



An Analysis of the Perceptions of Incivility in Higher Education

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Accepted: 25 March 2022 / Published online: 9 April 2022
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Abstract

The aim of this study was to understand how incivility is viewed across multiple academic programs and respondent subgroups where different institutional and cultural power dynamics may influence the way students and faculty perceive uncivil behaviors. This study used the Conceptual Model for Fostering Civility in Nursing Education as its guiding framework. The Incivility in Higher Education Revised (IHE-R) Survey and a detailed demographic questionnaire were used to gather self-assessment and personal perspective data regarding incivility in the higher education setting. This approach aspired to collect a comprehensive perspective of incivility in higher education. With data from 400 students and 69 faculty, there was limited agreement between faculty and student participants about perceptions and experiences with incivility. Faculty and students did agree that the solution to incivility may be found with the creation of a code of conduct that defines acceptable and unacceptable behavior, role-modeling professionalism and civility, and taking personal responsibility and standing accountable for actions. Despite significant differences in participants' perceptions of incivility, they shared common solutions. With a shared goal, faculty and students can work toward cultivating civility in higher education.

Keywords Incivility · Higher education · Faculty · Student · Solutions

A faculty member comes into class, rushed from a chaotic day, feeling frustrated and overwhelmed, only to encounter a cadre of equally stressed, distracted, and disengaged

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students. For many faculty and students, this is a routine experience in higher education. Higher education is a microcosm of the world, and like the world, institutions of higher education are mixing bowls of cultures, attitudes, behaviors, expectations, and personalities. The fluid culture of higher education facilitates dynamic encounters between participants. While many of those encounters are enriching, some are harmful to the higher education environment and its members. These harmful encounters are best described as uncivil and present a serious risk to a conducive learning environment for faculty and students (Clark & Springer, 2007). Despite ongoing investigation into the dynamics of incivility, there is a worsening of the phenomena. These uncivil encounters are the focus of this study.

Incivility in higher education was defined by Clark (2008a) as behavior “demonstrated by students or faculty... [that] violates the norms of mutual respect in the teaching–learning environment” (p. E38). Incivility between faculty and students is viewed as a reciprocal issue that negatively impacts the educational environment (Clark, 2008b). The impact can be emotional for faculty (decreased job satisfaction, anxiety, and burnout) and students (diminished self-esteem, sense of belonging, and community) (Clark, 2008b; Wagner et al., 2019). Incivility also has a negative organizational impact (poor teaching/student performance and increased student/faculty turnover) (Rawlins, 2017).

This study explored how incivility is experienced differently for specific groups within the higher education environment. Study groups included faculty (tenured and non-tenured), students (enrolled in licensure or certification and non-licensure or non-certification degree programs), and participants across several demographic areas (age, gender, race, etc.). With a better understanding of the perceived occurrence of incivility and what those acts of incivility entail, participants in higher education can develop an action plan for mitigating the behaviors and their impact.

Literature Review

As suggested by Clark (2008a), incivility is generally framed in pragmatic terms as a behavior or action that produces negative social, organizational, psychological, and emotional effects. The literature describes that set of behaviors in ways that range from annoyances and interference with harmonious function to insolence, disregard, disrespect, violence, and bullying (Boice, 1996; Center for Survey Research, 2000; Emry & Holmes, 2005; Feldmann, 2001; Hollis, 2015). The characteristics ascribed to uncivil actions are excessive loudness, unpredictability, emotionality, negativity, apathy, disruption, coldness, dismissiveness, or belittling (Boice, 1996; Feldmann, 2001).

In contrast to studies of incivility, the literature on civility is more conceptual and abstract. Civility is described as a moral virtue, a social virtue or character trait that facilitates cooperative and communal activity, or a pathway to democracy and the common good (Calhoun, 2000; Connelly, 2009; Levine, 2010; Rookstool, 2007). When civility is framed in these terms, some attribute the fall from civility into incivility to psychological failings, such as excesses of power or frustration (Feldmann, 2001).

The higher education literature more often uses terms of socialization or normativity in its approach to civility and the challenges faculty and students face in maintaining a civil environment (Bassett, 2020; Connelly, 2009;). In that sense, civility is a sign of integration, “the extent to which the individual shares the normative attitudes and values of peers and faculty in the institution and abides by the formal and informal structural requirements for

membership in that community or in subgroups of it” (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, p. 54). As a result, different groups within higher education may have greater or lesser ability to demonstrate civility as a shared norm. First-generation, working-class, and racially or culturally underrepresented students, as well as faculty members, may be excluded from unspoken power and civility codes (Bassett, 2020; Collier & Morgan, 2008; Kezar, 2013; Rendón et al., 2000; Tinto, 1993).

