



March 2006

Seasonal Student Issues

There's a seasonal ebb and flow when it comes to student issues. Here are a few things your student may be experiencing this winter:

March

- ➔ Hidden conflicts between roommates and friends begin to arise
- ➔ Drug and alcohol use may increase
- ➔ Low energy levels and restlessness
- ➔ Changing or deciding on a major
- ➔ Mid-semester slump and sickness
- ➔ Mid-term anxiety
- ➔ Pledging begins for Greek organizations
- ➔ Making plans for next year—housing, classes and financial aid
- ➔ Seniors thinking about graduation
- ➔ Excitement or depression about Spring Break plans



Is "rude and crude" on its way out? Civility on Campus

A culture of civility. What does that expression mean to you? Could it be a culture where:

- people return shopping carts to the appropriate area instead of leaving them in the middle of a parking lot?
- you regularly let others into lines of traffic?
- a fellow passenger asks you what floor you need to go to and pushes the elevator button for you?
- people don't engage in complaint-fests?
- students don't eat disruptively throughout classes or have numerous side conversations during meetings?
- you get warning from the person in front of you before they lean their airplane seat back?
- rumors and gossip are not the norm?

An increasing number of campus conversations are centering on issues of civility. Faculty are concerned by student behavior in class and by students who "get in their face." Rude comments and gossip circles concern students. Staff feel caught in the crosshairs of "supervisor bashing" or dealing with increasingly uncivil phone calls. In short, a growing culture of rudeness is a growing campus concern.

In his book, *Choosing Civility* (2002), Dr. P.M. Forni, the cofounder of the Johns Hopkins Civility Project and a professor of Italian literature at the university, explores not just manners or politeness but *civility*. "Being civil," he

writes, "means being constantly aware of others and weaving restraint,

"We have a choice about how we behave, and that means we have the choice to opt for civility and grace."

- Dwight Currie

respect, and consideration into the very fabric of this awareness."

Dr. Forni shares The 25 Rules of Considerate Conduct, many of which may seem like common sense yet offer a nudge for us all to be more civil beings. His rules include:

1. Pay Attention
2. Acknowledge Others
3. Think the Best
4. Listen
5. Be Inclusive
6. Speak Kindly
7. Don't Speak Ill
8. Accept and Give Praise
9. Respect Even a Subtle "No"
10. Respect Others' Opinions
11. Mind Your Body

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Healthy Ways to Get to Know Your Student's Friends —

Getting to know your student's friends is an important way to connect. Peers have great influence on many college students—and your student is likely no exception.

The process can be easier than it may seem at first glance. The following suggestions can help bridge the gap between you, your student and her friends:

■ **Just Ask.** Your student is probably excited about the new friends she has met at college. Remember names and the next time you two talk on the phone, ask how those friends are doing.

■ **Connect to Classes.** Has your student chosen a major? If so, ask if he's met anyone interesting in any of his classes. Even if he hasn't, this might

give him a chance to vent about the people he's met that he dislikes—which



opens the gate for him to tell you about the better people he's met other places.

■ **Look at Photos.** Does your student have a camera? If so, ask her if she's taken any pictures of the people with whom she spends time. Again, students are generally excited about their new surroundings, and will jump at the chance to show people their new homes and the people they live with. Once you see faces, you will have a better time picturing what your student means when she talks about how her roommate never does her laundry or how she always walks to class with the redhead down the hall.

■ **Visit.** If the school is close enough where a drive to take your student out to dinner is a feasible option, do so, and ask him to invite his roommate or one or two of his friends. This way, you get to spend time with your son and meet and talk to his friends at the same time. He will appreciate the offer you extended to his new friends, and his friends will love you for buying them dinner.

■ **Share Memories from Your Own Experiences.** Tell your student about the time you went camping for a weekend when you were her age, or about when you tried to drive to a party but got lost and ended up having more fun in your residence hall room anyway. These stories will probably remind her of things that have happened to her, and will prompt her to tell you about what she and her friends have been up to.

