Classroom Incivilities: Students' Perceptions About Professors' Behaviors

Elizabeth Stork, Robert Morris University, USA
Nell Tabor Hartley, Robert Morris University, USA

ABSTRACT

A learning environment is a social one, and as a social environment it impacts what learners retain, how they form ideas, and what connections are made and lost when acquiring new skills and knowledge (Goleman, 2006). Today's college students' expectations for and perceptions of professors in the classroom are likely to influence their learning environments. This paper reports on the development of a 56-item instrument, the Student Perceptions of Professor Behavior (SPPB), and findings about student perceptions concerning offensiveness of professor behaviors. Preliminary results suggest students' perceptions fall into two domains: a professor's competence and interest, and respect for the individualism of students. Perceptions about egregiousness and number of offensive behaviors lessened over a course semester. Learning about today's students' perceptions and expectations may improve practices, learning environments and ultimately learning outcomes.

Keywords: college classroom, learning environment, civility, professor behaviors, student perceptions, individualism

...no dark sarcasm in the classroom...Teachers, leave them kids alone (Pink Floyd)

INTRODUCTION

A professor dismisses a student's question with a wave of her hand and a shake of her head, calls on a student who is obviously sleeping, or tells her class about an inept response a student in another class gave to a test question. A professor uses a four-letter word in a lecture, responds to a question from a student with "go home and read your text," or tells his class about his date the night before.

Both direct and passive aggressions constitute incivilities that are detrimental to the learning environment. A learning environment is a social one, and as social environments they impact memory and retention, as well as affect the ability to take in information, think clearly and generate new ideas for the people involved in them (Goleman, 2006). Deviations in what are considered normal behavior, or good manners, occur at all levels of social interaction and vary in perception of offensiveness by individual, culture, situation, history and generation. Attitudes about responsibility for our individual actions have also shifted as have ideals and standards for self-control, self-regulation and compliance with (changing) cultural norms for interacting with contemporaries and non-contemporaries.

Lucas & Murry (2002) summarize several studies' familiar lists of student complaints about instructors, instructor complaints about students, and ways students wish or expect professors will act such as showing respect, establishing rapport, being creative, and providing fair and timely feedback. Complaints include how faculty resist becoming skilled performers just to appease and appeal to a roomful of "kids" who explain they learn better with dramatic presentations (like their video games and movies). They include how students don't care much for intellectual engagement for which they cannot conceive relevance to their lives, and only care about self-expression, grades, and enough time for leisure activities. Recent research describes and analyzes continuing (but not increasing or new) incivilities in classrooms, and offers explanations for and results of these incivilities on both the part of students and instructors (Amada, 1999; Boice, 1998; Carbone, 1999; Karp & Yoels, 1998; Kuhlenschmidt, 1999;

Marchese, 1996; Matus, 1999; Roach, 1997). Disinterest, dislike, apathy, overwork, complex lives, poor health, loss, inability to cope, lack of sleep, frustration, boredom, annoyance, poor self-regulation, stress, demoralization, and fear are some of the things that affect both professors and students when incivilities routinely occur in learning environments.

Much is made about the Millennials, GenX, Gen Y, GenerationMe, or iGeneration who now populate our college campuses – the generation of young people who were taught to feel special, unique, and love themselves above all. One study explains that fewer people of college age seek social approval, or care what others think; what they care most about is their individualism (Twenge, 2006). Many of them embrace the idea that society's expectations, including control of behaviors in certain circumstances, should not hold anyone, themselves above all, back. Freedom to express their individualism is central to their self-definitions. Sacks (1996), a college professor, related stories about students' sense of entitlement to good grades and valued opinions; equality on par with professors; disdain for authority, social expectations and conformity to rules or procedures; immediate informality; the right to challenge anything and anyone; and disrespect for people until respect is earned. If students enter college classrooms with even some of these beliefs, what then must they think about how professors do behave and should behave in the classroom? Why should professors care?

This paper reports on one part of a three-part study on classroom behaviors which is student perceptions of professor behaviors. One researcher/author is the course professor, the other researcher/author is a professor in a different discipline within the university who does not have any teaching relationship with these study participants (called "external"). The student participants were enrolled in a required course for business majors.

The intention of this research, firstly, was to discover how some traditional college students perceive professor behaviors over the course of a term and how they rate these behaviors on a scale of offensiveness. Secondly, the research was designed to test ways to measure college students' perceptions about civil and uncivil professor behaviors with the eventual goal of designing a survey instrument. We discuss preliminary findings, primarily on the perceived most offensive and least offensive professor behaviors. Suggestions are offered to faculty for being aware of how students think about professor behaviors and what implications this may have for learning environments and learning outcomes.

METHODOLOGY

This study is a comparison of perceptions at two different times by the same participants on the same items. The time frame is one semester of fifteen weeks. The participants are a convenience sample of all present students in three sections of the same course taught by the same instructor. Three environmental changes are expected to have an effect on responses at the post-test: 1) planned and unplanned class discussions on the topic – the "intended intervention", 2) raised consciousness about the topic from the pre-test of the survey or "priming", and 3) a formed relationship with the professor who will inevitably be at least one of the professors in the students' mind at the post-test which would not be the case at the pre-test. The research design is not intended to isolate possible causes of possible perception changes, but to report on perceptions at both times and offer some thoughts on shifts in perceptions.