While institutions of higher education often recognize and celebrate the diversity of faculty and student perspectives and backgrounds, very little policy or practice is enacted to acknowledge or resolve the conflicts that arise from differing views of civility and definitions of uncivil behaviors (Levine, 2010). The consequences of disagreements are often felt by vulnerable or underrepresented students and faculty who are viewed as noncompliant, unpleasant, or problematic (Bassett, 2020; Gibson, 2019).

This study seeks to explore the uneven and differential impacts of civility norms and perceptions of uncivil behaviors across groups within higher education. Miner et al. (2018) point out the problems with assuming that organizations have universal norms for civility and respect. Not only are such norms rarely documented and formalized, but they are often specific to the organization and context. This makes it impossible to identify universal expectations for behavior and the demonstration of respect.

Furthermore, the climate of rapid change within higher education over the past two decades makes it more likely that subgroups will not share civility norms. Traditional, lecture-style classrooms invest normative power and the authority to define expectations and assess outcomes entirely in the faculty member, no matter what the consensus of values and norms may be among the diverse students within the classroom (Alt & Itzkovich, 2019; Biggs & Tang, 2011). As ever-increasing numbers of once excluded student perspectives enter into higher education institutions, the literature registers the backlash against those who fail to maintain traditional norms. Lippmann et al. (2009) use the term “student entitlement” to describe students who come from newly affluent segments of the population and who reject the view of faculty as “intellectual leaders who are to be respected” (p. 200). Newer studies point to power differences and distances between students and faculty as causes of incivility in higher education and look toward models of shared authority and increased communication within the classroom as potential pathways forward toward both greater civility and improved learning environments for both faculty and students (Alt & Itzkovich, 2019).

Theoretical Framework

Clark’s Conceptual Model for Fostering Civility in Nursing Education was the framework used for this study. Clark (2008a) introduced this model as a metaphorical “dance” between two people where the participants respond, positively and negatively, to another’s “steps.” These actions and reciprocal responses cultivate a culture of civility or incivility. Clark (2008a) explains that “creating a culture of civility requires communication, interaction, and an appreciation for the interests each person brings to the relationship” (p. e37). This model demonstrates a continuum between civility and incivility that is influenced by participants’ attitudes (faculty attitudes of superiority, student attitudes of entitlement), high-stress encounters, and opportunities to engage (or not) with each other. With each ebb and flow of the interaction, civility or incivility can be experienced.

Clark's efforts to design a validated tool to understand the concept of incivility gave rise to the development of the Incivility in Nursing Education (INE), Incivility in Nursing Education-Revised (INE-R), Incivility in Higher Education (IHE), and the Incivility in Higher Education-Revised surveys. Because this study's participants included both nursing and numerous non-health science college majors, the IHE-R survey was most appropriate for use in answering the research questions that cut across the broader higher education context.

Methods

The site of this study is a regional, public, comprehensive university. Like many institutions in this category, over 50% of students receive or are eligible for federal funding to augment tuition costs in the form of Pell grants. Approximately 35% of the respondents are first-generation college students. Seniors work on average about 20 h a week for pay and spend on average 8 h a week caring for dependents. Just over 50% of students identify themselves as white, 30% identify as Black/African American, and 6% identify as Hispanic/Latino. Almost 68% of students are female.

With a 17:1 student-faculty ratio, the institution affords better than average opportunities to interact with faculty members. However, the demographic make-up of the faculty is quite different from the student population. Sixty percent of faculty identify as female; however, nearly twice as many adjunct faculty are women as compared to men, while men make up 53% of tenured faculty members. Seventy-eight percent of faculty members identify as white, while 11% identify as Black/African American with nearly half of the Black/African American faculty hired as adjuncts. In all, 42% of faculty hold adjunct status. Another 15% are not on the tenure track.

This study was reviewed by the university's Institutional Review Board (Pro101844) and classified as an exempt study. Faculty and student participants were invited to participate in the study weekly via email over a six-week period which ended in November 2020. Participants attended as students or were employed as faculty at a state-sponsored four-year college in South Carolina. Following completion of the survey participants were provided a \$5 Tango gift card as a thank you for participation.

