What do I do now?

Dealing with student conflict and incivility in the online classroom
What do I do now?

- Classroom Incivility, what is it?
- The official word, CCCOnline’s policies
- Responding to specific kinds of uncivil behavior
- Questions?
Broadly defined, classroom incivility is any action that interferes with a harmonious and cooperative learning atmosphere in the classroom.

Uncivil student behavior not only disrupts and negatively affects the overall learning environment for students but also contributes to instructors' stress and discontent – The Center for Teaching & Learning, UC Santa Cruz
What do I do now?

- Classroom Incivility
  - Instructors identify various student behaviors as annoying, rude, and disruptive, these are the most common we’ve noticed at CCCOnline
- Dominating discussion—The student who won’t let anyone else engage in discussions, or always responds to everything
- Aggressive challenges to the instructor—The student questioning your authority, expressing anger about grading, or generally undermining your ability to teach.
- Disputes between students; demeaning comments—When classroom discussion gets out of hand, or a student uses demeaning or stereotyping language
Why incivility occurs

- Anonymity of online courses which may lead to students not viewing their professors and classmates as “real people.”
- Different expectations of so-called millennial students, see themselves as “consumers” of education
- Often driven by stress over financial concerns
- Noticeable increase in incidents at CCCOnline
  - Spr 2010 – 5 reprimands, Spr 2010 – 2 expulsions
  - Spr 2013, 54 reprimands, Spr 2013 – 5 expulsions
Dealing with incivility

- It is reasonable for you to expect students to behave in a civil manner towards you as well as towards their classmates.
- You will have to decide which behaviors you can tolerate or adapt to, and which are unacceptable in your class.
- **Remember – you control your class**
- Constant disruptions prevent others from receiving an education, interfere with your ability to carry out your instructional responsibilities, and create a negative work environment for you
What do I do now?

- What’s the official word?
  - We are here to help you!
  - CCCOnline’s Procedures
  - Policy on Respectful Communications
  - Student handbook outlines student expectations and consequences
  - Students are sent the link to the handbook at the start of EVERY semester
  - [http://www.ccconline.org/Student_Services/Student_Handbook](http://www.ccconline.org/Student_Services/Student_Handbook)
What do I do now?

What’s the official word?
- For student misconduct (incivility) issues:
  - You will be asked to try and resolve the conflict with the student. If this is unsuccessful, you should contact your CCCO Program Chair and then your Associate Dean (AD).
  - If the issue is not resolved at the AD level, the CCCO Chief Student Services Officer (CSSO) will have the final decision. This decision will be communicated to you and the student.
  - At the jurisdiction of the CSSO and/or for repeated student misconduct offenses, the CSSO will contact the student’s home college and notify the appropriate person(s) of the student’s misconduct.
What do I do now?

- OK, that’s nice, but WHAT DO I DO NOW?
  - Responding to classroom incivility starts with prevention
- Make expectations clear
  - Write a statement for the syllabus, framed as positively as possible, communicating the civil behavior you expect of students, refer to the student handbook for support
  - Where possible, you may wish to have students as a group create the “rules of engagement”
- Do your part to create a civil climate
  - Treat students with respect. Treat them as adults. Respect their ability to learn
  - Establish a method for airing grievances
  - Reduce anonymity
What do I do now?

- Responding to specific kinds of incivility
  - **Dominating Discussions**
    - These students often don’t see themselves as “uncivil”
    - They may perceive themselves as “rescuing” you from a bad discussion
    - Of course, some just have an inflated sense of their own importance
What do I do now?

- Responding to specific kinds of incivility
  - Dominating Discussions
    - If it happens:
      - Stay positive in your comments
      - “Thanks, <>, I’d like to bring more people into the conversation”
    - If it persists, contact the student directly, say how you appreciate their eagerness and involvement, but that more learning can occur if more people participate
    - If they are or become aggressive or rude, see the following sections
What do I do now?

- Responding to specific kinds of incivility
  - Aggressive challenges to the instructor
    - Pick up on instructor insecurities, and those with bullying tendencies will take advantage
    - Sense of anonymity of online courses can increase these tendencies
    - Being very organized and prepared can reduce perceptions of insecurity
What do I do now?

- Responding to specific kinds of incivility
  - Aggressive challenges to the instructor
    - If it happens:
    - Don’t get emotional!
    - If it’s about a specific issue (e.g., grade problem) contact them directly
    - If they are challenging your authority, avoid discussing with them within the class, contact them directly
    - If the challenge concerns wider issues (e.g., policies) you may want to ask the rest of class if this is an issue for them as well
What do I do now?

- Responding to specific kinds of incivility
  - Aggressive challenges to the instructor
    - When contacting the student directly:
      - Try to identify the specific issue and stick with it
      - Express an interest in the student’s point of view
      - Be sure to give them a chance to reply
      - Try not to be defensive
      - Explain policies, grading, etc., but don’t get into a long defense
      - If you’re wrong, admit it gracefully, but…
      - If you’re feeling pressured, take some time to respond
      - And remember…
What do I do now?

- Responding to specific kinds of incivility
  - Aggressive challenges to the instructor
  - If it becomes serious or you are unsure how to proceed, contact your chair, AD or student srvcs
  - *Don’t suffer in silence!*
  - Keep a record of correspondence with the student
  - If you talk with them by phone or in person, follow it up with email summarizing what was said
  - We CAN remove a student from a class if necessary
  - Finally, if a student threatens to sue (more common than you think), have them contact student srvcs
  - If they threaten to go to a president, state rep, gov, etc., they can, will be referred back to student srvcs
Responding to specific kinds of incivility

- Disputes between students
  - Remind student of policies for respectful communication, ask them to read over the student handbook
  - State clearly that you will not tolerate demeaning comments of any type
  - A possible way out for the student – “I think many of us interpret what you said as meaning x. Is that what you meant?”
  - Remind students, getting passionate about an issue is great but, comments must be constructive and to avoid personal attacks
  - Can escalate to include other violations (e.g., sexual harassment or civil rights violations)
What do I do now?

- Remember
- DON’T PANIC!
- Your chair, AD and student services are here to help!
- At anytime, if you feel uncomfortable dealing with student incivility, contact student srvcs!
- Going forward, regular WebEx meetings to help troubleshoot and brainstorm any problems or issues that come up
What do I do now?

- QUESTIONS?
What do I do now?

THE DOGBERT GAZETTE IS DOING A STORY ON YOUR FIRING OF AN EMPLOYEE FOR POSTING A COMIC ON THE WALL.

I NEED SOME QUOTES THAT SUPPORT MY THESIS OF YOU BEING A HUMORLESS STAIN ON THE SOUL OF HUMANITY.

WOULD YOU SAY YOU WORSHIP SATAN, OR DO YOU SIMPLY RESPECT HIS NONSENSICAL APPROACH TO DISCIPLINE?

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