

Introducing a Culture of Civility in First-Year College Classes

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Higher education as well as the larger society appears to be experiencing a serious decline in civility. In this article I present the case for introducing civility education in first-year general education courses. After citing some of the research documenting both faculty and student perceptions of incivility in the university and reviewing the wealth of descriptions about the meaning of civility, I will present a general definition of civility as a virtue. This lays the foundation for developing a Code of Academic Civility that could set the tone for introducing new students to the culture of the community they are entering and alert them to the basic expectations of this community. The last section clarifies the role of general education in assuming leadership for explicitly introducing academic civility in the first-year classroom.

Civility and Society

Civility talk has become more common in the United States in the last fifteen years. We might have thought that things would have improved since the “old days,” for example, when George Washington at sixteen penned his 110 “Rules of Civility and Decent Behaviour in Company and Conversation.” His first rule (and many others, of course) still communicates well: “Every Action done in Company, ought to be with Some Sign of Respect, to those that are Present.” But our circumstances are somewhat improved, at least in middle-class America, so

that we do not worry so much about matters covered by George's rule #13: "Kill no Vermin as Fleas, lice[,] ticks, &c in the Sight of Others; if you See any filth or thick Spittle put your foot Dexterously upon it[;] if it be upon the Clothes of your Companions, Put it off privately, and if upon your own Clothes return Thanks to him who puts it off" (2007).

Today there are numerous books available with rules and suggestions that attempt to "reclaim," "rediscover," or "revitalize" civility in an age in which standards of social relationship and exchange seem seriously threatened. And of course there is always the latest edition of *Miss Manners: A Citizen's Guide to Civility* (Martin, 1999), not to mention *The How Rude! Handbook of School Manners for Teens: Civility in the Hallowed Halls* (Packer, 2004). There are civility programs in use in elementary and secondary schools and higher education as well. Besides the creation of numerous civility committees, courses, surveys, workshops, and Web sites, there have been major initiatives including the Penn National Commission on Society, Culture, and Community and the Johns Hopkins Civility Project (Rookstool, 2007).

Civility in Higher Education

Higher education, as we would expect, is a microcosm of the larger society. Faculty complain about student behaviors that interfere with learning (Boice, 1996; Burroughs, Kearney, & Plax, 1989; Rookstool, 2007; Schneider, 1998). For some sense of faculty perceptions of student incivility, here is a snapshot of the range of behaviors that concern faculty based on a study done at Indiana University (Center for Survey Research, 2000). One part of the survey asked faculty to check "Always," "Under Some Conditions," or "Never" in response to twenty-nine possible behaviors that exhibited incivility. For the purposes of this article I have organized the data below according to the percentage of "Always" responses so that those with a 50 percent response rate or above are considered more serious uncivil actions and those below 50 percent are less serious:

More Serious

- Threats of physical harm against you
- Harassing comments (racial, ethnic, gender) directed at you in class
- Harassing comments or behavior directed at you outside class
- Hostile verbal attacks or challenges directed at you in class
- Cheating on exams or quizzes
- Other harassing comments directed at you in class
- Students taunting or belittling other students
- Vulgarity directed at you in class

Inappropriate e-mails to you
Not paying attention in class
Students' conversations distracting other students
Students' conversations distracting you
Cell phone or pager disruptions during class
Sarcastic remarks or gestures, such as staged yawning or eye rolling
Using a computer during class for purposes not related to the class

Less Serious

Sleeping in class
Disapproving groans
Students demanding makeup exams, extensions, grade changes, or special favors
Acting bored or apathetic
Students creating tension by dominating discussion
Students arriving late for class
Students being unprepared for class
Students cutting class
Students leaving class early
Students challenging your knowledge or credibility in class
Eating in class
Chewing gum in class
Reluctance to answer direct questions
Not taking notes during class

In response, various authors have taken on the challenge of developing strategies to address the problem in higher education (Baldwin, 2007; Braxton & Bayer, 2004; Gonzalez & Lopez, 2001; Rookstool, 2007).

On the other side of the lectern, student perceptions of faculty incivility have also been documented. For example, a recent article citing a study in nursing education (Clark & Springer, 2007) summarizes the six themes that occurred in the order of most frequency of student responses on a survey: faculty making condescending remarks, using poor teaching style or method, using poor communication skills, acting superior and arrogant, criticizing students in front of peers, and threatening to fail students. Other studies refer to perceptions about faculty changing the syllabus; giving lectures that are too fast, without enough interaction with the students; making up the rules as they go along; coming up with unexpected test items and grades; being unfair and rigid; insisting on conformity; and discriminating based on gender, race, and ethnicity (Boice, 1996; Thomas, 2003).

