



College of Education + Human Development

Civility Initiative



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In February 2012, the self-made Civility Initiative committee surveyed faculty and staff regarding their experiences and perceptions of civility and incivility within CEHD. Overall, the responses to quantifiable questions showed that faculty and staff perceive the college as a relatively civil place to work. We are doing well, but there is still work to be done. The survey's open-ended questions elicited many stories of faculty and staff feeling berated, belittled, powerless and uncertain about how to address uncivil behavior in the workplace. Following is a more detailed discussion of survey findings and the committee's recommendations for next steps.

METHODS

After the Big Idea presentation at the 2011 fall assembly, a group of 8–10 staff members formed to work further on the idea of civility in CEHD. In consultation with faculty members Lou Quast, Mark Umbreit, and Martha Bigelow, as well as ORCS director Bruce Center, we designed and implemented a basic survey to “take the temperature” of civility in CEHD. Because “civility” is such an abstract concept, we developed the following definition of civility:

Civility is the art of treating others with respect, dignity and care. Being civil means being mindful of others, acknowledging their innate human worth and unique contributions, and acting with courtesy in all interactions.

Using the CEHD Survey Tool, the survey was launched on January 27, 2012. Dean Quam sent an invitation to participate to 2,238 individuals on the “CEHD Official” e-mail list. In addition, posters promoting the survey were distributed to all CEHD units for display. The survey closed on February 17, 2012, with 519 responses.

RESULTS

Respondents were well-distributed between faculty, P&A, and CS/BU staff. In general, ratings of civility within CEHD were good. 81.3% of respondents reported experiencing some sort of incivility within the last six months, but reports of frequent incivility were rare. 98.5% of respondents report that they experienced civility in some way, and 92.7% report demonstrating it themselves.

Overall ratings of CEHD as a place to work were similarly positive. 77% of respondents reported that CEHD met or exceeded their expectations of civility. 76% reported the same for their unit.

There are some areas for concern, however. 57% of respondents said that the incivility they experienced affected them in some way. Common reactions were to avoid the other person, become more cynical about CEHD and the University, become more reluctant to share ideas, and look for another job. The costs of such lost productivity to a budget-sensitive organization like CEHD are significant.

The qualitative questions at the end of the survey generated over 35 pages of responses, encompassing 158 “further thoughts” on civility within CEHD and possible next steps and 102 stories about specific instances of civility or incivility. Recurring themes included the following:

Positive comments about civility / lack of a problem (n=33)

Specific examples of incivility (n=27)

The power structure in higher education leads to incivility / faculty are the problem (n=22)

There are no consequences for incivility (n=6)

A few people in each unit set the tone (n=5)

Policies and training will not help (n=5)

Leadership matters — CEHD leaders need to model civility (n=10)

A safe way to report incivility is needed (n=9)

Training on how to act civilly is needed (n=9)

Civility should be part of the review process, including 360 degree reviews of supervisors (n=4)

Transparency in decision-making = civility (n=4)

Appreciation for the survey (n=7)

Critiques of survey (n=3)

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Ensure accountability and safe reporting. In the open-ended sections of the survey, many respondents said they are unsure of how to report egregious instances of incivility or harassment to the CEHD human resources (HR) office. Those who did make reports had concerns about the confidentiality of their complaint and did not feel that any formal process was being taken to address their concerns. Our recommendations in this area center around clarifying the complaint process and ensuring that CEHD employees know what will happen if they make a complaint.

Fast-track action items

- ✦ Create a page on the CEHD intranet that makes it clear what employees should do if they have a serious complaint with another employee’s behavior, and what HR can do about it. While information about this process exists, it is difficult to find and not highlighted on the CEHD HR intranet site. Employees should be made aware of this site on a regular basis, perhaps through annual e-mails.

Long-term considerations

- ✦ Review HR practices in the college to make sure that procedures are clear, effective, and well-

understood by employees. Provide clear information to employees about the roles of CEHD HR and central HR.

- ✦ Establish and communicate a CEHD policy that defines expectations of employees in regards to civility, as well as an accepted definition of civility.