Incivility in Higher Education Revised (IHE-R)

The Incivility in Higher Education Revised (IHE-R) is a proprietary instrument designed to measure the perceptions of students and faculty related to the presence of 24 uncivil behaviors, and the frequency of witnessing these behaviors. The IHE-R was adapted from the Incivility in Nursing Education (INE-R) and includes identical questions that are focused on all disciplines instead of just nursing (Wagner et al., 2019). The IHE-R includes two subscales measuring lower-level incivility and higher-level incivility (Clark et al., 2015). Instrument items can also be scored individually using means and overall percentages for each response category (Clark et al., 2015).

Student and faculty participants scored 24 behaviors on a 4-point Likert scale from 1-not uncivil to 4-highly uncivil. Student and faculty participants then reported the frequency for witnessing the same 24 behaviors using a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = never to 4 = often. This study also asked faculty to self-report the frequency of engaging in these behaviors. While the IHE-R asks faculty to report the frequency of witnessing

student behaviors, our study sought to probe further into the professional codes of conduct that may affect individual behavior. By prompting a moment of self-assessment among the faculty who are responsible for establishing classroom codes of conduct, this alteration to the instrument provided information about faculty members' self-reported tolerance for violating civility norms. Finally, faculty participants reported the frequency of engaging in those same 24 behaviors using a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1-never to 4-often. Internal reliability for the lower level and higher-level incivility subscales is 0.95 and 0.99 for student participants and 0.94 and 0.97 for faculty participants (Clark et al., 2015). The total item Cronbach alpha was reported as 0.96 for students and 0.98 for faculty (Clark et al., 2015). For this study, internal reliability for the lower level and higher-level incivility subscales was 0.99 and 0.98 for student participants and 0.93 and 0.87 for faculty participants. The total item Cronbach alpha for faculty participants was 0.94 (which includes the adapted frequency of engaging in behaviors) and 0.97 for student participants. For this study, the researchers asked faculty and student participants to rate their perceptions of incivility for 24 behaviors, asked faculty to rate the frequency in observing these 24 behaviors with other faculty, and asked students to rate the frequency in observing these 24 behaviors in faculty. With permission from the author of the IHE-R we adapted the instrument to include faculty reporting the frequency of engaging in these 24 behaviors. In contrast, the original IHE-R evaluates faculty and student perceptions of the incivility of 24 behaviors, frequency of observation of faculty displaying 24 uncivil behaviors by students, frequency of observation of students displaying 24 uncivil behaviors by faculty, and frequency of faculty and students engaging in 24 uncivil behaviors. An overall average of individual item responses is calculated and higher scores on this instrument indicate a higher presence of uncivil behavior and/or a higher frequency of these behaviors.

Statistical Analysis

Survey responses were analyzed using SPSS version 25. Descriptive statistics were calculated using means, standard deviations, frequencies, and percentages for study variables. Data were screened for missingness, normality, and outliers before performing inferential statistics. All participants who completed the survey in less than 5 min were removed from the data before analysis ($n=80$ students and 23 faculty). This was to ensure data accuracy as it was not possible to read and respond to all items in less than 5 min. Perceptions of uncivil behavior and frequency of witnessing uncivil behavior were compared using Mann–Whitney U tests to determine whether significant differences exist between student and faculty participants. Mann–Whitney U tests were also utilized with the following additional comparison groups: non-tenured faculty, white and non-white participants, and those with and without a licensure or certification program. Programs which include licensure or certification often have a professional and/or program code of conduct which potentially includes expectations of civil behavior (e.g. nursing, social work, education). Such programs may demonstrate heightened attention to such codes in the classroom, and their disciplines and accrediting bodies may explicitly interrogate the power dynamics between professionals in the field and the vulnerable populations they serve. The presence of formalized codes of conduct provides a rationale for comparing groups with and without licensure or certification programs. For white and non-white and licensure and certification program comparisons, faculty and students were combined into a single group for comparisons. Nonparametric analyses were utilized due to unequal group sizes and/or unequal variances. The level of significance was set at $p < 0.05$.