Faculty political bias in the classroom is also cited by students as a problem. One study of students' perceptions of their academic experience found that 49 percent of students said that "their professors frequently inject political comments into their courses, even if they have nothing to do with the subject, and that 29% felt they had to agree with professors' political views to get a good grade" (Neal, 2006, p. 9).

Support for perceptions about bias in higher education is also found in the general public. A poll from July 2007 reported that more than 58 percent of those who responded believe that political bias is a somewhat serious or very serious problem in higher education. This confirms American Association of University Professors data from a poll conducted in 2006 (Gross & Simmons, 2006). There are sharp divisions illustrated in the data from 2007. For example, white people and older people are more likely to believe bias is a serious problem (Jaschik, 2007). There were other divisions based on party lines, gender, religion, and shopping at Wal-Mart.

In response to such complaints mostly from more conservative students and the general public, David Horowitz, president of the California-based Center for the Study of Popular Culture, has led a national campaign to urge state legislators and members of Congress to pass an academic bill of rights. In 2005, fifteen or so legislators brought forward such bills, but they were not passed. Partly in response to Horowitz's initiative, in June 2005, the American Council on Education (ACE) and twenty-nine other higher education organizations endorsed a statement on intellectual diversity on college and university campuses, called "Academic Rights and Responsibilities." It includes five overarching principles that highlight the diversity of institutions and professional standards set by their different communities of scholars; the values of intellectual pluralism, free exchange of ideas, and academic freedom; and the importance of clear grievance processes to deal with unfair treatment (ACE, 2007).

The ACE statement is a positive step, though it did not completely satisfy Horowitz and others, and it does not address all the main ingredients of what I am calling academic civility. Before detailing a set of values that I believe constitute the larger view of academic civility, I will present a general definition of civility that then can be focused on the academic world and, in particular, the first-year classroom.

General Definitions/Descriptions of Civility

From the examples of George Washington up to the present day, various discussions of civility tend to identify it with a mixture of both moral principles or precepts, like respect for others, and manners, like don't pick lice off your head

in public, as George would say. The following definitions and descriptions give some sense of the broad spectrum of meaning that civility conveys. Civility is

- “behavior in public which demonstrates respect for others and which entails curtailing one’s own immediate self-interest when appropriate” (Billante & Saunders, 2002, p. 33)
- “what fits us for life in a pluralistic society” (Calhoun, 2000, p. 269)
- not a single personal quality like politeness but, rather, more “an amalgam of several such qualities . . . less a code of conduct than a spirit . . . that encompasses consideration, tact, good humour, and respect for others’ feelings and rights” (RBC Letter, 1995)
- a duty “that imposes a due acceptance of the defects of institutions and a certain restraint in taking advantage of them. Without some recognition of this duty mutual trust and confidence is liable to break down” (Rawls, 1999, p. 312)
- “participation in a collective self-consciousness which transcends or is preponderant over more numerous special, more partial and narrower collective self-consciousnesses, which can co-exist with it” (Shils, 1997, p. 74)
- “being constantly aware of others and weaving restraint, respect, and consideration into the very fabric of this awareness . . . and even a concern for the health of the planet on which we live” (Forni, 2002, p. 9)
- “the sum of the many sacrifices we are called to make for the sake of living together”; “an ethic for relating to the stranger” (Carter, 1998, pp. 11, 57)

Forni (2002, p. 8) also lists forty-two terms/phrases that have been connected with civility: respect for others, care, consideration, courtesy, the Golden Rule, respect of others’ feelings, niceness, politeness, respect of others’ opinions, maturity, kindness, manners, being accommodating, fairness, decency, self-control, concern, justice, tolerance, selflessness, etiquette, community service, tact, equality, sincerity, morality, honesty, awareness, trustworthiness, friendship, table manners, moderation, listening, compassion, being agreeable, going out of one’s way, friendliness, lending a hand, propriety, abiding by rules, good citizenship, and peace.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* summarizes the broad range of accumulated meanings for *civility* and also traces the historical origins of usage. Good manners is suggested by meanings involving ordinary courtesy or politeness, as opposed to rudeness, decency, and seamliness. The ethical basis of the term is captured in meanings, now obsolete, that cite a connection with citizenship, a community of citizens collectively, and behavior proper to the intercourse of

civilized people. Carter (1998) credits Dutch scholar Erasmus, writing in 1530 and author of a book on civility in children, with popularizing the concept of *civilité*, which is a primary root for our word *civility*:

