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Is it Incivility or Mental Illness? Understanding and Coping with Disruptive Student Behavior in the College Classroom

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Abstract

Rising rates of incivility in the college classroom can generate stress for both faculty and students. However, incivility can take multiple forms, have different causes and require different management techniques. In some cases disruptive behavior is the result of student faculty interactions, and can be ameliorated by improved communication or behavioral strategies. In other cases the behavior is symptomatic of more serious forms of mental illness. This paper will focus on helping faculty to distinguish incivility from mental illness, and to develop effective strategies for coping with disturbing behavior.

Keywords: Classroom incivility, mental illness, coping.

In recent years the world has watched in disbelief as four disturbed college-age students inexplicably shot and killed multiple people in public settings. While the circumstances differ, it is now known that all four shooters had shown signs of mental illness prior to their attacks. Jared Loughner, the former community college student who went on a shooting rampage at a gathering hosted by US Congresswoman Gabby Giffords, was described as hostile and dark by classmates and teachers, and has subsequently been diagnosed with schizophrenia. On the basis of his behavior he was eventually suspended from his school, which did not have a counseling service on campus. Cho Seung-Hui, the student who shot numerous people at Virginia Tech University in 2007, had a history of severe anxiety and had received psychological treatment on and off since he was a teenager. James Holmes, the young man who shot and killed multiple people at the Batman movie premier, had recently been denied admission to a graduate neuroscience program and had also been treated for psychiatric issues. Adam Lanza, responsible for the mass shooting at the Sandy Hook Elementary school in Connecticut, was described by friends and family as a loner, with social and emotional problems. While news pundits and the public speculated on how and why these young men were able to commit such atrocities, faculty members in classrooms across the country found themselves wondering if the occasionally disruptive, confusing, or disturbing behavior exhibited by their students was indicative of another tragedy in the making.

Unfortunately, even experienced law enforcement and mental health professionals cannot always predict a person's future behavior. However, knowing how to differentiate un-

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civil behavior from mental illness and determining when either sort of behavior is serious enough to warrant outside intervention is a start. The irony is that few college professors entered academics thinking that managing disruptive behavior in the classroom, and working with disturbed students, would be an integral component of their future career.

Typically academics don't spend much of their time in graduate school learning to teach. Fagen and Wells (2004) reported that a significant number of doctoral students at institutions of higher education felt they had not received the necessary preparation for teaching. While many graduate programs do offer students the opportunity to teach, and some even have training programs in place, most graduate students spend far more time learning to talk about the content of their discipline, than mastering the interpersonal and communications skills necessary to teach effectively**.** Even when graduate programs provide specific courses on how to teach, the focus is often on how best to deliver course content, apply teaching techniques, and use technology to promote learning. Typically, far less emphasis is placed on teaching new faculty how to manage the interpersonal dynamics they are going to face in the classroom (Wingert & Molitor, 2009). As a result, many faculty members find themselves at a loss when they encounter a student who is disruptive, disrespectful, angry, excessively anxious, or irrational. In some cases such behavior is merely annoying, or distracting. However, if it escalates, or increases in severity, it can disrupt the learning environment for everyone, and can also cause significant stress for faculty members.

Learning to determine whether behavior is uncivil, or symptomatic of an underlying mental issue, and determining how best to respond to such challenges, can benefit both students and faculty members. The first step is to assess the disruptive or disturbing behaviors and to attempt to understand why they are occurring. The second is to have a plan in place to respond appropriately, both in terms of maintaining control of the classroom, and addressing the underlying needs of the person who is caused the disruption.

What is Classroom Incivility and Who Does It Affect?

Certainly poor behavior in the classroom, and tension between faculty and students, is nothing new. In previous centuries students at Harvard and Yale expressed their displeasure with faculty members by rioting and throwing rotten fruit (Harvard Crimson, 1963). Fortunately, students don't typically throw things at faculty anymore. However, disruptive and even hostile behaviors do occur with regularity, and in fact appear to be on the increase (Kitzrow, 2003; Knepp, 2012). Consequently, researchers have begun to systematically explore student and faculty perceptions of bad behavior in the classroom (Appleby 1990; Meyers, Bender, Hill, & Thomas, 2006; Swinney, Elder, & Seaton, 2005).