Results

A total of 469 participants (400 students, 69 faculty) completed the Incivility in Higher Education-Revised (IHE-R) survey. Overall, this represents a 15% response rate for faculty and a 6.6% response rate for students. The majority of participants were white (61.2% students, 75.7% faculty), females (77.5% students, 68.6% faculty), between the ages of 18 and 20 (46.8%) for students, and 58% were between 30–49 for faculty. Close to 40% of participants were either students or faculty within education or health professions and related clinical sciences. Among the student sample, most participants were full-time (80.5%), junior or seniors (55.6%), with an Associate's (two year) degree (57.1%). Students within the sample also frequently reported being in a program of study that required licensure or certification (54.9%). Faculty participants reported being non-tenured (58.6%) and working within their current academic position for between 1–5 years (44%). A majority of faculty reported being in an academic rank from instructor to assistant professor/librarian (70.5%) within programs that did not require licensure or certification (62.3%). Faculty also reported teaching within bachelor's degree programs (91.4%) with class sizes between 16–30 students (58.6%). Additional demographic characteristics are presented in Table 1.

Faculty and Student Perceptions of Uncivil Behavior

Student and faculty participants did not identify a single behavior that all agreed was to some degree uncivil or not uncivil. No statistically significant differences between student and faculty perceptions of uncivil behavior existed for a majority of the 24 behaviors assessed. Statistically significant differences were identified between students and faculty for the following four behaviors. Student participants reported a higher mean rank (237.8) than faculty (187.8) for “*Ineffective or inefficient teaching method (deviating from the course syllabus, changing assignment or test dates)*” ($U=9817.0$, $p=0.004$). Faculty reported a higher mean rank (285.2) than students (222.9) for “*Leaving class or other scheduled activities early*” ($U=9300.0$, $p\leq 0.001$). Faculty also reported a higher mean rank (260.2) compared to students (226.3) for “*Making discriminating comments (racial, ethnic, gender, etc.) directed toward others*” ($U=10,834.5$, $p=0.03$). Faculty perceptions of “*using profanity (swearing, cussing) directed toward others*” were also higher (265.3) than students' perceptions (226.1) ($U=10,571.0$, $p=0.02$). Mean ranks for student participants ranged from 222.9 to 237.8 compared to mean ranks for faculty participants which ranged from 187.8 to 285.2 for perceptions of uncivil behaviors. Faculty and students differed in perceptions of incivility being a problem within their department. Over half of faculty participants (58.5%) identified incivility as a mild, moderate, or serious problem compared to the majority of students (59.4%) reporting incivility was not a problem in their department.

Tenure Versus Non-tenured Perceptions

Perceptions of civility for three behaviors were statistically significantly different between tenured and non-tenured faculty. Non-tenured faculty reported a higher mean rank (36.77) compared to tenured faculty (25.84) for “*Making rude gestures or non-verbal behaviors toward others (eye-rolling, finger-pointing, etc.)*” ($U=321.0$, $p=0.017$). Non-tenured faculty reported a higher mean rank (36.10) compared to 26.88 for tenured faculty for “*Refusing or reluctant to answer direct questions*” ($U=347.0$, $p=0.045$). Finally, non-tenured

Table 1 Demographic Characteristics

Demographic	Student N = 400	Faculty N = 69
	N(%)	N(%)
Age		
18–20	187 (46.8%)	0 (0%)
21–29	143 (35.8%)	3 (4.3%)
30–39	31 (7.8%)	23 (33.3%)
40–49	15 (3.8%)	17 (24.6%)
50–59	10 (2.5%)	14 (20.3%)
60 or older	7 (1.8%)	12 (17.4%)
Prefer not to identify	7 (1.8%)	0 (0%)
Generational cohort		
Generation Z (Post- Millennial) (1995–2012)	303 (76.3%)	2 (0.4%)
Generation Y (Millennial) (1980–1994)	59 (14.9%)	23 (34.3%)
Generation X (1965–1979)	25 (6.3%)	26 (38.8%)
The Baby Boomers (1946–1964)	9 (2.3%)	15 (22.4%)
The Silent Generation (Veteran) (1928–1945)	1 (0.3%)	1 (0.2%)
Gender		
Male	85 (21.3%)	18 (25.7%)
Female	310 (77.5%)	48 (68.6)
Non-binary	2 (0.5%)	0 (0.0%)
Other: (Specify)	1 (0.2%)	0 (0.0%)
Prefer not to identify	2 (0.5%)	4 (5.7%)
Race		
American Indian or Alaska Native	4 (1%)	0 (0.0%)
Asian	13 (3.3%)	1 (1.4%)
Black or African American	79 (20.2%)	12 (17.1%)
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	1 (0.3%)	0 (0.0%)
White	240 (61.2%)	53 (75.7%)
Prefer not to identify	30 (7.7%)	3 (4.3%)
More than one selection	25 (6.4%)	1 (1.4%)
Military status		
Reserves	3 (0.8%)	0 (0.0%)
Active Duty	1 (0.3%)	0 (0.0%)
Veteran	9 (2.4%)	2 (2.9%)
None	366 (96.6%)	67 (97.1%)
Highest level of general education		
Associates	228 (57.1%)	0 (0.0%)
Diploma	33 (8.3%)	0 (0.0%)
Bachelors	42 (10.5%)	10 (14.3%)
Masters	8 (2.0%)	24 (34.3%)
Doctorate	1 (0.3%)	36 (51.4%)
Licensure or certification exam associated with degree completion		
Yes	219 (54.9%)	26 (37.7%)
No	180 (45.1%)	43 (62.3%)
Student Status		
Full-time (at least 12 credits)	322 (80.5%)	
Part-time (6–11 credits)	50 (12.5%)	
Per course (1–5 credits)	22 (5.5%)	
Academic class level		

