Building Civility

_The University of Minnesota is committed to providing outstanding educational experiences and a positive and supportive environment in which to work and learn._

When offensive, hostile, and intimidating behavior occurs, it interferes with one's ability to do well. In fact, 80% of respondents in a recent U of M survey who experienced these destructive behaviors said that it 'somewhat or completely' prevented them from doing their best work.

Departmental leadership can have a big impact on their unit’s environment. How to get started in promoting a healthy and productive climate? One step is to regularly and proactively communicate the importance of a positive climate in your department (even if it is not something you are immediately concerned about). Frequently communicating that a supportive climate is a core value for your department (along with taking some of the other steps outlined below) often goes a long way to achieving one.

Another important step is to assess the political-cultural landscape:
- How can you support the things that are going well?
- What problematic issues come up over and over again?
- What is the level of your concern?

**Levels of Concern**

**Level One - Apathetic / Disconnected**
People look out for themselves, perhaps compete with others for scarce resources.

**Level Two - Micro-aggressions**
Subtle, offensive comments; may be directed at a non-dominant group. May be intentional or unintentional.

**Level Three - Abrasive Behavior**
Offensive, hostile, intimidating behavior that interferes with one's ability to work and learn. May be intentional or unintentional.

**Level Four - Abusive Behavior**
Systematic destructive behaviors directed at individuals over time with serious negative consequences.

* The kinds of behaviors identified above are often normalized, tolerated, or difficult to identify.
Pro-active Steps to Building a Healthy Culture

*These seemingly small initiatives can help people feel part of a larger enterprise and build stronger departmental identity and community.*

- Design informal social opportunities or spaces, such as a monthly sponsored 'pizza lunch', to encourage positive interactions among students, staff, and faculty. Set up a sponsored coffee lounge in a comfortable space.

- Include a page on your department’s website focusing on your unit’s commitment to a positive culture; include information on “Wellness Matters” and Active Bystanders.

- Develop group norms, check in regularly to see if they are working. Encourage faculty to use a “Welcome to My Lab” letter. Challenge the notion that graduate advising is simply replicating one’s own experience as a graduate student. Encourage students with a variety of career goals.

- Identify faculty liaisons who are available for students to talk with informally about their concerns.

- Assign advising mentors to assist new faculty and those advisers who are experiencing difficulties in training and graduating their advanced students.

- Dig deeper into the root causes of significant, long-standing problems through anonymous surveys or other assessment tools. Provide workshops to departmental personnel on how to better manage problematic issues.

- Provide incentives for improving advising and mentoring of graduate and professional students.

- Establish consequences for not meeting departmental standards.

Addressing Problems

*Don’t do nothing* if someone comes to you for help with a problem. Resist the temptation to overlook difficulties that arise. While some problems will resolve themselves, those that remain will only get worse – sometimes much worse – over time.

*Listen* to the person raising the issue; be aware of power differences.

*Consult* with campus experts, especially on serious issues such as abusive behavior. Your collegiate associate dean is also a resource for you in such matters.

*Act with care*, so as not to make the problem worse. Not sure what to do? Try something you think might help, reassess, and stay engaged; remember small actions can have large effects.

Resources

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<th>Student Conflict Resolution Center</th>
<th>Office for Conflict Resolution</th>
<th>Graduate School</th>
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<td><a href="http://www.sos.umn.edu">www.sos.umn.edu</a> 612.626.0689, 254 Appleby Hall Contact: Jan Morse</td>
<td><a href="http://www.ocr.umn.edu">www.ocr.umn.edu</a> 612.624.1030, 662 Heller Hall Contact: Tamar Gronvall</td>
<td><a href="http://www.grad.umn.edu">www.grad.umn.edu</a> 612.625.2815, 321 Johnston Hall Contact: Karen Starry</td>
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