When it comes to meeting friends, there are certain things *not* to do, also. Consider

avoiding the following:

■ **Badgering Your Student for Information.** If he doesn't want to

tell you, he's not going to—and excessive questioning will most likely make him clam up in the future, too.

■ **Making Your Student Suspect You Don't Trust Her.** Let her know you are excited to meet the new friends just to see who is in her life, not because you are hesitant and unsure if you're going to approve.

■ **Don't Judge on Appearances Alone.** Just because your student's new friend has a ring in her lip or his roommate doesn't dress like your idea of a successful young man doesn't mean they aren't good people and great influences. Your idea of an acceptable friend may be based on stereotypes—so check yourself before you say anything that might cause hurt feelings.

Using these tips will not automatically create a lasting bond between you and your student's friends, yet they will set you on the right track to a healthy relationship between you and your student. You've set a good example, so trust your student to do what he knows will make you proud.

by Jessica Polledri, an English major at the University of Mary Washington (VA)

Civility on Campus

12. Be Agreeable
13. Keep It Down (and Rediscover Silence)
14. Respect Other People's Time
15. Respect Other People's Space
16. Apologize Earnestly
17. Assert Yourself
18. Avoid Personal Questions
19. Care for Your Guests
20. Be a Considerate Guest
21. Think Twice Before Asking for Favors

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22. Refrain from Idle Complaints
23. Accept and Give Constructive Criticism
24. Respect the Environment and Be Gentle to Animals
25. Don't Shift Responsibility and Blame

As more and more campuses embark upon formal or informal "civility campaigns," chances are that they'll end up becoming much nicer places to be.



This Year's Freshmen Show Affinity for Civic Engagement and Responsibility

There's good reason to be proud of today's students! When it comes to civic engagement and responsibility, this year's entering college freshmen show some of the highest commitments in years. That's according to UCLA's annual "The American Freshman: National Norms for Fall 2005" survey of entering U.S. undergraduates.

When asked if they believe it is essential or very important to help others who are in difficulty, 66.3 percent of respondents answered yes, the highest this percentage has been in the past 25 years. In addition:

- 83.2 percent volunteered at least

occasionally during their senior year of high school (an all-time high)

- 70.6 percent typically volunteered on a weekly basis
- 67.3 percent said there is a good or some chance that they'll continue volunteering in college (an all-time high)

Something known as the period effect—when significant social or world events impact students at an impressionable time of life—may have to do with this increased sense of civic responsibility, says John Pryor, director of the Cooperative Institutional Research Project Freshman Survey conducted by the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA. "The Indian Ocean tsunami occurred during their high school senior year, and Hurricane Katrina hit the southern Gulf Region in August, as many students began college," he said. "This widespread rise in student attitudes reflecting social concerns and civic responsibility could be a reaction to the worst global and national disasters witnessed in their lifetime."

For more on "The American Freshman – National Norms for Fall 2005," go to <http://www.gseis.ucla.edu/heri/norms05.html>.

"This cohort will likely have a special affinity for social responsibility as a result," added Sylvia Hurtado, director of the Higher Education Research Institute and a UCLA education professor.

You can encourage this continued sense of civic responsibility by helping your student find places to volunteer when he is home. Maybe joining the volunteer firefighters sounds appealing. Or maybe she is interested in some one-shot volunteer efforts during school breaks, from gift wrapping for the March of Dimes at holiday time to offering classroom assistance during Spring Break. Many of today's students want to give their time and talents, and your encouragement makes a difference.

