

~~class, academic preparation, learning styles, etc.) and bridging those gaps in a large setting is difficult. Some reasoned that because the current generation of students was raised on television, MTV, and video games, it no longer is able to attend to the unidirectional, largely verbal transmission of information often found in large lectures. Finally, faculty members reminded each other that issues outside of class (e.g., a roommate conflict, not getting into a preferred course) might anger and frustrate students, affecting their behavior during class.~~

~~Teachers and administrators did not escape fault. Some discussants wondered why more attention is not paid to pedagogical issues in training for an academic career, leaving PhDs without the knowledge and skills to deal with disruptive students. Others asked why teachers themselves devote little attention to learning about instructional practices and pedagogy. Still others called for teachers to examine their own behavior (e.g., over or under using authority, expertise, and power) when faced with inappropriate deportment. Some blamed campus administrators for catering to students rather than punishing unacceptable behavior. Even society took a hit for encouraging cultures of consumerism, entitlement, youth orientation, and confrontational oratory, all of which discourage good manners, respect, and civil behavior in the home, school, and community.~~

Creating a Constructive Large-Class Environment

As instructors, while we may not agree on definition, standards, and reasons for classroom incivility, we can be sure of two things. First, when confronted with behaviors that do not match our basic expectations for classroom behavior, we need to do something. The longer inappropriate behavior continues, the more acceptable it becomes and the more difficult it is to stop it. Second, it is easier to prevent disruptive behaviors than it is to deal with them after the fact. Establishing a positive climate and expectations for large-class learning, for example, can avert many problems.

This section discusses four groups of specific strategies that college teachers can use to guide their efforts in creating a constructive large-class environment: 1) define expectations for student behavior at the outset, 2) decrease anonymity by forming personal relationships with students, 3) encourage active learning, and 4) self-assess your behavior and seek feedback from students and colleagues (Sorcinelli, 1994).

Define Expectations at the Outset

The importance of defining a class at the outset cannot be overstated. The first class meeting offers an ideal opportunity both for welcoming students and for communicating expectations for classroom conventions, such as arriving, leaving, and talking in class. The challenge lies in establishing both a pleasant atmosphere and a code of conduct. One professor on my campus, a microbiologist who routinely teaches a lecture course with 500 students, starts each first class by acknowledging the worries that go with beginning a course in the sciences, by discussing the constraints and the benefits of a large class, and by encouraging students to get to know him (e.g., bringing in topical articles from the local and campus paper, stopping by his desk before or after class). At the same time, he conveys to students the notion that they have certain responsibilities. He explicitly states expectations for behavior, asserting that, especially because the class is large, inattentiveness, tardiness, and idle chatter can only serve to break down the respect between teacher and students. Another colleague in business law videotapes her first class meeting so that students who are still completing their schedules or waiting in line for a parking sticker will not miss the setting of both tone and conduct.

A clear, informative syllabus can reduce student confusion about appropriate behavior. Teachers should describe, in a positive manner, what they anticipate and would like to see in terms of classroom behavior. Equally important, they should outline, with candor, what they dislike. Put simply, the syllabus should indicate whatever rules are deemed necessary for the course to run smoothly. For example, a professor who teaches introductory sociology adds a classroom behavior contract to his syllabus so that everyone starts out with the same assumptions. It describes rules of classroom conduct for the student (e.g., to cease talking at the bell, to refrain from speaking to seatmates during class, to enter by the front door and sit in the designated front rows when unavoidably arriving late, or having to leave early). It also outlines responsibilities of the instructor (e.g., to be on time for class, to spend at least five minutes after class for individual questions, to put a lecture outline on the overhead daily, to never hold the class for more than 30 seconds after class ends). He explains that the rules have one goal—to make the experience of the course more rewarding and enjoyable for all—fellow students as well as the teacher.

The large-class atmosphere also can be enhanced significantly when the instructor is willing to entertain reasonable suggestions and objections. Giving students some choices for shaping classroom policies within prescribed limits is likely to be appreciated. For example, an instructor might tell students he cannot tolerate side-talking during his lectures, but can live with students drinking a Coke or munching on a candy bar. Other possibilities for choice might include whether to drop the lowest quiz score, how much work to assign over a vacation break, or how many chapters in the text to cover for a given test.

Decrease Anonymity

When a student creates a personal relationship with the teacher as well as peers, civility comes more easily. Large classes present many more challenges than do smaller, more personal classes, however, in reducing anonymity. Lowman (1995) has asserted "the easiest way to begin forming personal relationships with students is to learn their names," (p. 67). A rare teacher can memorize hundreds of names, but there are other ways to make personal contact with students. One way is to administer a background questionnaire on the first day of class. A professor in Germanic languages and literature asks students to share their hometown, what dorm they live in, why they are taking the course, whether they work and how much, and their extracurricular interests or experiences. She tabulates the data and shares it in the next class, announcing that "a fifth of our class is from the Boston area" (the Bostonians cheer), or "will the 12 students in the marching band raise their hands," etc. She uses the questionnaire throughout the term to draw on students' common and unique interests and experiences. A professor in organic chemistry asks her 100 students to fill out background information on an index card and to tape a picture to it. She goes through the cards, repeating each student's name and scanning the face that goes with it. She can identify nearly every student's name within a week. Yet another professor, in information systems, chooses both to lead a computer lab section and spot visit other sections as a way to get to know students outside of lecture and to keep a pulse on how the lectures and labs work together to integrate student learning.