The word *civilité* shares with the words *civilized* and *civilization* (and the word *city*, for that matter) a common etymology, an Indo-European root meaning “member of the household.” Of course: civility, as Erasmus understood, is what enables us to live together. To be civilized is to understand that we live in society as in a household, and that within that household, if we are to be moral people, our relationships with other people (our fellow citizens, members of our civic household) are governed by standards of behavior that limit our freedom. Our duty to follow those standards does not depend on whether or not we happen to agree with or even like each other. (p. 15)

Reviving the Historic Meaning of Civility

The earlier ethic-based meaning of civility, as revised and broadened even further, may provide a foundation for thinking about shaping the culture of the classroom. First, I propose that we think of civility in general as a facilitating virtue that enables the individual to live harmoniously with others in various communities. It is facilitating in the sense of an ability to integrate and orchestrate other virtues appropriate for getting along in whatever community. I will purposely leave “virtue” vague and not try to do a philosophical analysis with references to the extensive virtue literature or to argue that it is a moral virtue, though I am inclined to agree with Calhoun: “Civility requires obedience to social norms not for their own sake but for the sake of one important moral aim: the communication of moral attitudes to fellow inhabitants of our moral world. It is this that makes civility a moral virtue” (2000, p. 273; Rookstool, 2007).

Here, I will simply claim that civility is a virtue in the sense of a learned capability, habit, disposition, or character trait based on the sincere belief in the value of living as part of diverse communities and the conviction that the goal of living successfully in each community calls us to serve the common good, not just function out of self-interest. The virtue of civility, as I envision it, enables the individual to

1. recognize the differences in various communities (the possible continuum is from the household community to the global and everything in between),

2. identify the accepted social norms/values that generally govern good relations for each community in which one is involved,
3. be flexible and adaptable enough to live by the norms of a given community in the spirit of getting along well with other members in that community,
4. know when to switch/shift/modify behavior and be guided by other norms as necessary to fit into another community, and
5. be tolerant of defects or imperfections in norms in order to maintain mutual trust in a community (instead of contributing to the suspicion about who is trying to get away with not following the norms).

What can complicate matters is that any number of circumstances can make it difficult to know what the norms of a particular community are. Institutions like family and church are undergoing rapid changes. Situations in politics, business, the media, and entertainment can contribute to a sense that community norms are unraveling and are less certain today than in the past. Some may cite other possible signs of the breakdown of communities: the increasing incidence of deception, double standards, hypocrisy, and rule bending. It is understandable that individuals and groups in all areas of society are calling for a return to something more stable and reliable in terms of community norms. The assumption is that the survival of any community continuously calls for reaffirming, rearticulating, or redefining what are the basic norms of the community.

Another factor that makes it difficult to develop the virtue of civility is the realization that civility requires that individuals curtail their freedom or give up some of their freedom in order for the common good of a community to be achieved more effectively. As Carter describes it, civility is “the sum of the many sacrifices we are called to make for the sake of living together” (1998, p. 11). Laws are large-scale examples of social norms, for example, highway speed limits, that set limits on individual freedom. Raising your hand before speaking in class is a small-scale example that also puts a limit on individual freedom. Some individuals who are motivated by self-interest can find such limits onerous or ill advised, and that leads them to exempt themselves from following the norms or to seek out the loopholes. The virtue of civility implies a developed mind-set that can recognize the limitations with current norms while still being committed to observing those norms for the sake of the common good. This mind-set also recognizes that communities typically have in place other norms that regulate how norms are changed and what actions are necessary to bring about such changes.

Understanding how civility applies in real-life situations can also be complicated if the established norms are not just personally inconvenient

but morally questionable. Compare the virtue of civility with that of integrity (Calhoun, 1995). The two overlap in meaning, but the latter is more self-regarding in the sense of a developed awareness of what it takes to be an integrated whole person who is in harmony with oneself and of course with others. Civility is more other-regarding in the sense of knowing how to live harmoniously with others and with self. Unfortunately, but understandably, civil behavior, as reduced to blind obedience to community norms, has been evoked as one way that has been used in the past and still today by those in power to control and keep others in their place of subservience. In such situations, authentic civility informed by integrity may necessitate civil disobedience that challenges the powers that be.

