

# Combating Campus Incivility . . . for Our Own Good

By Lee Struble, Director, Public Safety Department, Monroe Community College, Rochester, New York

Most campus safety directors or police chiefs will agree that it is becoming increasingly difficult to address common civility standards on our respective college campuses. We



have collectively noted that our line officers are increasingly involved in verbal and/or physical confrontations when attempting to achieve voluntary compliance to simple reasonable requests such as to refrain from smoking, curb inappropriate language, discontinue roughhousing, etc. Is this a societal phenomenon beyond our control, or is there a role that we can play to address these problems as senior administrators of our respective college or university communities?

It is my contention that we can and should take a lead role in combating the apparent eroding of our campus civility standards in a comprehensive and sustainable manner in order to make significant improvements in the campus climate in which we serve out our professional careers. Some of my security and law enforcement colleagues may be quick to defer this task to other student services areas that may be perceived as a more appropriate place for this effort to be undertaken. After all, we are busy with community policing, emergency management planning, special event planning, crime prevention, grant writing, budget issues, personnel issues and the like. Who has time for civility? Well . . . if we don't

begin addressing campus civility standards at their core, then ALL we will be dealing with will be issues of incivility. The other result of not dealing with our eroding campus civility is an ever rising crime and incident rate on our campuses.

This article is intended to challenge our profession to take a proactive leadership role in addressing all forms of incivility on our campuses. In order to be successful in this task, we must meet the following four criteria: 1) It must be supported by the senior administration; 2) It must be a comprehensive approach; 3) It must be sustainable; and 4) It must be student-driven. If all four of these criteria are met, it is my belief that you will experience a fundamental culture change that will impact all aspects of your campus community. I will share some of the steps we have recently taken at Monroe Community College (Rochester, NY) to begin our work in this area. MCC currently enrolls over 35,000 students each year and our average on-campus population at our largest campus is over 15,000 students, faculty, staff and campus visitors. Our student profile is 25% minority students, with 55% of our students being female and 45% male. As with most four-year colleges and universities, community colleges are continually challenged with the constantly changing demographics and diversity of our respective campuses. Coupled with a noticeable decline in the coping strategies and negotiating skills of our students simple acts of incivility can quickly escalate into a major incident on our campuses — oftentimes with Public Safety or

Security becoming a focal point in the subsequent inquiry of the follow-up investigation or "healing process."

## The Beginning

Soon after joining Monroe Community College as director of public safety this past year, I was conversing with another new colleague who also recently joined the staff of MCC as the assistant director of our Counseling Center. Both of us had recently left relatively quiet and serene private, four-year colleges with the lure of greater challenges and opportunities of a large community college setting. The one noticeable change that we both immediately experienced was the generally accepted level of incivility of the campus culture. It was difficult for both of us to understand why simple acts of incivility such as smoking in non-smoking areas (building entrances), the use of obscene, loud and threatening language, fighting or roughhousing in the halls, etc. were generally not challenged by the community members who were being subjected to these unwanted acts. We began to discuss ways that we could involve the larger campus community in discussing and addressing these issues that affected our quality of work life, as well as our quantity of workload.

Soon afterward, we scheduled a meeting with our associate vice president and furthered our discussions on campus civility. Fortunate for us, he had recently returned from the 2006 ASJA Annual Conference and had attended a wonderful

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session on the American University "CIVITAS" campaign ([www.american.edu/ocl/vp/civitas/](http://www.american.edu/ocl/vp/civitas/)). The stated mission of CIVITAS is to "heighten awareness of the relationship between personal conduct and the quality of campus life." An interesting aspect of the American University program is a "CIVITAS Week" that is used to highlight the significance of civil and responsible citizenship and to celebrate the program successes. Upon further research it was apparent that many other colleges and universities throughout the United States are developing programs to address the issue of civility on campus. Among the schools that have already established effective programs are:

University of Southern Maine ([www.cphv.usm.maine.edu/CCP.htm](http://www.cphv.usm.maine.edu/CCP.htm)),

Colorado State University ([www.campusofcharacter.colostate.edu/civility.htm](http://www.campusofcharacter.colostate.edu/civility.htm)), and

Johns Hopkins University ([www.jhu.edu/civility/](http://www.jhu.edu/civility/)).

Many of these civility efforts have been guided by the 2002 release of P.M. Forni's book entitled *"Choosing Civility: The 25 Rules of Considerate Conduct."* In his book, Forni states that,

"Civility means a great deal more than just being nice to one another. It is complex and encompasses learning how to connect successfully and live well with others, developing thoughtfulness, and fostering effective self-expression and communication. Civility includes courtesy, politeness, mutual respect, fairness, good manners, as well as a matter of good health. Taking an active interest in the well-being of our community and concern for the health of our society is also involved in civility."

### The Players

One of the first and foremost challenges that we faced was to identify and to solicit interest from the appropriate areas of the campus. Our president of the Faculty Senate sent a general e-mail to the campus faculty and received over 50 emails from interested faculty members who volunteered to participate in our initial steering committee. We selected three faculty members, representing three distinct academic areas (business, math and

science). Each of these faculty members has been invaluable to our early work.