Table 1 (continued)

Demographic	Student N = 400	Faculty N = 69
Freshman	74 (18.5%)	
Sophomore	75 (18.8%)	
Junior	105 (26.3%)	
Senior	117 (29.3%)	
Post-Baccalaureate	29 (7.3%)	
Employment Status		
Full-time		52 (74.3%)
Part-time		1 (1.4%)
Adjunct		17 (24.3%)
Years in current academic position		
1–2 years		15 (22.0%)
3–5 years		15 (22.0%)
6–10 years		16 (8.8%)
11–15 years		10 (14.7%)
16–20 years		6 (8.8%)
21–25 years		4 (0.5%)
26–30 years		1 (1.5%)
31+ years		1 (1.5%)
Tenure Status		
Tenured		29 (41.4%)
Non-tenured		41 (58.6%)
Academic Rank		
Instructor		22 (32.3%)
Senior Instructor		12 (17.6%)
Assistant Professor/Librarian		14 (20.6%)
Associate Professor/Librarian		8 (11.8%)
Professor/Librarian		12 (17.6%)
Degree program you primarily teach		
Associates		1 (1.4%)
Bachelors		64 (91.4%)
Masters		5 (7.1%)
Student population		
Lower Division (100–200)		30 (42.9%)
Upper Division (300–500)		38 (54.3%)
Graduate (600–700)		2 (2.9%)
Class size		
1–15		17 (24.3%)
16–30		41 (58.6%)
31–60		9 (12.9%)
61–100		3 (4.3%)

faculty reported a higher mean rank (35.43) when compared to tenured faculty (25.68) for “*Refusing to discuss make-up exams, extension, or grade changes*” ($U = 317.0$, $p = 0.031$). No statistically significant differences were identified between tenured and non-tenured faculty perceptions of overall civility ($U = 460.0$, $p = 0.589$).

Tenured faculty reported a significantly higher mean rank (37.92) compared to non-tenured faculty (28.36) for observing “*Expressing disinterest, boredom, or apathy about course content or subject matter*” ($MU = 326.0$, $p = 0.031$); as well as higher mean ranks

for tenured faculty (39.50) compared to nontenured faculty (27.38) for observing “*Using a computer, phone, or another media device in faculty meetings, committee meetings, other work activities for unrelated purpose*” (MU = 288.0, $p = 0.008$). Tenured faculty also reported a significantly higher mean rank (39.00) compared to nontenured faculty (27.69) for observing “*Being unprepared for class or other scheduled activities*” (MU = 300.00, $p = 0.013$). Finally, tenured faculty reported a significantly higher mean rank (37.25) compared to nontenured faculty (28.77) for observing “*Sending inappropriate or rude emails*” (MU = 342.0, $p = 0.041$). There were no statistically significant differences identified between tenured and non-tenured faculty in engaging in uncivil behaviors.

Perceptions of White Versus Non-white Participants

Perceptions of civil behaviors were not significantly different between white and non-white participants (faculty and student). White participants reported a significantly higher mean rank for observing 15 behaviors broadly classified into classroom behaviors or communication behaviors when compared to nonwhite participants. No statistically significant differences were observed in perceptions of overall civility within the department between white and non-white participants ($U = 23,630.5$, $p = 0.692$). Engaging in “*making rude gestures or non-verbal behaviors toward others (eye-rolling, finger-pointing)*” was the only behavior reported by White faculty that had a significantly higher mean rank (34.14) compared to non-white faculty (26.21) ($U = 292.5$, $p = 0.04$).

