

1 of 3 DOCUMENTS

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NOT SO LONG AGO, MOST COLLEGE INSTRUCTORS WERE TREATED WITH DIGNITY AND RESPECT. BUT NOW, TO THE DISMAY OF MANY ACADEMICS, SOME STUDENTS SEE THEM AS SERVICE PROVIDERS, TO BE IGNORED WHEN THEY ARE NOT ENTERTAINING

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At a mandatory study hall for about 25 Towson University freshmen last semester, teaching assistant Dorothy Williams repeatedly implored several male students in the back of the classroom to stop joking around and settle down.

Moments later, in response to a perceived slight, one of the troublemakers stood and struck a fellow student --- hard --- in the back.

Several students laughed. A clearly rattled Williams ordered the assailant to leave the room and "cool off" by the door. "They're usually very well behaved," she insisted later, her voice still shaking.

While physical violence in college classrooms is rare at Towson and elsewhere, unruly and discourteous behavior is on the rise, experts say, and it is a growing preoccupation of academics and administrators nationwide.

Across the country, veteran college teachers complain of increasing student hostility to rules of classroom conduct, and belligerence in demanding higher grades. In addition to chatting, eating and sleeping in class, students now have new ways to distract themselves and their fellows from the lecturer: text-messaging on cell phones, and shopping for shoes on laptop computers during Biology 101.

"I have had crazy things go on in the classroom," said Julie Reiser, a Towson writing lecturer. When Reiser told one student he couldn't listen to his iPod while completing an in-class assignment, "he just blew up at me," she recalled. "He said, 'I can't write without an iPod.' They are addicted to multi-tasking. They need a soundtrack to their lives."

In interviews, professors relate with equal parts bemusement and concern similar stories of student discourtesy. James Klumpp, a communications professor at the University of Maryland, College Park, said he recently observed a younger colleague's 40-student lecture class and counted 50 instances of students entering or leaving the room during one 75-minute session.

At Seattle Pacific University, a small private college in Washington State, faculty have a shorthand for the new

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generation of disruptive students: "the boys in the baseball caps."

"They sit in the back row and make snide comments under their breath," explained an English professor, Susan VanZanten Gallagher. "That's very disruptive to the class as a whole and quite disheartening to the teacher."

Of course, bemoaning the ill-mannered antics of college students is a tradition as old as academe itself. In the mid-16th century, the president of Bavaria's University of Ingolstadt -- and future saint -- Peter Canisius complained to Rome of "barbarian packs [of] students ... roaming the streets ... blowing horns and acting like a bunch of drunken madmen."

The difference today is that faculty complaints are not about acts of intentional rebellion -- whether political sit-ins or post-adolescent partying -- but about being treated as mere service-providers in a consumer transaction, neither automatically feared nor revered.

In response, many colleges are trying to persuade their paying customers to buy into traditional notions of civility, and restore the sanctity of the classroom.

In 2003, American University launched a campus-wide civility campaign branded "Civitas," the Latin word for body-politic, or citizenship. The on-going initiative includes an annual "civitas week" at the start of the fall semester, including lectures and workshops for the university community.

Civitas co-chair Bernard Schulz said American University officials have been asked to make presentations on their effort to higher education institutions around the country, from Wyoming's higher education commission to Georgetown University and Loyola College in Baltimore.

Likewise, when the Chronicle of Higher Education published an article in 2004 about a "contract on classroom behavior" that Western Illinois University's John Drea asks his students to sign (in exchange for extra-credit points), the marketing professor received about 30 requests for copies of his 14-point covenant of classroom etiquette, from sources as diverse as Harvard University and a 6th grade elementary school teacher.

One sought-after speaker is P.M. Forni, Johns Hopkins University professor of Italian literature, who in 1997 founded the Hopkins Civility Project, which examines the role of etiquette and manners in modern society. Forni's slim 2002 book, *Choosing Civility*, is required reading at many faculty-development seminars and civility campaigns.

Forni is at work on a new book on rudeness, and is planning a chapter on the growth of unruliness in academia.

"To try to explain the current high incidence of incivility on college campuses we can invoke the continuing decline of the principle of authority, the fact that the new generations have not received serious training in good manners at home, genuine ignorance about expected behavior, and the rising costs of college tuition, with the attendant rise of a consumer mentality among students," said Forni.

The Internet age has also ushered in an era of "radical informality," he said, but one in which the Web replaces the teacher as the most trusted repository of knowledge. "Hence, less incentive to pay attention in class, more boredom, more frustration and more disruptive behavior."

Not that the teachers escape blame in Forni's analysis. "And then there are bad professors," he said. "The uninvolved, the arrogant and the burnt-out, the sarcastic and the dismissive."

Improving "relational skills" on campus is important not just to foster a better learning environment, he said, but to prepare students for the workforce.

"We have ascertained that relational intelligence is a much more precise predictor of success in school and in life than the kind of intelligence that we measure with IQ," Forni said, citing research by Daniel Goleman, the former New

York Times reporter whose 1995 book *Emotional Intelligence* popularized the theory about the predictive value of non-cognitive talents, such as the ability to relate well to others.