Student Behaviors That Bother Faculty

Research on incivility suggests that disruptive student behaviors can be classified as immature, inattentive, or hostile. Immature and inattentive behaviors, include talking during lectures, coming in late, clowning around, sleeping, reading non-course material, cutting

class, and packing up to leave before the end of the class period. Such behaviors, while annoying, are not typically serious (Connelly, 2009). Disruptive or hostile behaviors tend to be more serious and typically include more dramatic actions such as arguing about grades, lying about missed work, cheating, disclosing personal information inappropriately, and attempting to intimidate or criticize the professor or other class members. Alberts, Hazen, & Theobald (2010) argue that the incidence of hostility or threats towards instructors have been increasing for the past 20 years. Although such behaviors have been termed "classroom terrorism" this suggests that the students involved are actively trying to disrupt the classroom or harm the professor, and can only be controlled by punitive measures. The work of Robert Boice (2000), however, suggests that students are most likely to disrupt class when they are frustrated with the classroom atmosphere, their own performance, or the instructor's behavior towards them.

Faculty Behaviors That Bother Students

Faculty behaviors that bother students include giving poorly organized lectures, providing ineffective reviews and visual aids, exhibiting irritating mannerisms, showing condescension or favoritism towards students, failing to provide grades and feedback in a timely manner, and being unavailable (Appleby, 1990). Not surprisingly, failing to fully explain evaluation processes and criteria, grading inconsistently, and being unclear about what students need to know for tests also distressed students. According to a survey by the Indiana University Center for Survey Research (2000), students are also bothered by faculty who appear aloof or uncaring, or let students ridicule their classmates. In a study of faculty student conflict, Tantleff-Dunn, Dunn, and Gokee (2002) reported that the three most common sources of student faculty conflicts were grades, exams, and excuses for missed work. Although unhappiness with faculty behavior and willingness to work with students accounted for almost one third of conflicts they studied, most students who reported a grade conflict with a faculty member also said that they were more interested in how the faculty member treated them than in whether their grade was changed or not.

Student Behaviors That Bother Other Students

Students can also irritate other students with their behaviors. Lynch and McNaughton-Cassill (2004) surveyed students at a large state university regarding the behaviors they found most frustrating on the part of other students. The top 5 behaviors cited were failing to contribute to group projects, using cell phones in class, cheating, belittling others, and talking during class. Bjorklund and Rehling (2010) found the most frequent uncivil behaviors involved coming to class late or leaving early, and using electronics in distracting ways in the classroom. In this study, students ranked talking in class after being asked to stop, coming to class under the influence of alcohol or drugs, and allowing a cell phone to ring, as the most uncivil behaviors. The Lynch and McNaughton study also indicated that the majority of students want and expect faculty to manage and control disruptive student behaviors, and will blame the faculty member if they fail to do so. Ausbrooks, Jones, & Tijerina (2011) report that many students believe faculty don't address incivility as often or as strongly as they should. Clearly, both faculty and students have concerns about the behavior of others in the classroom. In addition to impacting the

learning of those involved, incivility in the classroom has been shown to correlate with lowered student perception of their academic development and decreased commitment to their university (Hirschy & Braxton, 2004).

Factors That Influence Incivility

Robert Boice (2000) argued that faculty often set the stage for conflict by coming across to students as uncaring, disparaging, and unfair in terms of testing and grading. Students then respond by disrupting class, behaving disrespectfully, and failing to participate in classroom activities. Berger (2000) argues that faculty who do not make the effort to connect with students in prosocial ways (making eye contact, using an encouraging not a disparaging tone of voice) actually fuel incivility. Although faculty may contend that teaching should be about content, not personality and social interactions, the reality is that as social beings we are constantly monitoring and adjusting our interactions with others. By definition, the faculty member in the classroom is the authority who sets the rules, determines the content of the course, and sets the tone of interactions. Building rapport, showing control, and responding appropriately to feedback are all characteristics we admire in coaches, politicians, CEOs and leaders outside the classroom. It is not unreasonable then, for students to look to us for the same sort of leadership from faculty in the classroom.