Perceptions of Participants in Programs with Versus Without Certification Requirements

Perceptions of civil behaviors were significantly different between all participants (faculty and student) with a licensure or certification requirement versus those without a licensure or certification requirement following graduation for two behaviors “*Ineffective or inefficient teaching method (deviating from the course syllabus, changing assignment or test dates)*” ($U = 22,613.50$, $p = 0.006$) and “*Refusing or reluctant to answer direct questions*” ($U = 23,300.00$, $p = 0.033$). Participants with a licensure or certification requirement reported a significantly higher mean rank (245.94) for “*Ineffective or inefficient teaching method (deviating from the course syllabus, changing assignment or test dates)*” when compared to participants without a licensure or certification requirement (213.21). Similarly, participants with a licensure or certification requirement reported a significantly higher mean rank (242.26) compared to those without a licensure or certification requirements (217.21) for observing “*Refusing or reluctant to answer direct questions*” ($U = 23,481.5$, $p = 0.031$). Faculty participants who worked in programs without a licensure or certification requirement, self-reported a significantly higher mean rank (28.38) for engaging in “*being unavailable outside of class (not returning calls or emails, not maintaining office hours)*” compared to those with a licensure or certification requirement (34.54) ($U = 387$, $p = 0.038$).

Frequency of Witnessing Uncivil Behavior for Faculty and Students

Statistically significant differences were identified between students and faculty witnessing uncivil behaviors for twelve behaviors. Interestingly, faculty witnessed these behaviors

more than students for each of the twelve behaviors which fall broadly into classroom behaviors and communication skills. Faculty reported a higher mean rank (311.8) compared to students (218.8) for witnessing “*Expressing disinterest, boredom, or apathy about course content, or subject matter*” ($U=7509.0, p \leq 0.001$). Higher mean ranks for faculty (290.1) were also observed for “*Making rude gestures or non-verbal behaviors toward others (eye-rolling, finger-pointing, etc.)*” compared to students (222.3) ($U=8876.5, p \leq 0.001$). “*Using a computer, phone or another media device in faculty meetings, committee meetings other work activities for unrelated purpose*” was also witnessed more by faculty (355.8) when compared to students (211.2 ($U=4674.5, p \leq 0.001$)). “*Arriving late for class or other scheduled activities*” or “*Leaving class or other scheduled activities early*” was observed more by faculty (355.8, 319.0) compared to students (217.7, 215.9) ($U=7055.0, p \leq 0.001, U=6529.0, p \leq 0.001$) respectively. Faculty also reported witnessing “*Being unprepared for class or other scheduled activities*” (313.6) compared to students (218.) ($U=7398.5, p \leq 0.001$). Being distant and cold toward others (unapproachable, rejecting student’s opinions) was witnessed more by faculty (276.9) compared to students (224.3) ($U=9707.0, p \leq 0.001$). Students reported witnessing “allowing side conversations by students that disrupt class” less (221.6) than faculty (294.2) ($u=8617.0, p \leq 0.001$). Students also witnessed less “*Making condescending or rude remarks towards others*” (222.5) compared to faculty (284.7) ($U=9157.0, p \leq 0.001$). Ignoring or failing to address or encouraging disruptive student behaviors was witnessed more frequently by faculty (274.6) when compared to student participants (223.5) ($U=9726.5, p \leq 0.001$). Being unavailable outside of class (not returning calls or emails, not maintaining office hours) was observed more frequently by faculty (266.1) compared to students (226.0) ($U=10,391.5, p=0.02$). Finally, students observed “*Sending inappropriate or rude emails*” less frequently (223.8) than faculty participants (276.2) ($U=9687.5, p \leq 0.001$).

Engaging in Uncivil Behavior

A majority of faculty reported never engaging in uncivil behaviors with a few exceptions. Faculty reported “*using a computer, phone, or another media device in faculty meetings, committee meetings, other work activities for an unrelated purpose*” rarely (33.3%), sometimes (15.9%), or often (6.3%). Faculty also reported, “*Ineffective or inefficient teaching method (deviating from the course syllabus, changing assignments or test dates*” rarely (41.3%), sometimes (7.9%) or often (1.6%). Students reported they are more likely (72.4%) compared to faculty to exhibit uncivil behavior which aligned with faculty perceptions (58.5%) of students being more likely to exhibit uncivil behaviors.