We also reached out to our various student groups and organizations and identified three students to join our taskforce. We also included our Director of Human Resources, Director of Housing, Director of our Campus Center and several other administrative representatives from throughout the campus. The end result was a committee of 16 committed members of our student, faculty and staff.

### Our Early Work

Our first several meetings were dedicated to information gathering and sharing regarding what existing civility efforts were already in place on campus and at other colleges and universities across the United States. The following civility statement had been adapted several years earlier by the college:

*"We, the students, faculty, staff and administration of Monroe Community College are committed to core values that include:*

- *Creating an environment where we value and respect each other;*
- *Promoting a community that encourages the tolerance of divergent opinions and constructive resolution of conflict;*
- *Exchanging ideas and enriching our lives through the exploration of our multifaceted culture;*
- *Embracing responsibility, integrity, and courtesy;*
- *Respecting the dignity, rights, and freedoms of every community member;*
- *Respecting the intellectual and physical property of others; and*
- *Respecting college property including both public and private spaces.*

*We, as a community of learners, are affirming these core values to guide our actions and behaviors."*

This statement was used in a very effective poster campaign at our smaller downtown campus location, but was not used to a great extent on our larger suburban campus. The recently adapted campus-wide "Three Rs" campaign (Respect,

Responsibility and Reality) was also reviewed and discussed. As a result of our information gathering and sharing, we were able to identify several campus resources that were already in place to support our new campus civility effort. We also discussed various educational outreach models, passive learning and social norming philosophy. While we certainly weren't experts yet, we did have a good sense of what was currently in place on our campus and a good understanding of some of the best practices and programs that were in place at other colleges and universities.

### Developing and Conducting a Civility Survey

At this point, our committee reached a consensus that an initial survey of our campus community would provide important information to our committee work and would also establish a baseline of our current campus culture. We researched and reviewed several campus survey instruments, but ultimately decided to create our own survey. A smaller ad hoc committee began designing the survey and presented the draft to the larger committee for further discussion and revision.

The faculty members of our committee took a lead role in the design, implementation and analysis of the survey. Our biology professor provided invaluable input into the research, design and substance of the survey; our business professor used one of her classes to administer the survey and our math professor used a statistics class to analyze the data. 562 usable surveys were completed. 55% were female respondents and 45% were male. 96% were completed by students and 4% were completed by faculty or staff. We were able to breakdown demographics into age groups, ethnicity, and which campus they were located at the majority of the time.

### The Next Steps

With our summer winding down, the Civility Committee is eager to begin the next phase of our work. Several blended focus group meetings are scheduled in the early fall to present the survey re-

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ing how they pay attention to the little issues as well as the big issues. Develop an obsessive compulsion to detail.

- **Its Nice to Be Important, But It Is More Important to Be Nice:** No one likes a bully or to be treated with a lack of respect and courtesy. Incivility and mean-spirited people do not succeed. Say please and thank you. Change the script from "Nice Guys Finish Last" to "Nice People Succeed."
- **Never Let Them See You Sweat!** Perseverance; get back on the horse. If you fall off, fall forward.

No revelations. Hopefully you are saying to yourself, I knew that, I've heard it all before. The challenge is in overcoming the knowing-doing gap and putting what we have learned to work for us.

### About the Author

**Bruce Harman** is a Certified Protection Professional and is Director of Public Safety at New Jersey City University, Jersey City, New Jersey. Mr. Harman holds a Bachelor of Science Degree and a Master of Arts Degree. He was an Adjunct Professor in the Criminal Justice Department, Security Management Program at NJ City University for 10 years. Mr. Harman served twice as the International Chair of the Educational Institutions Committee for the American Society for Industrial Security (ASIS). He is a past president of the New Jersey College and University Public Safety Association. He is the principal of Bruce D. Harman & Associates, Security and Emergency Management Consultants who have been serving large and mid-sized clients for over twenty-five years.

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sults and to solicit suggestions and recommendations from the larger campus community for ways the college community can promote greater civility. Following these focus group meetings, the Civility Committee will produce and forward a report of recommendations to the campus administration. Many excellent suggestions have already been discussed by the Committee in our work to date, but the final report is intended to combine the work of our committee with the recommendations from the campus community.

### Benefits

For the director of public safety, the benefits of leading this effort are immeasurable. As a fairly new member of Monroe Community College, I have been able to develop a much deeper understanding of the campus climate as it relates to civility issues and standards. I have also established an excellent working relationship with several critical faculty, staff and students on our campus. I look forward to working on many of the specific recommendations that will certainly impact our public safety operations with the understanding that a more civil campus climate will result in fewer public safety complaints, calls for service and crimes. What better mark to leave on our respective campuses?

### About the Author

**Lee Struble** is the Director of Public Safety at Monroe Community College in Rochester, New York. He has over 24 years of experience in campus security. He served as President of the Northeast Colleges and Universities Security Association from 2003-2005 and is currently serving as the Chair of the IACLEA Crime Prevention Committee.

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[www.iaclea.org](http://www.iaclea.org)

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