

Model and Reinforce Civil Behaviors and Professional Expectations

Just like in a classroom setting, instructor behaviors can have a big impact on the online course environment (Boettcher & Conrad, 2016; Nilson & Goodson, 2018; Palloff & Pratt, 2007; Stavredes, 2011). The online environment can leave a lot of room for conjecture (e.g., you do not reply to an email because you are busy; the student interprets the lack of response as not interested or caring). Therefore, it is important to be conscientious about the various ways you communicate and model civility. The online environment is also a good place to connect expectations with the professional behaviors students will most likely be expected to exhibit in the work environment.

As you consider ways to model and reinforce civil behaviors and professional expectations, first take the time to complete a self-reflection. The list of questions below is a good place to start. Then consider the opportunities you have to model and reinforce these behaviors for your students.

Questions for Self-Reflection

- How do you encourage students to reach out to you with their questions or concerns?
- How do you communicate and what tone do you use to ensure that students know you are truly interested in their learning and in the course topics?
- How do you ensure that students do not misinterpret the timing of your responses?
- How and how often do you reply to questions posted in online discussion forums?
- How do you respond to negative and/or disruptive behaviors?
- How closely do your expectations mirror workplace expectations?
- How often do you remind students of the connection between the expectations in your course and professional behaviors?
 - Do you explain the importance of checking for tone in an email?
 - Do you provide feedback on how a student communicates with you electronically?
 - Do you set expectations for participation in online classes and explicitly share how and why these expectations are required in the workplace as well?
 - Do you hold students to those professional expectations in online meetings and classes?
 - Do you provide feedback to students on how well they are meeting the professional expectations?

Tips for Instructor Behaviors That Positively Impact Online Civility

- **Be approachable.** Frequently remind and encourage students to take advantage of your virtual office hours. The more they hear you say it, the more likely they will be to take advantage of your availability. The more opportunity you have to connect with your students one-on-one, the better you will be able to understand and address difficult behaviors they may exhibit (Boettcher & Conrad, 2016).
- **Check for tone.** Always reread messages and discussion board posts to try to ensure that you are striking the right tone. Remember that humor can be difficult to communicate in a text-based format and can be easily misinterpreted. On the flip side, a serious tone can come off as more serious than intended. Always strive for an encouraging tone, even when dealing with difficult situations.
- **Commit to a response time for questions and emails.** Let students know how quickly you will respond to their questions and emails (within 24 to 48 hours is best) and then be sure to live up to your commitment. Failure to address student concerns in a timely fashion can send an unintended message that you are not interested in or supportive of them.
- **Connect expectations to professional behaviors.** When possible, remind students of the connection between the civil behaviors expected in your course and the behaviors they will be expected to display at work.

Sources

Boettcher, J. V., & Conrad, R.-M. (2016). *The online teaching survival guide: Simple and practical pedagogical tips* (2nd ed.). Jossey-Bass.

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