Faculty Characteristics and Incivility

Unfortunately, some faculty experience more challenges and incivility from students, than others. Research suggests that new, inexperienced teachers and women are most likely to experience rude disrespectful behavior in the classroom (Boice, 2000; Alberts et al., 2010). Specifically, younger teachers and women report more frequent student incivility, and women are more likely to rate such incidents as severe. Presumably, student perceptions of the competence or personal characteristics of a faculty member influence how they respond to that person in the classroom. While experience will only come with time, faculty who appear confident, organized, and caring seem to experience less overall classroom conflict (Tantleff-Dunn et al., 2002).

The relationship between faculty gender, and incivility is complex as well. Hart and Cress (2008) reported that as full professors women teach more classes than men. Furthermore, at the associate and assistant levels women taught the same number of courses, but women worked with more students on an individual basis. Respondents also indicated that they felt that students expected greater nurturing from female than male teachers, while still wanting the female professor to come across as an authority in the classroom. In another study, 82% of female faculty women reported having been challenged about their professional identity or expertise in the classroom and 83% of students admitted that they have different standards for male and female faculty members, and often expected females to be more caring than males (Goodyear, Reynolds, & Gragg, 2010). Research also indicates that female faculty members spend significantly more time on mentoring and service than do their male counterparts (Misra, Lundquist, Dahlberg Holmes, & Agiomavritis, 2011), receive more student email (Duran, Kelly, & Keaton 2005) and are

more likely to receive inappropriate emails from students (Bruner, Yates, & Adams, 2008). Such findings suggest that female faculty members often teach more, and encounter more challenges from students than do male faculty, and so have to spend more time and energy managing their courses.

Managing Classroom Incivility

The good news is that there are things teachers can do to create a positive, constructive, civil atmosphere in the classroom, and in their interactions with their students (Boice, 1996; Twale & DeLuca, 2008). These include being very clear about behavioral expectations, and grading policies (Matejka & Kurke, 1994; Morrissette, 2001). McKeachie and Svinicki (2006) present an overview of strategies for effective teaching in the college classroom. In addition to presenting clear, organized lectures, and being fair about grading policies, the use of active learning strategies and interactive techniques has been shown to promote learning and classroom civility. It is also useful to establish rituals for the beginning and ending of class so students know what to expect. Explicitly telling students what you will cover in a given day is an easy way to enhance their sense of control.

Faculty can also build a sense of camaraderie with students by acknowledging and rewarding those who are trying to succeed in class. Using humor to engage students, and paying attention to their nonverbal signals can be helpful too. It is even possible to gauge the success of these efforts by integrating active learning exercises and question and answer sessions into lectures so students can discuss what they are learning, and let faculty know what they don't understand. Such feedback can also be collected formally through the use of mid-term feedback surveys giving faculty the opportunity to improve the classroom environment and demonstrate their willingness to attend to help students learn (Morissete, 2010).

Interpersonally, making eye contact with students, learning their names when possible, moving around the class to chat individually when handing out papers, or during group activities, and being available after class and during office hours to talk, can also decrease the chance of uncivil behavior. Kearney and Plax (1992) view such situations as opportunities for faculty to model prosocial behaviors that in turn generate prosocial responses from students. When student behavior is inappropriate, or hostile, faculty also need to learn how to respond effectively. Letting students know that such behaviors won't be tolerated, validating alternative opinions, and promoting a spirit of conversation, not confrontation in the classroom can all serve to reduce tension and conflict (Warren, 2000). Acknowledging differences in opinion, without defensiveness, clarifying misperceptions, and not humiliating people can be difficult in the heat of the moment, but modeling such behavior in the classroom can serve as a valuable learning tool for students (Kandlebinder, 2008).

In some cases such discussions may even need to occur outside of the classroom. Alberts et al., (2010) surveyed faculty members and reported that three quarters of their respondents had spoken to students about incivilities outside the classroom, and most found it to be an effective approach. Dealing with students one on one without an audience can sub-

stantially change the interaction. One approach when students self-disclose too much, is to suggest that they save their comments for office hours so the faculty member can better address them. This strategy can diminish the behavior without conveying the message that the faculty member doesn't care about the student's concerns. However, no matter how emotionally, and verbally skilled the faculty member is, there will occasionally be students whose behavior is impervious to normal social and behavioral cues. At that point faculty are faced with determining whether they are dealing with a student who is acting out, or with someone who is mentally ill.

