Spectrum

Faculty Development and Instructional Design Center, Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, Illinois 60115

Classroom Civility

Today there is a seemingly growing problem of lack of civility in university classrooms across the nation. Disruptive classroom behaviors include students arriving late and leaving early, reading newspapers, coming unprepared, being argumentative, refusing to participate, students not respecting the views and rights of classmates and faculty, private conversations, cell phone and beeper use.

Media provide visual images of the current state of unrest and terrorism that today's culture has come to expect; these images can readily translate to the classroom (Lepper, 2000, www.missouri.edu/~petwww/library/chalkboard/fall2000/rudeness.htm). Easily filed lawsuits may keep faculty and administrators from acting on incidents of classroom incivility. In many cases, faculty may not retaliate for fear of retribution.

Not everyone experiences severe incidents of classroom behavior. Many of us, however, have encountered students, or even colleagues, who are disrespectful. Here are just a few strategies that may be useful in addressing civility in your own classroom:

- Serve as a role model for the conduct you expect from your students.

- If inappropriate behavior is occurring, consider a general word of caution, rather than warning a particular student.

- If the behavior is irritating, but not disruptive, try speaking with the student after class. Most students are unaware of distracting habits or mannerisms.

- When it's necessary to speak to a student during class about his or her behavior, do so in a firm but not condescending manner.

- If disruption is serious, and other reasonable measures have failed, dismiss the class and summon the campus police (University of North Carolina at Charlotte, 2004, www.legal.uncc.edu/civility.html)

Additional points include:

- Establish ground rules and devise a protocol on expected classroom civility.

- Relate to all generations of students.

- Liven up your classroom environment; get students involved, and be enthusiastic about your subject.

- Know your department and the university policies on classroom civility.

By creating a welcoming, positive, collaborative learning environment, and modeling civility in the presence of your students, you will be well on the way to establishing a safe, and civil, learning experience (Lepper, 2000).

Are you interested in learning more about classroom civility? Mark your calendars for the **Spring 2006 Teaching Effectiveness Institute (TEI)** scheduled for Thursday, January 12, 2006. Dr. Linda Nilson (Clemson University) will present a one-day program that will cover defining instructor and student rights and creating an instructor persona that commands respect. Look for the TEI flyer and registration information early in November.

Fall 2005

GRANT DEADLINE

For Development Grants Application for January – June 2006 Cycle:

Faculty Development Grant deadline:
November 11, 2005

Supportive Professional Staff Development Grant deadline:
November 18, 2005

As part of our ongoing assessment effort, our Center conducted a campuswide survey of our programs and services with the help of the Public Opinion Laboratory at NIU. Nearly 400 faculty and staff responded to the survey conducted online during fall 2004 and we would like to thank everyone who responded to the survey and provided us useful feedback.

Along with excellent reviews of our programs and services, we also received some questions and suggestions. Even though these were from individual respondents, we thought these could be of general interest and have addressed them in the following paragraphs.

One respondent has asked why our programs are only for faculty and not for SPS or instructors. Our programs are open to all faculty and staff. Due to budget constraints, we are no longer able to send individually addressed program announcements and we send copies to campus units to distribute them to all their faculty (including instructors, adjuncts and retired faculty), supportive professional staff, and teaching civil service staff. Faculty and staff can also subscribe to our program announcement listserv and receive the announcements directly. We also publicize our programs through NIU's web calendar.

We also offer separate programs for graduate assistants, which are open to all teaching, research, and staff assistants. We send copies of our program announcements for GAs to campus units and request them to be distributed to their GA/RA/SAs and we also distribute them through a separate listserv for GAs and through the Graduate School newsletter.

Another respondent has asked if the Center has an advisory committee. The Center has an advisory committee called the Faculty Development Advisory Committee with representatives from all colleges and the SPS body, which not only advises the Center on its programs and activities, but also participates in its programs and contributes to the review of faculty development grants. The list of current members of the committee can be found at http://www.niu.edu/facdev/information/advisory.htm

One respondent has asked why the Center's programs do not include many speakers from the humanities. The Center invites speakers from all disciplines at NIU, but the availability of speakers depend on a number of factors such as their availability on a particular date and their interest in presenting on a particular topic. Speakers from humanities regularly present at our Teaching Effectiveness Institutes and various conferences.

