

# Classroom Incivility Case Studies

## Indiana University of Pennsylvania

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#### Case Study A: Student-to-student incivility

Professor Cho is a junior faculty member teaching the *Psychology of Aging* in a mid-sized university. Her course has an enrollment of 40 students who represent a diverse population of learners between the ages of 19 and 28. This is the third time she has taught the course.

Professor Cho begins each class with current issues, studies, and news stories related to aging such as health care, retirement, Social Security, human services, poverty, and aging from a global perspective. One of her male students, Jake, consistently challenges her information and the need for age-related studies. He also challenges students who disagree with him on any aspect of a story or study. Challenging the information is not the problem as Dr. Cho wants students to consider the quality, source, and credibility of information. The problem is Jake's outspoken intolerance of others' ideas and opinions.

This is only Week 4 in the semester, but Dr. Cho is already concerned because she's seen a decrease in student participation. No one has complained to her; however, she suspects students don't share their opinions due to Jake's negative remarks. For example, in a discussion on the quality of emergency room care for aging women reporting chest pains, Jake said to a female student, "Women just don't assert themselves. They whine which makes no one want to listen. That's why women don't get quality care." Sarah did not reply and has been quiet ever since that class.

Dr. Cho wants to make some changes in the course to address the problem of rude, intolerant learners such as Jake. What should she change in how she manages the classroom? What should she say to Jake? The next time she teaches the course, what should she change or add to her syllabus?

In the space below, write your documentation for this incident:

## Case Study B: Student-to-instructor incivility

Dr. Alan Stewart teaches *Introductory Sociology* which fulfills a general education requirement at his public university. He has been teaching for 18 years and receives excellent student evaluations. Dr Stewart enjoys teaching and this is reflected in his enthusiasm and subject expertise. He travels extensively and shares many stories, artifacts, and photographs with his learners.

This semester, there are 38 students in his 9:00 a.m. course. Dr. Stewart starts every course promptly at one minute after 9:00. There is no specific policy about arriving late to class. During almost every session, several students arrive a few minutes late. Most students are quiet and polite, so this is not a big problem to Dr. Stewart.

Dr. Stewart lectures with PowerPoint presentations because he has a lot of visuals to share. During this Monday morning class, Karen arrives 20 minutes late. She walks across the front of the class in front of the projector screen, and takes a seat with several of her friends. Immediately, she begins to talk to her friends about the weekend. Dr. Stewart stops talking, makes eye contact, and waits for Karen to also stop talking. When he begins to talk again, she also talks. Finally, he firmly asks her to stop talking. Karen still continues to talk to her friends. At this point, Dr. Stewart walks towards Karen and asks her to leave the class. Karen replies, "I paid for this course and I have the right to stay here." Dr. Stewart replies strongly (but not shouting), "Your behavior is disruptive to me and everyone else. You do not have the right to prevent others from learning. I want you to leave this classroom right NOW!" Karen still refuses to leave.

If you were Dr. Stewart, what would you do next? What would you say to Karen and to the whole class?

In the space below, write your documentation for this incident:

### **Case Study C: Student-to-instructor incivility**

Karen Cohen has been teaching *Public Speaking* in the Communication Department of a large university for 6 years. She also sponsors the debate team and has been very successful in getting female students to participate in campus debates. This semester, she has 24 students in her required, 3-credit course. According to the syllabus, her students develop and deliver 3 formal speeches. Dr. Cohen has a well-developed grading rubric that she uses for each speech. Following the speech, students come to her office hours for private, detailed feedback.

One of her students does not like the manner in which Dr. Cohen teaches the course. Mario is a 24-year old accounting major with a high grade point average and an excellent reputation. On four occasions, Mario has asked to speak with Dr. Cohen in the hall either before or after class. He criticizes her lectures as being too-long, too-boring, and too theoretical. Furthermore, Mario does not like the textbook used for the course. Mario's biggest complaint is that students have to go to Dr. Cohen's office hours to receive feedback on their speeches. He thinks the feedback should be given immediately after the classroom speech. Dr. Cohen explained that she believes (and research shows) public speaking feedback should be delivered in private.

Students in the course are aware that there is a problem between Dr. Cohen and Mario. In class, Mario shares his concerns with other students and occasionally rolls his eyes and sighs. He sits in a group with three friends who also have poor attitudes, but they do not talk or disrupt class.

Last week, Mario met with the Communication Department Chairperson and complained about Dr. Cohen's course and the slow feedback. There are only two weeks left in the semester and Dr. Cohen dreads going to class. Finally, Mario delivers his last speech, and then announces "Dr. Cohen, I'd like to have your feedback now. I don't mind if others hear your comments. We can all learn from my mistakes."

What would you say to Mario and the rest of the class? If you were Dr. Cohen, what would you do differently in this course?

In the space below, develop several ground rules to include on Dr. Cohen's next syllabus.