A relatively new source of student faculty stress involves electronically communication. Nworie and Haughton (2008) argue that technology has changed the nature of incivility in that it provides increased opportunities for distraction and disruption both in and out of the classroom. Thirty-five percent of nursing students taking online courses reported that their peers were rude online, and 60% felt that a faculty member was uncivil to them online (Rieck & Crouch, 2007). Even when faculty report that email serves a useful purpose in facilitating communication, they still feel pressured by student's expectations that they will be available 24/7. They also report that they believe that students say things in email they wouldn't be willing to say in person (Duran et al., 2005). While it is sometimes difficult to resist the urge to retaliate electronically to student's attacks, the reality is that such exchanges can both escalate the conflict, and reflect badly on the faculty member if the conflict escalates into complaints to administrators or campus judicial bodies. Saving written conversations with students can also help to bolster your position if they reveal that you responded professionally to an impolite missive.

In some cases uncivil behaviors are simply the result of tired, overbooked, or underperforming students attempting to manage their stress by multitasking during class, pretending they don't care, or have better things to be doing, or distracting themselves and those around them during class. In other cases uncivil behaviors may reflect frustration with a teacher, rebellion, or unrealistic expectations about college (Knepp, 2012). However, if students fail to respond to verbal and behavioral efforts to manage their actions, faculty members may need to move beyond simple behavioral rewards and punishments. If in fact the student's behavior is associated with mental illness, faculty may need to adopt alternative strategies. Learning to recognize the signs of mental illness, and knowing who to consult on your campus, can be a crucial component of dealing with disturbed and/or disturbing students.

Managing Online Incivility

A relatively new source of academic stress involves electronic communication. Nworie and Haughton (2008) argue that technology has changed the nature of incivility in that it provides increased opportunities for distraction and disruption both in and out of the classroom. In addition, many more courses are now being offered either partly or wholly online. Certainly, communicating online can change the nature of faculty-to-student and student-to-student interactions. Galbraith and Jones (2010) characterized online incivility into four categories including challenges to authority, offensive remarks, a sense of entitlement, and academic dishonesty. While all of these behaviors could also occur in a face-

to-face classroom, the sense of anonymity or distance created by mediated communication has the potential to create conditions that promote such behaviors. For example, Duran et al. (2005) suggested that students are often willing to say things in email they wouldn't be willing to say in person.

The prevalence of online grading recording systems has also changed the nature of faculty student interactions. I find that my efforts to make my grading policies transparent by including explicit guidelines about how to calculate grades at any given time can result in students attempting to bargain for extra points throughout the course, instead of waiting until the final grades are posted. Electronic communications also carry with them the potential for misunderstanding because they lack the social cues often transmitted via tone of voice and facial expressions (Byron, 2008). Even attempts to communicate via emoticons and conventions such as capitalizing words for emphasis may not be interpreted the same way by students and faculty. Furthermore, such misunderstandings can go both ways. Thirty-five percent of nursing students taking online courses reported that their peers were rude online, and 60% felt that a faculty member was uncivil to them online (Rieck & Crouch, 2007).

Even when faculty report that email serves a useful purpose in facilitating communication, they still feel pressured by student's expectations that they will be available 24/7. At a more philosophical level Forni (2008) writes that faculty and students often differ greatly in their approach to the use of the Internet in learning. He speculates that a natural conflict can emerge between faculty, who spent much of their professional life learning and memorizing information, and younger students who treat learning as a retrieval process based largely on looking material up as needed.

The solution to these misunderstandings however, may not differ that much from suggestions for managing civility in the classroom. While it is sometimes tempting to respond to students with our own annoyance, the reality is that such exchanges can both escalate the conflict, and reflect badly on the faculty member if the conflict escalates into complaints to administrators or campus judicial bodies. Being very clear about course expectations, monitoring online chat sites for the appropriateness of activity, and checking the intent of student's messages before reacting can all help promote civility. Saving written conversations with students can also help to bolster your position if they reveal that you responded professionally to an impolite missive.