One respondent has commented that we will have more people attending our programs if not for the perception that our programs are "only for those who teach badly." During 2004-2005, our Center offered 143 programs on a range of topics for more than 1800 participants, which included first year faculty to Presidential Teaching Professors and retired faculty. None of our programs are ever advertised in content or in title as only for those who teach badly, and many of our presenters are NIU faculty and staff who never give the impression that our programs are only for those who teach badly.

With respect to the schedule of our programs, a majority of the respondents have indicated that they would prefer programs offered during mornings or afternoons and less than 5% of the respondents have expressed an interest in programs offered during evenings. If there is enough interest, we will certainly consider offering programs in the evenings, but our program schedule is also dictated by the availability of seminar rooms and computing facilities. Many respondents have also indicated that they prefer programs of shorter duration and many of our programs offered during the semester are of shorter duration.

Some respondents have suggested us to offer programs on topics such as Time Management, and Civility in the Classroom, and in response to these suggestions, we offered a daylong workshop on Time Management this August, and we will be offering a daylong workshop on Civility in the Classroom in January 2006. But please note that for the past 6 years we were able to offer daylong workshops by nationally recognized presenter with the help of Pepsi Incentive Funding. Due to the discontinuation of the Pepsi funds we will be able to offer such workshops only if additional funding sources are available in the future. However, we will do our best to invite nationally-recognized presenters to offer workshops on topics of interest to faculty and staff at NIU.

We appreciate your positive response to our survey and your feedback on our programs and services. Thank you once again for your comments, suggestions, and continued support of our activities.

Computer simulations are a computer-based strategy that simulates a real life scenario in which users are prompted to navigate, respond, or make decisions while acquiring new information and skills. The goal of a simulation activity is to provide learners an opportunity for application and practice in a specific context. What distinguishes simulation from more traditional passive strategies, such as listening to lectures or reading text, is the level of learner involvement. Learners are required to be engaged in an activity by taking on a role or roles and participating in vicarious experiences designed to disseminate information, model behavior, and provide opportunities for application and practice.

There are a number of advantages offered by training with simulations:

- Benefits learners by providing an environment where newly acquired skills can be practiced in a safe and controlled setting without fear of making mistakes that could be costly in a real world environment;

- Training lessens the need to access unwieldy/expensive equipment or specialized training staff;

- Permits learners to apply and refine their skills to potentially hazardous procedures in a safe manner; and

- Allows learners to observe behaviors or procedures modeled in a precise and consistent manner.

Simulations can also have drawbacks:

- Can be expensive to develop and implement requiring specialized trained staff (content expert, instructional designer, programmer, graphic artist);

- Might not be practical to develop if content, procedures or scenarios frequently change; and

- May not be the best instructional strategy for all audiences such as individuals with minimal computer literacy skills, or learners already having a higher functioning specialized skills set and who could become bored.

Northern Illinois University has its own simulation resource that will go online by the end of the calendar year (www.niu.edu/rcrportal). The simulation, titled "Research Mentoring," represents a collaborative effort between the Faculty Development and Instructional Design Center, university faculty members, and e-Learning Services. The goal of this interactive activity is to expose student and faculty researchers to a variety of challenging research mentoring issues. The project is funded by a Responsible Conduct of Research Education Grant awarded to the Faculty Development and Instructional Design Center by the Office of Research Integrity (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services). A second simulation activity, titled "Collaborative Research," is currently in development. For more information on either simulation, please contact Dan Cabrera, Multimedia Coordinator at 815-753-0613 or dcabrera@niu.edu.

Call for Faculty Development Grant Proposals

The Faculty Development and Instructional Design Center is offering grants of up to $2,500 each annually to regular continuing faculty (tenured and tenure track). The purpose of the grants is to encourage and support faculty development activities that directly benefit the applicants' departments, colleges and/or the university. Equal matching funds from the applicants' academic units or appropriate external sources are required. Five copies of each proposal, including the proposal cover sheet, accompanying letters of support and other relevant documents must be submitted to the Grant Review Subcommittee, Faculty Development and Instructional Design Center, by Friday, November 11, 2005 for activities scheduled between January and June 2006. Complete proposal guidelines and cover sheet can be obtained on the Web at http://www.niu.edu/facdev/development/grants.htm. Tenured or tenure-track faculty who plan to submit proposals by the November 11, 2005 deadline and need more information are encouraged to register and attend the grant writing seminar that will be held from 12:00 to 1:00 pm on Friday, October 28, 2005. Register by email to facdev@niu.edu or online at http://www.niu.edu/facdev/forms/fsprogreg.htm.