Source: UCLA News release, Jan. 25, 2006, www.newsroom.ucla.edu

Other Results from the Survey

- 25.6 percent report that it is essential or very important for them to participate personally in community action programs—up 4.1 percentage points since 2004 and the highest percentage since 1996
- 33.9 percent find becoming a leader essential or very important—a 3.2 percentage point increase since 2004
- 41.3 percent believe it is essential or very important to influence social values personally—3.0 percentage points over 2004
- 49.7 percent participated in organized demonstrations as high school seniors
- 36.4 percent believe it's important or essential to "keep up to date with political affairs"
- 12.0 percent worked in local, state or national political campaigns in high school

The Mid-Semester Slump

Your student may be in a funk known as the mid-semester slump. It involves restlessness, anxiety, strained relationships and stress. It comes about for all sorts of reasons, from midterm exams to being cooped up inside during the winter months.

Some of this slump may come across when you talk with your student. Perhaps she's a bit shorter with you on the phone or he doesn't email as frequently as he used to. Try not to take it personally. Instead, see what you can do to help de-slump your student! Some things to try include:

- Sending a colorful piece of real mail to brighten her mailbox
- Giving him a favorite magazine to shift his focus
- Planning a fun event during Spring Break that you can both look forward to
- Listening when she wants to blow off some steam



Gender Communication

March is National Women's History Month, celebrated on campuses, in offices and in K-12 classrooms everywhere. What better time to talk about some of the gender communication differences between males and females? It can help you interact more positively and productively with your student.

Understanding communication styles and preferences, based on gender, can increase positive interactions and decrease misunderstanding. There are some general rules of thumb when it comes to verbal and nonverbal communication. Of course, not all men will communicate one way and not all women will communicate another. These are just some general differences that you may see.

Women's Speech

- Women speak less often and talk less time per turn
- Women often state ideas tentatively, using qualifiers and disclaimers
- Women wait their turn to speak so talk can be shared among equals
- Women's talk focuses heavily on people, feelings and daily events
- Women tend to rely on requests
- Women ask questions to invite others into the conversation and show interest in others' ideas

Women's Nonverbal Behaviors

- Women establish more eye contact
- Women use more facial expressions to convey emotion
- Women rely on more closed body positions
- Women use fewer gestures
- Women touch others less, value touch more and are touched more by others
- Women use more nonverbal cues of intimacy, like what a commu-



nicator is feeling, to include and nurture others

Men's Speech

- Men talk more frequently and longer per turn
- Men state ideas assertively and forcefully
- Men interrupt or speak over others to assert themselves and their role
- Men's talk focuses on actions, events and themselves
- Men often give orders
- Men ask questions that challenge the speaker or assert their own position

Men's Nonverbal Behaviors

- Men establish less eye contact
- Men use fewer facial expressions to convey emotions
- Men rely on more open body positions
- Men use more gestures
- Men touch others more, value touch less and are touched less by others
- Men use more nonverbal cues of power or status to indicate a degree of influence or control

Bridging the gender gap through increased understanding can lead to a better connection with your student.

Sources: *The Supervisor's Journal* 2005-06 by Laura Dicke, PaperClip Communications; "Gender and Communication in the Not-So-9 to 5 Student Affairs Workplace," NASPA presentation, 2000.

Preparing for Move Out

If your student lives on campus, chances are he has a good deal of stuff crammed into his residence hall space. And he'll need to move that stuff at the end of the semester. Discuss a few things now to help this process go smoothly:

- ➔ Is storage available on campus for larger items such as rugs and fridges?
- ➔ If not, is there storage in town that might be a viable option?
- ➔ If your student is moving off campus, when will her new apartment/house become available? Can she store items there even if she's not living there this summer?
- ➔ Is there a quick turnaround between when your student moves out and when he needs to be to his summer job/internship/etc.? How will you handle this?
- ➔ If your student is staying on campus this summer to work and/or take classes, will she need to move to another building or can she stay where she is?
- ➔ What vehicle will fit your student's belongings effectively?
- ➔ Who can help your student move?

While it may seem early to discuss these details, starting the conversation now can go a long, long way in preventing end-of-the-year hassles and stress. Best of luck!