When Incivility Stems From Mental Illness

Research suggests that the numbers of students dealing with mental illness on college campuses is on the rise (Sharkin, 2006; Guthman, Iocin, & Konstas, 2010). There are a number of explanations for this increase. In some cases the trend may simply reflect improvements in the identification and detection of mental conditions. But in addition, more people than ever are going to college. Since many psychiatric conditions first emerge in late adolescence and early adulthood, it isn't surprising that college age students experience the first symptoms of mental illness while at school. Ironically, improvements in the treatment of mental illness are also influencing this pattern. Before the advent of psy-

chotropic medications people with serious mental health conditions were often unable to function well enough to gain admission or continue to attend college. However, the advent of psychotropic medication means that even students with serious forms of mental illness can successfully compete for college admission, and succeed academically, in ways they couldn't before such treatment was available. A survey by the American College Counseling Association (2011) found that 44% of students who seek counseling on college campuses have been in psychological or psychiatric treatment before coming to school. Changes in the laws regarding equal access to education for people with disabilities also means that students with serious problems are more likely to be accommodated on campus. Of course, the stress of leaving home, going to school, establishing a social life, and meeting academic expectations can exacerbate ongoing symptoms, or result in students failing to sleep, take their medication, or engage in other mental health care efforts. Perhaps it is not surprising then, that students are increasingly seeking counseling for a variety of concerns ranging from adjustment disorders related to leaving home, formulating career goals, and dealing with relationship stress, to depression and anxiety, eating disorders and substance abuse, and chronic conditions such bipolar disorder and schizophrenia. In 2006, the American College Health Association reported that 10% of college students suffered from depression during their college years. Even more disturbing The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry reports that 11.4% of college students think about suicide and over 1,100 college students commit suicide a year (Douglas et al., 1997).

Indicators of Mental Illness

While it is unrealistic to assume that faculty members will recognize and diagnose mental illness based on their classroom observations of student behaviors, humans are actually remarkably good at recognizing social and behavioral deviations from the norm. Even small children make quick decisions about whether they approve or disapprove of someone else's behavior, and we often seek to avoid those people whose actions seem inexplicable or disturbing. However, faculty don't have the option of simply ignoring inappropriate behavior in their classroom.

Signs of mental distress can include inappropriate emotional reactions, disclosing too much personal information in the classroom, showing disregard for the rights and feelings of others, misinterpreting communications from the faculty, poor impulse control, memory and attention problems, poor hygiene, and expressing evidence of hallucinations, delusions, paranoia, or thoughts of harming themselves or others (Norwood, 1998). Academic indicators such as the deterioration of work, missed assignments, and absenteeism can also be signs of difficulty. Students may also tell professors about self-injurious or worrisome behaviors such as suicidal or depressive thoughts, substance use, cutting, or engaging in disordered eating behaviors (Wingert & Molitor, 2009). Occasionally, a student may even focus on the professor in a hostile, sexual, or obsessive manor (Meunier & Wolfe, 2006), either by contacting them repeatedly electronically, misinterpreting their actions or even stalking them. In such cases faculty need to take action to protect themselves, as well as to get help for the student. If your own safety is in doubt it is advisable to contact the police immediately. It is always better to be safe than sorry.

Is Veteran Student Mental Health an Issue?

Recent media attention on Veteran's mental health issues are beginning to concern college personnel who are seeing an influx of student veterans using their educational benefits. While the majority of veterans will never exhibit disruptive behavior in the classroom, as a population, veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts are more likely to be dealing with PTSD, suicidal ideation, and mild traumatic brain injuries (mTBI) (Church, 2009; DiRamio & Spires, 2009; Rudd, Goulding, & Bryan, 2011). The symptoms of PTSD include hypervigilance or sensitivity to cues in the environment that remind the individual of trauma, difficulty concentrating and staying in the moment, and the paradoxical combination of rapid anger, and dampened emotional responsivity. Brain injuries, which can range from concussions to major head trauma, can cause a host of changes in cognitive abilities, impulse control, alertness, attention, and mood, all of which can impact the student's ability to interact with others and function in the classroom (Trudeau et al., 1998). Both PTSD and TBI can be associated with depression and suicide as well (Hoge et al., 2008).