2. Normalize civility. The survey results showed that most respondents looked to faculty, administrative staff, and their unit leadership to set the tone of civility. In other words, we are all responsible for the tone of the college. If we expect CEHD to be a civil workplace, we need to embed the expectation of civility in our behavior, policies, and communications.

Fast-track action items

- ✦ Include a question about civility in the annual review process for all faculty and staff. This gives employees an opportunity to reflect on their own behavior, and also gives supervisors a chance to discuss the tone of the workplace in a non-punitive manner.

Long-term considerations

- ✦ The civility group has received a high amount of interest from other University of Minnesota units and groups. We need to continue to network with these groups, as well as groups and organizations outside the university, in order to identify best practices and bring them back to CEHD.
- ✦ Within CEHD, we are in the position of needing to balance the University's Code of Conduct with academic freedom. Consider providing case studies and examples of how this divide can be successfully navigated.

3. Provide ongoing training. Overcoming knee-jerk reactions and treating others with civility is a learned skill. As with most other skills, sharing information and training opportunities can help develop civility.

Fast-track action items

- ✦ Explore the possibility of sponsoring at least one Art of Hosting workshop. The Art of Hosting focuses on developing facilitation and conversation skills through a series of frameworks and training in group processes. The Bush Foundation and the University's Center for Integrative Leadership have spearheaded the introduction of Art of Hosting in Minnesota.
- ✦ Provide an annual reminder of what employees can do when they are being faced with serious incivility. (This could link back to the website in #1)

Long-term considerations

- ✦ Organizational Leadership, Policy, and Development and other CEHD units offer a rich pool of expertise on relationships both within and outside of organizations, and in particular in higher education. We could take advantage of this expertise by asking faculty members to write or present on issues surrounding civility and dealing with difficult situations. Brief articles could be distributed through the *Burton Brief* and the *CEHD News* blog, while experts could present small workshops or speak at faculty meetings.
- ✦ Encourage units and departments to engage in small discussions around civility and employees' work lives, perhaps as part of regular meetings. Conversation starters and ideas could be provided by the college.

4. Accentuate the positive. 98.5% of survey respondents report that they have experienced acts of civility from their coworkers. The good things that are happening in CEHD deserve as much focus as those that fall short.

Fast-track action items

- ✦ Establish an ongoing space in *Burton Brief* for people to write in with examples of the little acts of civility that make their day better. (i.e. I was in a meeting when things were getting heated and personal

attacks started to be made. I was impressed that the meeting chair stepped in and redirected the conversation.)

Long-term considerations

- ✦ Create a visual identity and promotional materials to provide a visual reminder of the good things going on in CEHD.

5. Create a sustainable infrastructure. All of the work on the civility project to date has been volunteer time from CEHD employees interested in the issue of civility. We have reached the limits of the time that we're able to dedicate to this project, as well as our capacity to make lasting changes.

Fast-track action items

- ✦ Release the results of the civility survey to the college at large and interested groups. Our plan is for this to include an announcement e-mail with a PDF of this report, as well as an intranet page with the more detailed results and information about the cost of incivility to organizations.
- ✦ Conduct additional analysis of the survey results data, particularly the qualitative comments.

Long-term considerations

- ✦ Research civility initiatives at other institutions to see what's worked and what hasn't. What does success look like for us. (See also #2, networking outside CEHD)
- ✦ Create a task force or committee to coordinate initiatives related to civility.
- ✦ Create buzz. Establish a visual identity and slogan for the CEHD Civility Initiative that can be used to brand workshops, materials, and other communications. (See also #4, visual reminders)
- ✦ Extend the CEHD civility initiative to include students.
- ✦ Consider incorporating civility issues into our courses, research, and outreach efforts. We have the opportunity to make civility part of the CEHD "brand." Civility in businesses and politics has received a fair amount of attention, but lessons learned in those arenas do not necessarily translate to the unique set of circumstances found in academia. Tapping into the college's expertise in workplace relationships, higher education administration, communications, curriculum development, human development and many other related areas, CEHD could create a new model of how a diverse academic community can become more creative and productive simply by treating each person with the dignity, respect and care he or she deserves.
- ✦ Consider developing an income-generating series of workshops or seminars that specifically address civility in higher education that would be marketed to other institutions.

CIVILITY COMMITTEE ROSTER

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