A majority of students reported incivility not being a problem within their department or program (59.4%) compared to faculty who reported incivility as a mild, moderate, or serious problem (58.5%). Overall mean civility scores were slightly higher for students (78.20) compared to faculty (72.1) with scores ranging from 0 representing an absence of civility to 100 representing complete civility.

Strategies for Improving Civility

Faculty and student participants agreed that establishing a code of conduct that defines acceptable and unacceptable behavior (14% of participants), role-modeling professionalism and civility (13% of participants), and taking personal responsibility and standing

accountable for actions (12%) were the top three strategies for improving civility with academic environments.

Limitations

There are several potential limitations to this research that are important to discuss. The recruitment period for this study occurred during the global COVID-19 pandemic during a time when the majority of the nation remained teaching and learning remotely. This likely influenced results for students and faculty. Further, the nation was also experiencing a renewed racial justice movement in the wake of the murder of George Floyd. The potential for self-selection bias as well as response bias due to self-reporting of data are also limitations of this research. Due to low response rates for faculty and student participants non-response bias is possible. However, demographic characteristics of faculty and staff participants were similar to overall characteristics of all eligible faculty and students. Students were not asked how frequently they engaged in uncivil behaviors which limits the ability to compare the frequency of engaging in uncivil behaviors between students and faculty.

Discussion

The data collected in this study was gathered when the COVID-19 pandemic was in its eighth month. The stress that society, in general, was experiencing affected students and faculty as they navigated this unprecedented event. The survey asked participants about their perceptions of incivility and witnessing or engaging in uncivil behaviors in the previous 12 months, including four months before the pandemic, but the majority of the time, as higher education was engaged in emergency remote teaching in Spring 2020 and increased online learning in Fall 2020. Several key points were brought to light through the student and faculty responses in this study. The first, generational differences, emerged in the areas of technology (specifically using computers and mobile devices), and the impact of the lifestyle of today's students on perceptions of incivility. A second key point is that there is no standard set of shared norms among faculty and students, or between tenured and non-tenured faculty. Overall, faculty and students differed greatly in their sensitivity to uncivil behaviors. Without agreement about what constitutes incivility, differences between student perception of incivility and faculty perception arise. There is inherent value in understanding the differences between subgroups. Future research would be supportive in better understanding these phenomena.

The greatest demographic differences between faculty and students in this survey were in the categories of age and generational cohort. The majority of students (76.3%) identified as Post-Millennials or Gen Z. In contrast, the largest cohorts of faculty members belonged to Generation X (38.8%) and Millennials or Gen Y (34.3%). Because the distribution of age-related categories was so wide, a meaningful statistical comparison of responses by generation was not possible. Generational differences are likely to be a contributing factor to differences between faculty and students in their perceptions of civility norms. Overall, faculty perceived more behaviors as more uncivil than students did and had a greater range of perceptions of behaviors; faculty mean ranks of perceptions of uncivil behaviors ranged from 187.8 to 285.2 compared to students' mean ranks of 222.9 to 237.8.

This difference in perception carried beyond the classroom into perceptions of the whole department. Although a majority of students (59.4%) found incivility was not a problem in

their department, 58.5% of faculty in this survey identified incivility as a mild, moderate, or serious problem in their departments. The only behavior students perceived as significantly more uncivil than faculty did was ineffective or inefficient teaching methods, such as changing the syllabus. Piotrowski and King (2016) emphasize that students complain more about uncivil faculty behaviors that affect their academic outcomes. The findings in this study are consistent with previous research (Clark, 2008b; Connelly, 2009); however, previous studies did not ask faculty about the faculty behaviors they witnessed or engaged in. This study found that while students found ineffective teaching particularly uncivil, this was one of only two uncivil behaviors that a majority of faculty (50.8%) were willing to admit engaging in. They reported doing so rarely (41.3%), sometimes (7.9%), or often (1.6%). Both students and faculty witnessed the behavior at nearly the same frequency with very similar mean ranks (231.3 and 232.5 respectively) ($U=12,504.5$, $p=0.95$). The difference seems to lie in their perceptions of its incivility.