Despite the lack of empirical data on the rise of campus incivility, there is a growing body of literature about how to address it. Experts advise professors to include behavioral expectations in course syllabi and to lead by example.

In his own classes, Forni practices what he calls a "soft formality," addressing his students by their last names, and forbidding eating, drinking or wearing hats. "I believe that encourages the student to care about the protocols of behavior in a way that he or she would not otherwise," he said.

Instructors often facilitate student misconduct by failing to discipline it, says Patrick Morrisette, a psychology professor at Canada's Brandon University who has studied classroom incivility. "We don't want to disrupt or disturb the student because there are some people who really believe in the student-as-consumer framework, and we want to keep the customer happy," he said. "Because without the consumer, there's no revenue, right?"

That's how professors ought to be thinking, according to Sean Smith, a Towson freshman who is financing his education by working six hours a day as a Web designer, in addition to attending the university full-time.

"We pay attention when we want to," said Smith, who acknowledges napping sometimes in lectures, when the instructor is "annoying" or boring. "We have to spend all this money, so it shouldn't be our responsibility to have to teach ourselves the content. The teachers should try to make it interesting."

From Smith's perspective, it's rude of professors to publicly embarrass students who are caught text-messaging or surfing the Internet, in-class activities he says are common among Towson students. "This is my time, this is my money. The teacher is paid to be here. He should try to be a good employee."

Fear of appearing incompetent to department chairmen and administrators is also a reason that instructors sometimes fail to report student unruliness in the classroom, Morrisette said, a phenomenon which Seattle Pacific University's Gallagher has noticed among junior faculty concerned about the importance of teaching evaluations in the promotion and tenure process.

"I had a young female faculty member tell me about some extremely rude behavior on the part of some male students in her class," said Gallagher, who directs her university's faculty-development programs. "She didn't want to tell her department chair because it would reflect poorly on her ability to control the class. I happen to know her department chair would be appalled."

In negotiating these issues, four-year colleges and universities can learn from community colleges, says George Lavery, a senior administrator at the Community College of Baltimore County-Catonsville. About 20 years ago, the two-year school developed a first-year course now called "Achieving Academic Success," which focuses on improving student behavior, time management strategies, even "listening skills," according to an online course description.

The credit-bearing course is not mandatory, but is strongly encouraged, and has grown from about two sections a semester to more than 40 today. As a result, Lavery said, student unruliness is usually dramatically reduced after the first semester.

While welcoming the increased attention to student behavior, some observers worry that university officials are too quickly inclined toward punitive solutions, and that sweeping civility initiatives may end up encroaching on academic freedom.

"I think that the technology revolution certainly has prompted greater insensitivity on the part of students," said Gary Pavela, who has directed judicial programs at the University of Maryland, College Park, and is a frequent consultant to universities on issues of student behavior. "But too much on campuses I've been finding in discussion the

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focus shifts very quickly to, 'When do I kick them out of class?' or 'When do I call the police?'" he said.

Not enough attention is paid to the need to change teaching styles to better engage the current crop of students who have grown up with captivating technology, Pavela believes, and teachers often mistake student restlessness for rebelliousness.

"We are talking about a millennial generation, and if you look at surveys about their values and their response to authority, they're hardly a rebellious bunch. So that suggests, and what most experienced teachers find, is that simply discussing the issue and ... involving the students in developing the rules, really does solve the problem."

Pavela cites Johns Hopkins's new politeness policy as an example of dangerous over-reaching in the name of civility.

The policy was formally adopted by Hopkins in November while the university was investigating an undergraduate who wrote a controversial invitation to a "Halloween in the 'Hood" fraternity party. The student was later suspended.

The first bulleted item in the university's "Principles for Ensuring Equity, Civility and Respect for All" reads:

"The Johns Hopkins University is an environment in which all people behave in a manner that engenders mutual respect, treating each other with courtesy and civility regardless of position or status in the academy. Rude, disrespectful behavior is unwelcome and will not be tolerated."

In explaining the university's decision to censure a student for "crude and tasteless" speech, President William R. Brody wrote in a campus newsletter that the party invitation -- which contained mocking references to blacks and hip-hop culture -- did not deserve free-speech protections because it was "a fundamental breach of civility." Brody urged the Hopkins community to read Professor Forni's book on civility.

Forni says he is philosophically uncomfortable with the notion of enforceable codes of civility, and that he did not help craft the civility policy.

"I think there is educational value in behaving as persons of integrity, compassion, and empathy not because we are compelled by a written statement, but because we believe that it is the right thing to do, and it's freely chosen," he said.

As a private institution Hopkins is not legally obligated to extend First Amendment protections to students, though some private universities, such as Yale and Harvard, have voluntarily committed themselves to the same speech standards by which public universities must operate, Pavela said.

Pavela said that by formalizing an obligation to courtesy and civility, without defining what those terms mean, Hopkins risks stifling intellectual expression. "The definition of civility has changed rather dramatically over the years. There was a time that civility meant you ate your asparagus in a particular way," he said. "A lot of people thought that what Martin Luther King did was uncivil.

"A broad term like 'incivility' is in many ways comparable to 'un-American,' and we know how that has been abused in the past."

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2. Johns Hopkins University professor P.M. Forni makes an academic study of "civility" in cultures and in public life.

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