Despite the challenges, society in general needs to continue to respond to acts of incivility that seem to damage the broader civic community as well as other smaller communities that intersect the lives of individuals. Higher education can help by dedicating more research to measuring the scope of the incivility problem(s) as well as assessing how well civility initiatives offer useful programs for improvement. But first and foremost, perhaps colleges and universities should assume responsibility for raising civility awareness in the students they touch, the future leaders of society, and to do so from the beginning of their experience in higher education. My focus in what follows is on education for academic civility in the first-year classroom. Implied in that is that some background attention be paid to what civility is in general and what it means to talk about a virtue of civility.

The Need for Academic Civility Education in the First-Year Classroom

First-time college students quickly learn that the educational community at this level is somewhat different than what they are used to in high school. Orientation programs, first-year seminars, and other planned activities, along with their experience of course work in the first semester or term, make clear to students that they have entered into a new community with its own set of values and expectations. The student handbook typically outlines the big picture of the campus community, with its policies and procedures that govern student rights and responsibilities. Students already know about living in multiple communities as they move in and out of the realities of family, social groups, high school, clubs, work, and place of worship, not to mention social networking on the Web. And now they begin to realize that the college community itself is a complex of related communities. For example, some professional programs such as nursing and pharmacy, and a few other programs across the university, are very

explicit about their norms for student conduct both in and out of the classroom. Some programs also have national standards or professional codes of ethics to follow. Residence living points to another type of community with its own set of norms. Membership in student government or other organizations or athletic teams involves learning to live in yet other communities that may intersect in a given student's life.

In this article I am suggesting that the first-year classroom is the place to introduce in an explicit way a first step in academic civility education. I will not try to argue that first-year seminars, or a required course in civility as a few institutions have implemented, or any other specific curriculum proposal is the recommended way to go. As a minimum, I propose that a published Code of Academic Civility for the classroom be used to stimulate an initial discussion in some first-year classes. The objective is twofold: (1) to make more clear than is currently done in the typical classroom that a class is one more community in which the individual should learn what is acceptable behavior, including the often unspoken but still expected manner of acting and speaking, in order to know what it takes to be academically successful in the student role and (2) to help students begin to understand that there is a cluster of related concepts that identify some basic set of norms and values that go beyond any one community and are transportable from one community to another; that these concepts have a name, civility; and that the individual is being challenged to develop in an intentional way what I have defined as the virtue of civility.

My underlying assumption is that the classroom is a multifaceted community with the focus on learning but is also the intersection of social, political, cultural, and professional values, some of which are made explicit in the class syllabus and outline and in the behavior of the instructor but much of which is left unexpressed and taken for granted. Civility represents the complex of norms and values that are part of the content delivered or facilitated by the instructor along with the course discipline content. Ordinarily, civility content is not directly addressed, or if it is, it comes across as a matter of housekeeping or rules laid down for a particular assignment at the beginning of class. I am convinced that civility content should be addressed explicitly and seriously: "Civility is not another piece to be added onto the plate of an educator, it 'is' the plate upon which all else is placed" (Vincent, 2006, p. 28). There may be a more appropriate metaphor, but the point is that faculty who live and breathe the values of academic culture need to be more transparent about these values with students. The challenge is for students to learn the importance of developing the virtue of civility with immediate application to the classroom.

Stephen Brookfield best describes the challenge for faculty:

Students can't read our minds. They can't be expected to know what we stand for without our making an explicit and vigorous effort to communicate this. We have to build a continual case for learning, action, and practice, instead of assuming that students see the self-evident value of what we are asking them to do. We have to create windows into our minds so that students can see the workings of our own teaching rationales. Laying bare our pedagogic reasoning helps students understand that our actions are not arbitrary or haphazard. They see that our choices and injunctions spring from our past experiences as teachers, from our convictions about what we're trying to accomplish, and from our knowledge of students' backgrounds, expectations, cultures, and concerns. . . . We want them [students] to understand that our insistence on particular ways of working is grounded in a set of examined and informed beliefs about what teachers should do, what education should look like, and how learning should happen. Students do not have to agree with these beliefs, but they need to know what they are and why we have them. And they need to see that our apparent stubbornness about a particular approach or requirement grows out of our pedagogic rationale and not out of egomania. As I point out in *The Skillful Teacher* . . . , one of the chief indicators to students that a teacher should be taken seriously is that she makes clear that her actions spring from a well-thought-out rationale grounded in experience. Continuous full disclosure by teachers of their expectations, guiding agendas, and evaluative criteria is an important sign of authenticity. If such disclosure is accompanied by the possibility of negotiating some of these items, so much the better. Under these conditions, students come to trust the teacher much more quickly than would otherwise have been the case. (1995, pp. 108–9)