While announced office hours may signal an instructor's accessibility to students, many students are reluctant to use them. A journalism professor encourages personal contact with students by coming to

class early. This allows her to work the aisles, chatting informally with students and eliciting their concerns. Similarly, she stays awhile after class to allow students to follow-up with a question or idea that they might have been reticent to bring up in class. Other faculty members find it helpful to schedule their office hours right after class. In that way, students who approach them after class have a chance to accompany the teachers to their offices to continue discussion.

A teacher in classics found that her 475 mostly first-year students were so reluctant to take advantage of office hours that she set up a coffee hour in the student center, reminding students that she would be at a corner table on most mornings at 10:00 a.m. and inviting them to come for coffee and conversation. She discovered students were more likely to arrive in groups of two or three and now encourages small-group visits.

Encourage Active Learning

Studies on active learning suggest that such methods engage students with content in ways that develop positive relationships among students as well as competencies and critical thinking skills—rather than solely the acquisition of knowledge. In large classes, however, students may resist non-lecturing approaches because they are in sharp contrast to the familiar passive listening role to which they have become accustomed. Faculty may fear that the use of active learning strategies will reduce the amount of available lecture time that can be devoted to content coverage (Bonwell, 1996).

Carbone (1998) offers three useful guidelines for getting started. First, be prepared. Decide on the goal of the activity, using an overhead to spell out the assignment (oral directions can lead to confusion). Make sure the task is clear and specific. For example, "Summarize the most important points you heard in today's lecture," or "List as many (fill-in-blank) as you can in the next four minutes." Second, ensure participation by requiring that individual or group assignments are handed in. These may or may not be graded but should require students' names to encourage attendance and participation. Finally, maintain order by limiting time and group size. Most large-lecture teachers that I work with use periods of two to ten minutes for group activities, interspersed with segments of lecture. This format stimulates student thinking, discussion, and learning without requiring large blocks of time. Also, in large lecture halls, even groups

of four or five students can prove unwieldy. Having students simply turn to the person next to them and pair up, or twist around to form triads helps keep noise levels down and encourages task completion.

There are a number of active learning strategies that are particularly suited to large classes (Bonwell, 1996; Carbone, 1998; Sorcinelli, 1994). Four effective and low-risk activities include:

Pause procedure. Stop the lecture every 13-18 minutes to allow students to work in pairs to compare and rework their notes for three to five minutes. Ask what questions arose from their review.

Short writes. Punctuating a lecture with short writing assignments is a powerful way to assess the degree to which students understand presented material. Twenty minutes into the lecture, questions might include, "What was the main concept presented in this portion of the lecture?" "Give an example of this principle or concept." "Explain this concept in your own words." "How does this idea relate to your own experience?" Five or ten minutes before the end of lecture, use the "one-minute paper," advocated by Angelo and Cross (1993), and simply ask, "What was the most important thing you learned in this lecture?" or "What questions remain unanswered?" Short writes can be submitted or form the basis for questions or class discussion.

Think-pair-share. About 15-20 minutes into the lecture, put a question or problem up on the overhead. Ask students to think, write, and then talk about the answer with the person next to them. (Writing and then talking about their answers can take five to ten minutes depending on the question's complexity). You may ask several pairs to share their answers with the whole class. You can also collect the writing and grade it simply: check for "okay," check-plus for "great." This technique can reveal how much students are learning from the lecture and lead to a major improvement in student understanding of fundamental concepts.

Formative quizzes. Formative—that is ungraded—quizzes can be used to efficiently determine how students comprehend material. Using the kinds of questions that might be used on your exams, place questions on the overhead, giving students appropriate time to respond. If the question entails multiple choices, students can raise their hands in agreement, as each prompt is featured. (An essay question might be broken into component parts.) This preview can help you determine student understanding and show students problem areas that warrant further study.

Examine Your Behavior and Seek Feedback from Students and Colleagues

Examine your own behavior when faced with inappropriate deportment in the large classroom. Surveys of students' pet peeves about teaching reveal that many are concerned about lecturing behaviors—including poor organization of the lectures; blocking the blackboard; talking too fast, softly, or slowly; poor use of class time (e.g., coming in late and stopping early). Other top complaints include intellectual arrogance—talking down to or showing a lack of respect for students, being unhelpful or not approachable, and employing confusing testing and grading practices (Appleby, 1990; Perlman & McCann, 1998).

Asking students for help in determining what is working and what merits some attention can be incredibly valuable in encouraging communication, establishing a responsive tone, and providing self-correcting feedback. One effective technique is to administer an informal course evaluation early in the semester (many teaching and learning centers will facilitate a midsemester feedback session with your students). Our center's staff ask students either in small groups or individually what they most like about the course and teaching of it, what they would like to see changed or improved, and what would make the course a better learning experience for them. When asked at midterm, we find that most students' responses are substantive and constructive—the technique demonstrates respect for and interest in students' voices and promises to improve their learning experience while the course is in process.

Colleagues can prove a sounding board and offer suggestions on how they approach civility issues in the classroom. For example, we facilitate a process by which early career faculty can visit large lecture classes that are taught by some of our outstanding teachers. After the observations, these senior colleagues join our junior faculty for an informal session in which we talk about what worked, raise questions about large-class problems, and brainstorm solutions. And over the last decade, our teaching and learning center has offered periodic campus-wide workshops on teaching large classes well. Again, we call on seasoned large-lecture teachers to help workshop participants to identify civility problems in large classes and to share best practices.