For some veterans adjusting to college itself can be traumatic. Combat veterans often report feeling uncomfortable in crowds, or being confined in classrooms. In others cases they complain of having trouble paying attention in class or focusing on tests. Other veterans exhibit inappropriate emotions such as anger or anxiety that can be directed towards other students or the faculty members. Some Veteran students are already receiving mental health treatment, but this is not always the case. Should the Veteran's behavior begin to cause disruption in the classroom, or stress for you as a faculty member, it is key to approach the student, try to figure out if they are aware of how they are coming across, and to help them get help. Campuses are also starting to improve their student Veteran's services, and often are creating Veteran's liaison services, which can be a good source of information for faculty seeing help for a Veteran student (McNaughton-Cassill, 2012b).

Seeking Help for Mentally Ill Students

Faculty often worry that their concerns about a student are vague or implausible. But according to Ellen Gecker (2007), a psychiatric nurse who has worked on several college campuses, faculty need to learn trust their gut feelings. If you feel that a student is not functioning well it never hurts to consult with other faculty members or your supervisor in order to see if others who interact with the student mirror your concerns. Sharing mail or essays, and even inviting a colleague to sit in on a class with you can help you to gain perspective on the student's behavior and state of mind.

Sokolow and Lewis (2007) argue convincingly that campus responses to signs of mental illness on the parts of students need to be organized and integrated. Fortunately, in recent years most colleges have organized teams of personnel trained to respond to students with mental illness. Such teams may include staff from the Campus Counseling Center, Disability Services, Judicial Affairs, Housing, Police Officers and faculty. Unfortunately,

many faculty are not aware of such resources, so it would behoove Universities to be more open and vocal about the mental health resources available on their campus.
Once a faculty member has decided that a student's behavior is not a simple matter of incivility, they need to take action. Even if it is after hours, know how to contact the first responders on campus. If your concerns are based on written materials, share them with responders, and if they stem from behavioral observations, or verbal comments document them. The more information you can provide about the student's state of mind, and behavior, the easier it will be for response teams to determine the severity of the problem. If you think a student will go willingly you can refer them to your campus counseling facility, or walk them over. However, if you are concerned about a student committing suicide or hurting someone else, university police can check on the student, or contact community police to do so.

Ironically, when faced with disturbed student behavior many faculty worry about losing a students' trust or confidence if they raise their concerns with the student, or insist that they get help. Accustomed as they are to supporting individuality and diversity, faculty may also be hesitant about judging or reporting a student for idiosyncratic behavior. However, once a student has disclosed or demonstrated disruptive or potentially harmful behavior to you, your duty is to insure their safety, and the safety of those around them, over and above concerns about their reactions to your seeking help for them.

Faculty may also fear that they are over-reacting, or exacerbating a student's behavior by their responses. The reality though is that just as stopping someone from driving drunk doesn't make that person more of an alcoholic, seeking help for a student who is struggling won't make him or her more mentally ill. And, as with drunk driving, failing to seek such help can have tragic consequences. In fact, mental health professionals argue that it is better to err on the side of caution, than to overlook symptoms (Renninger, 2008). Research on suicide suggests that contrary to popular belief, talking about suicide does not prompt students to harm themselves, and in fact ignoring signs or symptoms of distress can contribute to feelings of hopelessness. Even when the students' immediate well-being is not in question, untreated mental illness can take a toll on physical health, social interactions, and academic performance.

Figuring out who to consult with, and who can follow up with students on your campus is a major component of coping with students who are experiencing mental difficulties. Unfortunately, even with increased emphasis on campus responses to mental illness, finding effective help for mentally ill students can be difficult. Sometimes family members are no longer willing or able to help students, many college age students don't have adequate insurance to cover extensive psychological treatment or in-patient services, and many community based services are over-extended, and can have long waiting lists for care. If the student's behavior is disturbed enough to warrant immediate treatment both campus and community police can and will seek hospitalization.

If your University has a Counseling Center, familiarize yourself with their services and policies. Sometimes students don't know they are there, or will go with a push from a caring professor. Colleges with graduate training programs in psychology or counseling

may also offer low cost treatment for students and community members if they don't wish to seek counseling on campus. Mentally ill students may also qualify for Disability services (American Council of Education, 2012). Keep in mind though, that although Universities are required to make reasonable accommodations for students with physical or mental disabilities (ACPA, 2012), receiving such help does not give them the right to disrupt the learning environment for other students. If you feel a student is abusing their privileges, consult with your Disability Services Office to see what how best to respond. Many campuses also have people on their housing or judicial affairs staff who are trained to respond to aberrant student behavior, and can help you determine how best to respond to a student who is disturbed.