As Brookfield puts it, the critical question is, What do we stand for? What are the key values that represent an ethic or philosophy of an effective learning environment, something faculty could say is what they stand for or stand on, in addition to what it means to be experts in different fields?

Through our behaviors we do communicate an answer to that question as we interact with students over the course of a semester. Yes, the syllabus and outline, including a reference to a policy on academic integrity, for example, may make many specific norms/values of a particular class visible. But I would like to suggest that this is not enough. I believe that a more explicit statement of what academic civility is and requires would better clarify what as teachers we are trying to do and why—what we stand for and what the university stands for!

To do this implies that faculty recognize that the virtue of civility needs to be seen as both a trait or disposition to be developed by the student and a responsibility that faculty must assume for being the intentional transmitters of that cluster of values that compose academic civility. This responsibility includes self-consciously partnering with students by modeling civility in the facilitation of the classroom.

I envision that the most efficient way to begin this education is to develop a relatively short document, a Code of Academic Civility, that could be communicated and discussed in some first-year classes and also considered, for example, for use at orientations, for posting in classrooms, and as an addition to faculty and student handbooks. But it must be both discussed and modeled if the written text is to come alive or be taken seriously.

Academic Civility Values in Institutional Documents

It is certainly not the case that civility values only exist in the heads of faculty and administrators. Student and faculty handbooks are replete with statements of value and student expectations related to civility. What we in the professorate tend to be guilty of is assuming too much about what first-year students coming into the university know about higher education, or that they read the student handbook before matriculating, or that faculty take the trouble to do an adequate orientation to the culture of the academy that they are best suited to do.

Various published documents include policies on academic integrity, anti-harassment, and the code of student conduct. Some common values referred to are respect for others, assuming self-responsibility, tolerance of differences, and balancing individual and community rights. In addition, professional schools may have, for example, a dress code requirement or mandatory class attendance.

The faculty handbook also may outline instructional duties or a professional code of ethics. My assumption is that such a code is not explicitly communicated to students and only certain aspects of a list of duties may be translated specifically into syllabus and course outline language.

Then there is the mission statement of an institution that also includes civility values broadly construed. Once again, it is a naive assumption to think that incoming students have much of a sense of what the mission includes, let alone even a beginning understanding of all that its tenets mean.

In sum, granted that civility values of the academy are spelled out in a variety of institutional documents, the challenge is to find a way to distill what is needed for the formation of new students and at the same time effectively

communicate this content with students at the very beginning of their college experience. I see the goal as developing a sort of “Ten Commandments of the Academy” for use in first-year classes.

A Proposed Code of Academic Civility

In the following model code I have attempted to establish a bridge between the most general institutional document, a mission statement, and specific rules and standards that appear in course syllabi and handouts. The latter rules, for example, refer to attendance and absence policies, harassment and disability issues, use of cell phones and other electronic devices, class preparation expectations, cheating, appropriate dress, and forms of prohibited class disturbance. My claim in this article is that the civility code values provide the base rationale that answers the question of why we have such specific rules. Without an explicit, at least cursory, explanation of the “why,” classroom rules can easily convey a simpler message—the instructor is the authority in charge and that’s the only “why” that is important. Instructors usually intend more than this, namely, that students understand that learning, among other things, is a reasoned and humane interactive process, not something done to you by someone in charge. A code could help set the right tone for introducing new students to the culture of the community they are about to enter and alert them to the basic expectations of this community.

Model Code of Academic Civility

Preamble

Each class at X University is a community of learners committed to the goal of improved learning in students and faculty alike. Civility is an acquired virtue that calls members of the community to work effectively and respectfully together to meet this goal. Civility sets the tone for how course subject matter in any class is learned and shared and overall helps establish a supportive and caring environment conducive to learning. We believe that both faculty and students modeling civility in the class community is an essential part of the learning experience that contributes to the growth of persons and their role as concerned and enlightened citizens.

