

Strategies for Reducing or Eliminating Uncivil Student Behavior in the Classroom

1. Practice effective communication skills. This means using civil language, maintaining an inclusive attitude, respectfully listening to students, and serving as a role model for respect and understanding. Mutual courtesy will go a long way.
2. Speak *with* them rather than *at* them.
3. Learn their names – all of them.
4. In a clear and respectful manner, spell out academic and behavioral expectations in the syllabus. Be specific about expectations and address logistics such as course objectives, evaluation methods, exam and attendance policies, course schedule, and consequences that will arise from acts of incivility. Uncertainty about course policies will lead to uncivil behavior.
5. Stick to the syllabus. Changing objectives during the course can lead to student anxiety, and thus incivility.
6. Distribute mid-term evaluations to receive early feedback.
7. Foster a collaborative, rather than competitive, learning environment.
8. Practice prosocial behavior rather than antisocial behavior. Prosocial behavior involves being warm and motivational, showing an interest in the students, and maintaining a positive attitude. Antisocial behavior involves being aloof and disinterested.
9. Reframe potential conflict. Students often seek attention in different ways and it is best not to personalize ill-mannered student responses. Your best defense is to respond non-defensively. Acknowledge their disappointment, listen respectfully to their complaint, and then respond productively.
10. If necessary, confer with the student in a one-to-one setting. Calmly tell the student what you see as the problem and then listen reflectively to their perspective.
11. Ask them questions such as why are they taking the class – some oppositional students are simply in need of attention, while others are simply uncertain of the class or the professor's expectations. Asking them questions may generate answers regarding their hostile behavior.
12. Talk with colleagues about situations they have faced and ask them how they handled it. Every instructor has experienced uncivil student behavior.

13. Integrate conflict-resolution activities into your lessons. If the students learn about communication and interactive listening, they may be better able to apply it themselves.
14. Facilitate learning activities that teach social skills and self-insight. For example, journal writing, role playing, and other self-awareness activities force students to reflect on both their behavior and the behavior of others.
15. Deal with conflictual behavior as it comes up – talk about it directly in the classroom and help the students to see what respectful conduct is and is not.
16. Remember to always practice *immediacy*. Immediacy involves the following:
 - Arriving to class early and/or staying late (to allow time for informal chats with students).
 - Utilizing body language that indicates approachability, including forward leans and open body postures, direct eye contact, and walking around while lecturing or listening.
 - Making sure to pause, slow, and check student note-taking – be sure they are involved and comprehending.
 - Listening patiently and reflectively to students – both in class and out of class.
 - Avoiding signs of impatience or annoyance when talking to students.
 - Constructing a clear syllabus that lays out behavioral and academic expectations (and sticking to it!).

PLNU's New Academic Behavior Policy:

Both faculty and students at Point Loma Nazarene University have the right to expect a safe and ordered environment for learning. Any student behavior that is disruptive or threatening is a serious affront to Point Loma Nazarene University as a learning community. Students who fail to adhere to appropriate academic behavioral standards may be subject to discipline. Although faculty members communicate general student expectations in their syllabi and disruptive student conduct is already addressed in the Undergraduate Student Handbook, the purpose of this policy is to clarify what constitutes disruptive behavior in the academic setting and what actions faculty and relevant administrative offices may take in response to such disruptive student behavior.

“Disruption,” as applied to the academic setting, means classroom, instructor or classmate-related student behavior that a reasonable faculty member would view as interfering with or deviating from normal classroom, class-related, or other faculty-student activity (advising, co-curricular involvement, etc.). Faculty members are encouraged to communicate positive behavior expectations at the first class session and to include them in course syllabi. Examples of disruptive classroom behavior include, but are not limited to:

- persistent speaking without being recognized or interrupting the instructor or other speakers;
- overt inattentiveness (sleeping or reading the newspaper in class);
- inordinate or inappropriate demands for instructor or classroom time or attention;
- unauthorized use of cell phone or computer;
- behavior that distracts the class from the subject matter or discussion;
- unwanted contact with a classmate in person, via social media or other means;
- inappropriate public displays of affection;
- refusal to comply with reasonable instructor direction; and/or

- invasion of personal space, physical threats, harassing behavior or personal insults.