Call for SPS Development Grant Proposals

The Faculty Development and Instructional Design Center and Human Resource Services are offering grants up to $1,000 each to Supportive Professional Staff (SPS) pursuing professional development activities that benefit the individuals as well as their academic units. Proposal guidelines and other information are available at http://www.niu.edu/facdev/development/grants.htm. Five copies of each proposal, including other relevant documents, must be submitted to the SPS Awards Committee, Faculty Development and Instructional Design Center, by Friday, November 18, 2005 for activities proposed between January and June 2006. SPS who plan to submit a proposal by the November 18, 2005 deadline and need more information are encouraged to register to attend the grant writing seminar from 12:00 to 1:00 pm on Friday, November 4, 2005. Register online at http://www.niu.edu/facdev/forms/fsprogreg.htm or email facdev@niu.edu.

Moving Groups Online

The professor hands out a syllabus; students glance through the course requirements and groan: group work! Since students complain vehemently about group work, why do we, as faculty, go to such great extents to incorporate group projects into our courses?

As faculty move away from the traditional teacher-centered classroom, they look for ways to involve students more directly in the learning process; group projects are an ideal way to get students working independent of the professor. But students continue to complain about working in groups despite the fact that the pedagogical value of teamwork is clearly established. Their main complaints seem to be two fold: it is difficult to get together outside of class and all too frequently some group members do not share the work.

These complaints can be addressed to some degree by the faculty member. For students who have problems getting together outside of class, we can attempt to supply some in-class group time; the very nature of group work, however, suggests additional meetings outside of scheduled course time. To address the concerns of those who complain that some members of the group do not pull their weight, peer assessment of group effort can help motivate the persistently-absent group member to participate more actively; there are, of course, no guarantees that all group members will do their share. The downside to peer assessment is that some students hesitate to downgrade their classmates, even when the evaluation process is anonymous. In other situations, students may unfairly assess group mates with whom they have a personality conflict.

Setting up groups online is another solution to help maintain the vitality of group work and decrease the number of student complaints. Online groups automatically eliminate the need for face-to-face meetings so a variety of schedules can be accommodated. Students appreciate the flexibility afforded by online meetings and frequently establish a more closely knit learning community than groups that meet more traditionally. Cyber meetings level the playing field and provide off-campus and non-traditional students the opportunity to actively participate in group work without driving to campus.

Additionally, online groups provide students with a simplified method for sharing files vital to the group project. Students can post their individual components of a group assignment for group mates to peruse and edit. Posting files online is more efficient than sending them as file attachments and creates a sense of physical space for the group to share and gather data.

Perhaps the greatest advantage to moving groups online is that the faculty member can readily access group discussions to be certain all group members are fulfilling their required assignment. This participation check can be done quickly and can provide the faculty member with specific information (dates, times, etc.) needed to address groups' concern about participation.

If you would like to join a discussion about creating effective groups for your classes, please register for the Tuesday, October 18 (10:00-11:30) workshop on how to set up and sustain online groups using Blackboard as the online medium. Register online for an opportunity to discuss the technical and pedagogical aspects of creating successful groups: http://www.facdev.niu.edu/facdev/forms/fsprogreg.htm.

Grant Recipients for July -- December 2005

The following were awarded Faculty Development Grants:

Connie Fox (Kinesiology and Physical Education),

Chang Liu (Operation Management and Information Systems), and

Pamela Macfarlane (Kinesiology and Physical Education).

Teresa Wasonga (Leadership, Educational Psychology & Foundations) received the David Raymond Grant for the Use of Technology in Teaching sponsored by Mr. David Raymond (former trustee), Provost's Office, and the NIU Foundation. Congratulations to all the recipients!