We challenge ourselves to deliberately think and act in accordance with the following values so that civility is a lived reality in each class community.

Overarching Values of Civility

Respect the human dignity of each person (however inspired: God is present in the whole person, Golden Rule, autonomy).

Promote the good of the community (learning is an individual and social experience/responsibility).

Specific Values for Guiding Class Interactions

1. Accept responsibility and accountability for one's own behavior and expect the same of others; be willing to engage in critical self-examination.
2. Show respect for the search for truth and the love of learning.
3. Pursue knowledge with personal integrity and academic honesty.
4. Acknowledge that the pursuit of knowledge is complex and involves ambiguity; humility about the limits of one's own knowledge is called for.
5. Encourage dialogue (be willing to listen and be open to hearing the perspectives of others; show respect for free inquiry and freedom of expression; create a safe space for voices of dissent; tolerate differences).
6. Explore controversial issues by seeking to understand arguments on all sides; then deliberate and evaluate.
7. Be fair and impartial in judging the work and opinions of others; avoid personal attacks.
8. Appreciate diverse backgrounds: ethnic, racial, religious, cultural, social, political, economic, gender, sexual orientation, age, and disability.
9. Discourage all forms of prejudice, bias, bigotry, discrimination, and intimidation in the process of learning.
10. Encourage cooperation and collaboration, not just competition with others.
11. Avoid speaking and acting in ways that interfere with the learning of others.
12. Seek clarity in class expectations, policies, procedures, and rules.
13. Contribute to the development of a caring community where compassion for others is valued.

The list of value statements could be longer or shorter, of course, and possibly prioritized, which the above list of specific values is not. Also note that the intended audience for the code is *both* students and faculty. For example, "encourage

dialogue” points to a responsibility that both faculty and students must share. Or “seek clarity in class expectations” calls upon faculty to meet Brookfield’s challenge of being transparent but also calls upon students to be persistent in asking questions about what has to be done to be successful in a class. One limitation in the use of the language of “code” is that this may convey an intention of being prescriptive, with the implication that someone is responsible for enforcing the code and imposing appropriate penalties for violations and so on. My intent here is more to imagine a document that communicates the aspirations envisioned for any class community at the university. Various parts of the code, of course, refer to behaviors, for example, harassment, that should be subject to scrutiny and enforcement through more detailed policies and procedures already in place.

The Role of General Education in the First-Year Experience

Generally speaking, every community has an obligation to continuously educate new and old members to the norms of the community and ongoing changes to those norms. It is a failing to assume too much about what members of a community understand or remember, especially new members and what they bring with them that enables them to understand the nature of higher education. And if the larger challenge is to bring to awareness for new members the idea that living well in community, now including this first-year class and this university, is part of what academic learning is all about and learning more generally, then civility education needs to be addressed explicitly and early on.

First-year general education courses are the most natural vehicle. General education promotes the ideal of a liberally educated person, one who develops a broad sensibility to what forms the whole person in addition to learning professional and work-related skills and expertise in a major. The nature of liberal education as well as recent concerns about accountability in higher education continue to call us to prepare students to be effective, contributing members of our “civic household,” as Carter recalling Erasmus would put it. Colleges and universities typically have stressed service and social responsibility as part of their mission statements, and general education requirements have been considered the natural method for promoting civic education. General education is the means of helping students understand the ideal of a liberally educated person, and civic engagement is an essential part of that ideal. A recent study focusing on the use of democratic classroom techniques or service learning seems to establish the feasibility of a general education curriculum that could “serve as the academic platform for an institutionally based, mission driven commitment to civic engagement” (Spiezio, Baker, & Boland, 2005, p. 273). The point is that

such education must be intentional. It will not just happen by having students complete a selection of courses that satisfy the general education requirements.

What I have argued in this article is that civility education is the broad category that includes what it means to be part of any and all communities that intersect in a person's life. Civic engagement as described above refers to an individual's responsibilities to the larger local community. Academic engagement refers to students learning how to be successful in any class. This overlaps with civic engagement but includes all forms of class learning, including that which stresses practice-oriented pedagogy referred to in the above study as well as more traditional methods.