A similar split between perception and behavior centered on the use of technology. With constant access to email, and the increase in remote learning, especially during the pandemic, the lines between work/school and home blurred. The necessity of using technology to deliver classes during the pandemic increased students' communication with faculty through computers and mobile devices. One study published just before the COVID-19 pandemic found the "most frequently experienced uncivil student behavior for both faculty (44.86%) and students (65.22%) was using a computer, phone, or other media device during class, meetings, or activities for unrelated purposes" (Wagner et al., 2019, p. 267). The present study finds that faculty members, especially tenured faculty members, were particularly aware of the use of technology for unrelated purposes, and they reported witnessing the behavior far more often than students did. Using devices for unrelated purposes was also the uncivil behavior most faculty (55.6%) reported engaging in either rarely (33.3%), sometimes (15.9%), or often (6.3%). Like students, faculty appear to use mobile devices as a regular part of their everyday communication, and they engage in this use while in class, meetings, or other activities. Unlike students, they seem to be more sensitized to noticing and reporting the behaviors.

Further research is necessary to better understand these dynamics. Although there was no difference between student and faculty perceptions of incivility in using devices for unrelated purposes, it is not clear how those witnessing the behaviors determine whether the use is related or unrelated. Students may use mobile devices to look up definitions or follow along in an ebook during a lecture. They use laptops to take notes, research the topic being discussed in class, complete in-class group assignments, and more. Students may also need to learn using alternate methods of processing information. For example, students may need to type or record or follow along in their ebook because they can't process aural information at the rate necessary to understand conventional lectures. Many faculty may view the use of these devices in class as unrelated, uncivil behavior and develop classroom policies that penalize students who use devices during class. However, when faculty do not honor the behaviors students use to learn, learning is decreased. If higher education is going to meet the needs of today's students, faculty must expand their understanding of what learning looks like in ways that are more inclusive and provide more accessibility to a range of learners. However, many faculty members were not prepared by their graduate programs to teach adult students, and there is a lack of expectation that continuous professional development related to teaching be part of a faculty members' responsibility.

Students' lifestyles today are very different from when most faculty members were enrolled in their undergraduate programs. The days of students going to school full-time, living on campus, and learning in environments separated from other communities and

other cultural norms are not the experience of most students today. Today's students are parents, work full time, manage others in their workplaces, and interact with a variety of different communities where they are often engaging with adults as equals or even as leaders. Coming to campus and being in the classroom requires them to switch both cultural codes and status roles. Clark (2008a) stresses the relationship between civility and norms of mutual respect, yet it is clear that not all students know the codes of higher education as faculty perceive them. Students who do not understand the context of higher education may question why professors are entitled to be listened to just because they have a degree. Alt and Itzkovich (2019) argue that breaking down power relations and fostering more shared authority in the classroom may lead to increased civility in learning environments, but the results of this study point to a more fundamental need to communicate about and codify norms to bridge the differences in perception of incivility across faculty and students in higher education. This communication should be granular and involve developing a shared taxonomy that describes the detailed elements of civility and incivility.

Conclusion

This study makes it clear that while students and faculty overall and in different subgroups do not share the same perceptions of what is civil versus uncivil, they unite around common solutions. All participants rank the creation of a code of civil conduct, role-modeling professionalism and civility, and taking personal responsibility and standing accountable for actions as the top strategies for addressing incivility. Collating these three solutions into a meaningful intervention has the opportunity to strengthen the likelihood of successful implementation due to a shared agreement between faculty and students. Any successful interventions require both groups to set aside feelings of superiority and entitlement and engage in a new dance (Clark, 2008a). Faculty have an opportunity to socialize students to their professional role identities using civility as a framework if they are willing to reflect on their behaviors as a first step in the dance. Civil faculty have the best opportunity to function as role models for students. During the role modeling process, faculty can bridge students' understanding of how civil behavior aligns with professional role expectations (Luparell & Frisbee, 2019). These relational bridges create a gateway to crafting a shared taxonomy for civil behavior that can guide both groups in the educational setting and into professional roles.

Acknowledgements Special thanks go to Lynda Davis for her assistance and support throughout the project.

Authors' Contributions Tracy Hudgins– Primary investigator, co- author. Diana Layne– Co- investigator, co-author, statistical analysis. Celena E. Kusch– Co- investigator, co- author. Karen Lounsbury– Co- investigator, co- author.

Funding This project received funding from the University of South Carolina Upstate Office of Institutional Equity, Inclusion, and Engagement.

Data Availability Not applicable.

Code Availability Not applicable.

Declarations

Ethics Approval The Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the University of South Carolina (Columbia) affirmed this as an Exempt Study.

Consent to Participate Not applicable; Exempt Study.

Consent for Publication All authors consent for this manuscript to be published in its entirety by Journal of Academic Ethics (Springer).

Conflicts of Interest The authors have no relevant financial or non-financial conflicts of interests to disclose.

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