Finally, faculty who are dealing with uncivil behavior or mentally ill students often find themselves stressed as well (McNaughton-Cassill, 2012a). Dealing with disrespectful, hostile, or inexplicable behavior can take its toll. Balancing the teaching, research, and service demands common in academia can be stressful enough without factoring in student disruptions. Talking with colleagues, getting more information about mental illness, taking care of yourself in terms of getting enough sleep and time to relax, and even seeking personal mental health care can be helpful. Whether the ivory tower was ever really an escape from reality is debatable, but in today's academic world many faculty feel they are spending as much time in the moat as they are in the towers.

Conclusion

In conclusion, managing behavior in the classroom can be one of the most challenging tasks a faculty member undertakes. Whether students are engaging in incivility because they are stressed, bored, rebellious, or experiencing a mental illness, faculty still bear the responsibility for responding to the student appropriately, getting them help if necessary, and continuing to provide a comfortable learning environment for other students. In many cases creating a calm, cooperative classroom atmosphere can be enough to promote student civility and collaboration, and at the very least may help students who are struggling with mental issues to manage their condition while in the classroom.

However, mentally ill students may require more care and support than faculty members are trained, or able to give. If you find yourself dreading a particular class or encounters with a difficult student, it is well worth taking the time to articulate your concerns to a colleague. If reasonable efforts to connect with a student don't work, then calling for support is not only necessary, but also the ethical thing to do. Faculty members often pride themselves on their ability to identify problems, integrate information, and solve problems in innovative ways. Applying such strategies to understanding and managing disruptive behaviors in the classroom is a necessary skill if we as faculty are going to create effective learning environments for our increasingly diverse student population.

Ironically, when faced with disturbed student behavior many faculty worry about losing a students' trust or confidence if they raise their concerns with the student, or insist that they get help. Accustomed as they are to supporting individuality and diversity, faculty may also be hesitant about judging or reporting a student for idiosyncratic behavior.

However, once a student has disclosed or demonstrated disruptive or potentially harmful behavior to you, your duty is to insure their safety, and the safety of those around them, over and above concerns about their reactions to your seeking help for them.

Such efforts are made even more salient in light of highly publicized cases in which students who were having personal or academic problem shot and killed faculty at their institution Lauren (2003). While such well-publicized events are actually rare relative to other forms of campus violence, they are also extremely threatening (Carr, 2004). Faculty, who are expected to maintain academic rigor, may find themselves at odds with students who are desperate to get the grade they need to meet their future career goals. Graduate students in particular, may focus their academic or personal frustrations on the faculty members they are working with Lauren (2003). Certainly, Universities need to take security measures to protect and promote safety. Fortunately, the report of the National Campus Safety and Security Project (2009) indicated that 85% of colleges have emergency preparedness plans in place. Such efforts include creating procedures to make it easier for people to identify and report suspicious behavior, and developing plans for assessing and responding to such responses.

However, prevention is typically preferable to waiting to respond when a tragedy occurs. Recognizing, acknowledging, and responding effectively to signs of mental distress are the keys to preventing disturbing or violent behavior. This however, can be daunting to faculty who already feel overwhelmed about managing their teaching, research, and service commitments. Teachers may also fear that they are over-reacting, or exacerbating a student's behavior by their responses. The reality though is that just as stopping someone from driving drunk doesn't make that person more of an alcoholic, seeking help for a student who is struggling won't make him or her more mentally ill. And, as with drunk driving, failing to seek such help can have tragic consequences. In fact, mental health professionals argue that it is better to err on the side of caution, than to overlook symptoms (Renninger, 2008). Research on suicide suggests that contrary to popular belief, talking about suicide does not prompt students to harm themselves, and in fact ignoring signs or symptoms of distress can contribute to feelings of hopelessness. Even when the students' immediate well-being is not in question, untreated mental illness can take a toll on their physical health, social interactions, and academic performance.

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