A Code of Academic Civility could be useful in a first-year class to the extent that it makes the values of the academy more transparent and hopefully begins to create an environment of trust and increased awareness that translates into student learning success. Trust is essential, and it must be consistently cultivated in the classroom community. As Fukuyama (1995) expresses it, trust is "the expectation that arises within a community of regular, honest, and cooperative behavior, based on commonly shared norms" (p. 26). But a code is also useful to the extent that it identifies values that have currency in many different communities and also helps students realize that survival in whatever community calls for values awareness and related skill development. Students eventually learn such survival skills on their own through trial and error. I believe that general education can do more to actually teach about such skills and if not simplify, perhaps improve and better inform the learning process students go through. A code of civility used in first-year classes is a small step in that direction.

Assessing Civility Awareness

It is realistic to assume that little time could be devoted to education about civility in a given first-year class in whatever discipline. Ideally, the class would occur in the first term of a student's first-year experience. And even if a required reading and/or other media strategies could supplement in-class instruction and discussion, we might only expect limited growth in student awareness by the end of term.

Documenting what student gain does occur will require the development of student learning outcomes based on the values of the model Code of Academic Civility. One suggestion would be to select a relatively short list of outcomes that first-year students could relate to as in some sense relevant to their high school experience as well as their anticipated college experience. Another guideline for selection of outcomes could be what has some connection to data already collected in items assessed on local or national surveys of student

perceptions about the college experience. A laundry list of specific behaviors as illustrated earlier in the survey used by Indiana University may provide concrete examples for class discussion of the code values but may not be as useful as a beginning-of-class survey that prepares students for the discussion to come.

A beginning-of-class survey might ask students to reflect back on their experience of the last year of high school and how they might characterize that experience as a civil learning environment. A five-point Likert scale using “Strongly Agree” to “Strongly Disagree” could be used with statements focusing on respect, trust, academic integrity, dialogue, freedom to express ideas, fair and just treatment, diversity, cooperation, and caring community. This opening assignment may be viewed as noncredit or possibly small credit or extra credit when the student completes a related end-of-class survey. Such a survey at the end could ask students to characterize their experience of civility in this particular class, in other words, Did it model living up to the challenge of the code values? Another possibility for comparison would be for the instructor to complete the same survey as the students or develop a rubric summarizing his or her experience for the class as a whole.

The same survey for students also could ask them to characterize their overall experience at the university thus far. Information on their perceptions about their overall experience may say something about the conjunction and effectiveness of other civility initiatives such as orientation activities, student life events, a speaker series, honor codes, and so on or the need to supplement the single in-class experience with other initiatives.

Other assessments may help confirm in-class data about the students’ overall experience. National surveys such as the National Survey of Student Engagement for first-year and senior students and the companion faculty survey or the Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory include a number of questions that relate directly to the values singled out above from the code. The Student Satisfaction Inventory also allows for add-on questions that could target some of the civility values. These resources as well as in-house surveys, including student evaluations of teaching, could help identify baselines for measuring the success of civility initiatives and, indirectly at least, correlate with the in-class civility education that occurs in the first year.

Challenges to Successful Implementation

The minimal approach suggested in this article is the use of a civility module in at least one required general education class in the first term of a student’s first-year experience. Overall impact may depend on not only the resources available for any curricular initiative but also other factors at work in the larger university

community. Are there resources for developing and piloting a module and then the assessment and research resources necessary to track success? Will faculty resources include using full-time instructors only or adjuncts or other personnel as well, for example, from the student life area? Would it be more effective to fold the civility content into a learning community or seminar experience? Would there be any opportunities for and interest in teaching civility in courses beyond the first year? Are there other campus initiatives or activities that reinforce the importance of civility to the university community? How serious and effective is the campus in enforcing existing academic integrity and harassment policies, and is this commitment widely known? How to communicate with transfer students about civility is another challenge but is not addressed in this article.

Conclusion

A Code of Academic Civility makes explicit and in one place what we stand for as a faculty and as an institution of higher learning and what makes the university different from high school or a trade school. A code could help build a sense of community by sending a clear signal at the beginning of a first-year class that moral behavior and development most importantly, but also etiquette, are part of the shared class culture and experience. Civility needs to be presented as something important enough to be modeled and learned in every class and taught expressly in the first-year experience of every new student, and not just, or only, presented in an orientation experience, for example. Finally, a code is only a gesture, but an important one, in the direction of the university committing itself to respond in whatever way that it can to the perceived incivility in society and on university campuses. General education has a natural and vital leadership role to play in this effort.

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