The policy applies if the behavior is reported by a faculty member or academic administrator and occurs exclusively or primarily in a student-faculty member interaction. Incidents which involve both academic and non-academic behavior may result in responses coordinated by the Vice Provost for Academic Administration and the Dean of Students.

Civil and polite expression of disagreement with the course instructor, during times when the instructor permits discussion, is not in itself disruptive behavior and is not prohibited.

Some students possess medical or psychological conditions that may affect functioning within the standards of the university. Although such students may be considered disabled and are protected under the Rehabilitation Act/ADA, they are required to meet the fundamental university academic and behavioral policy as described in the Student Handbook, Undergraduate Catalog and/or faculty syllabi.

Response Procedure

The following response procedure is recommended to faculty who witness or experience disruptive behavior, either in the classroom or in contact with an enrolled student outside the classroom.

Depending on its severity, disruptive behavior would result in responses from an escalated use of the strategies below:

1. Verbal and/or written request to stop behavior and warning of potential consequences.
2. Exclusion from the current class period/activity.
3. E-mailed report to dean, Vice Provost for Academic Administration and Vice President for Student Development (in cases of a severe instance, or multiple instances) using Classroom Behavior Report Form (to be developed) which, depending on faculty wish and severity, may result in:
4. Filing of report and no further action.
5. Student meeting with VPAA and Dean of Students to develop and sign classroom behavior and growth plan detailing appropriate behaviors and consequences for failure to comply.
6. Depending on the frequency and severity of the student behavior, consequences may include permanent exclusion from a specific class up to and including administrative withdrawal from the university.

Note: Faculty should immediately report by phone students in an academic context who express either intent to harm themselves or to harm others to the Office of the VPAA or the Dean of Students, in that order. (Staff are instructed to report non-academic incidents to the Dean of Students.) If events occur in classes after university business hours, faculty should call Department of Public Safety and ask to speak to the highest ranking officer who will notify administrative personnel. Students who report tendency to self-harm will not be subject to disciplinary action for making PLNU officials aware of that tendency.

Resources to Learn More:

Bain, Ken. 2004. *What the Best College Teachers Do*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Boice, Robert. 1996. "Classroom Incivilities." *Research in Higher Education* 37(4): 453-486.

Boice, Robert. 2000. *Advice for New Faculty Members*. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Braxton, John M. and Alan E. Bayer. Fall 2004. *Addressing Faculty and Student Classroom Improprieties*. San Francisco, CA: Wiley Periodicals.

Clark, Cynthia M. September/October 2009. "Faculty Field Guide for Promoting Student Civility in the Classroom." *Nurse Educator* 35(5): 194-197.

Downs, Judy R. 1992. "Dealing with Hostile and Oppositional Students." *College Teaching* 40(3): 106-108.

Filene, Peter. 2005. *The Joy of Teaching: A Practical Guide for New College Instructors*. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press.

Galagan, Pat. July 2010. "Burp, Chatter, and Tweet: New Sounds in the Classroom." *Association for Talent Development (T + D)*.

McGlynn, Angela Provitera. 2001. *Successful Beginnings for College Teaching: Engaging Your Students from the First Day*. Madison, WI: Atwood Publishing.

Moore, Valerie Ann. 1996. "Inappropriate Challenges to Professorial Authority." *Teaching Sociology* 24: 202-206.

Morrisette, Patrick J. May 14, 2001. "Reducing Incivility in the University/College Classroom." *International Electronic Journal for Leadership in Learning* 5(4).

Richardson, Steven M. Spring 1999. *Promoting Civility: A Teaching Challenge*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, Inc.

Robertson, Jason E. January/February 2012. "Can't We All Just Get Along? A Primer on Student Incivility in Nursing Education." *Nursing Education Perspectives* 33 (1): 21-26.

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- Galagan, Pat. July 2010. "Burp, Chatter, and Tweet: New Sounds in the Classroom." *Association for Talent Development (T + D)*.
- McGlynn, Angela Provitera. 2001. *Successful Beginnings for College Teaching: Engaging Your Students from the First Day*. Madison, WI: Atwood Publishing.
- Moore, Valerie Ann. 1996. "Inappropriate Challenges to Professorial Authority." *Teaching Sociology* 24: 202-206.
- Morrisette, Patrick J. May 14, 2001. "Reducing Incivility in the University/College Classroom." *International Electronic Journal for Leadership in Learning* 5(4).
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