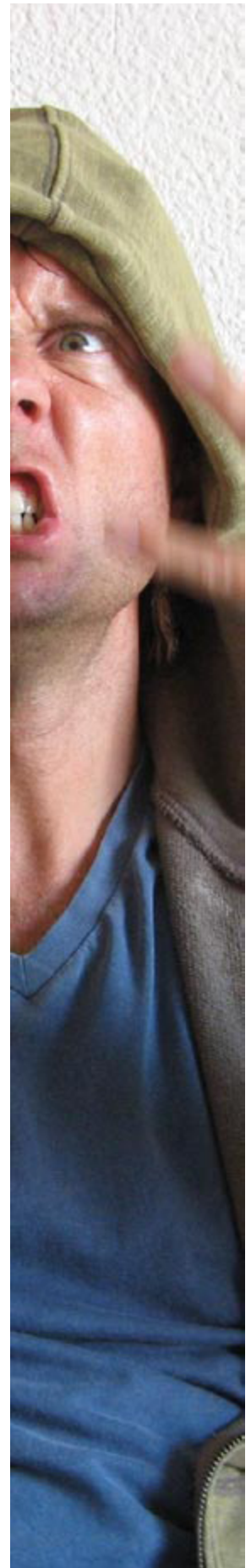
RESPONDING TO EXTREME CASES OF INCIVILITY

In addition to the common behaviors listed above, there are rarer incidences of extreme uncivil behaviors – behaviors that are threatening or harmful. Examples include:

- being verbally abusive
- using profanity and/or pejorative language
- being intoxicated or using drugs
- using intimidation, harassment and physical threats

The sorts of behaviors mentioned above are often the result of stress, mental health issues and the like. While occurring infrequently, it is your responsibility to stop student behaviors that endanger either themselves or others. The recommended course of action in such situations is to remain as calm as possible, create distance between that student and the rest of the class and get support from campus Police and Public Safety (483-1800) immediately. In addition, as soon as possible, contact the Office of Student Compliance (483-9632) and your Department Chair. If it's possible to enlist the assistance of a colleague in getting the help that's needed, that is preferable, so you or the class are not left alone with the student.

The following are departments and programs at LCC that can assist with various problems and issues. Also, be aware of the administrative withdrawal policy found at http://www.lcc.edu/policy/policies_9.aspx



COUNSELING AND ADVISING CENTER

Hours:	Monday – Thursday, 9:00 a.m. - 6:00 p.m. Friday, 9:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.
Phone:	(517) 483-1904
Location:	Room 204, Gannon Building

OTHER CAMPUS RESOURCES

Office of Student Compliance	(517) 483-9632
Police and Public Safety	(517) 483-1800
Office of Disability Support Services	(517) 483-1904
Financial Aid Department	(517) 483-1200
Gay/Straight Alliance	(517) 483-1209
Women's Resource Center	(517) 483-1199
Tutoring Services	(517) 483-1206

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