The Instrument

Items for the Student Perceptions about Professor Behaviors (SPPB) survey were developed through two focus groups with sixteen student volunteers from the same course with the same professor in a semester prior to the study term. Focus groups enable a researcher to identify domains that can be developed into survey items through targeted questions and discussions about a subject. Each focus group was comprised of eight junior and senior students, male and female, in the current Organizational Behavior course, from all three sections. Signs were posted outside the classroom to recruit participants from the class, but giving the external researcher's name as the one conducting the groups. The course professor scheduled the volunteers into one of two focus groups.

The external professor conducted the focus groups, audio-recording the entire process, and taking notes on non-verbal communication that could not be captured by the recording. Students signed informed consent forms

after having the process explained, agreeing to the audio recording as well. They had no additional questions about the process. The primary question asked of these participants was: "What do you consider offensive behavior in a classroom by professors?" Then participants were asked why they thought these behaviors were offensive, and responded to prompts about the classroom environment, their own behaviors, the behaviors of others, and variations in professors. Participants discussed interactions including their own behaviors and those observed. They also admitted to imagining or transferring to their own classrooms from tv or movies how students and professors might act that would be offensive to them were they to observe these behaviors in an actual classroom. Not all student participants had experienced the behaviors they considered offensive. Both of these focus groups lasted one hour each. Audio tapes were transcribed professionally.

Potential survey items were developed from these focus groups and from related research by both professors. These were tested and refined in cognitive interviews conducted by the external professor with fourteen of the students from the focus groups who volunteered and were available during the two weeks these were conducted. Cognitive interviews give researchers a structured forum for asking potential survey participants just what they think a survey item is asking to ensure the items survey creators seek responses to are in fact on target. The external professor asked students in one-on-one sessions to explain how they understood degrees of offensive and annoying behaviors ("not offensive" to "extremely offensive") as well as how they understood the questions on approximately twenty randomly selected items from fifty-nine potential survey items. Time constraints meant not all questions could be tested with each participant, however the number of participants enabled all items to be tested at least twice. Students offered their own experiences or those observed in classrooms in support of their claims. Cognitive interviews lasted from 35 minutes to one hour, and were audio recorded, then transcribed professionally.

Fifty-nine survey items were discussed between the two researchers using the transcriptions of both the focus groups and cognitive interviews. Fifty-six were kept for inclusion in the Student Perceptions of Professor Behaviors (SPPB) survey. Three were deemed repetitive. Three demographic questions, age, sex, and class level (junior or senior) were added to complete the survey.

The SPPB survey posed one question: How do you feel about a Professor behaving in the classroom in any of these ways? Fifty-six numbered items followed such as "swearing," "not helping students when assignments or tasks are unclear to them," "criticizing another professor or an administrator," and "calling on a student who is unlikely to be unprepared." Responses were positioned on a Likert scale: 1 = not at all offensive, 2 = somewhat offensive, 3 = fairly offensive, 4 = quite offensive, 5 = offensive, 6 = extremely offensive.

Data Collection Procedures

The SPPB survey was administered to the three class sections of the same course taught by the same professor in the same semester (Spring 2008) once very early in the term, and again on the last day of the term. The external professor handled the administration and management of the surveys. During the course, the "intervention" consisted of planned and unplanned discussions of civil and appropriate behaviors in organizations and in classrooms which was performed by the course professor alone.

In the first class meeting of a 15-week course on Organizational Behavior, the course professor told students that a professor from another school in the university would administer surveys. Students would receive a few points toward their class participation grade if they participated (which was assumed by attendance records), however their participation was completely voluntary. On the third day of class, the external professor arrived and described the study and survey, while the course professor left the room for the survey administration. Surveys with consent forms were distributed; informed consent and instructions were read out loud as students followed along. Surveys were collected by the external professor as they were completed, after about ten to twelve minutes. They were assigned individual identifying numbers, including class section, and date. On the last day of the course, the same procedure was employed for the post-test. No identifying information for the participants except for class section remained in connection with the survey responses.

Intended Intervention

Activities to increase students' awareness of acceptable and unacceptable, civil and uncivil behaviors, in both classrooms and in organizations in general were offered to all students present for instruction in all sections of the course. In all three sections early in the term, the professor held a discussion on "psychological contracts" between professor and student defined as: informal obligations, mutual considerations, and shared perceptions of members of an organization, and their difference from any formal contracts. Students exchanged ideas about civil behaviors in the classroom, discussed as "acceptable" and "unacceptable" behaviors, such as the use of cell phones during class time – an example of "uncivil" or unacceptable classroom behavior because they create a disturbance to others.

Examples of highlighting civil behaviors in course lessons, and using the terms "civil," "civility," "uncivil," and "incivility," include the following both planned or structured content and opportune unstructured content. In reviewing the history of the Organizational Behavior field, the course professor specifically linked the term "incivility" with Machiavelli (1513/1961), and with those whose view of employees tend toward McGregor's Theory X (1960). Barnard's Acceptance View of Authority (1938) and Greenleaf's Servant Leadership (1973) represent respect for individual strengths – a "civil" view of leaders and followers. In lectures and discussions about behavior modification in organizations, points about incivility as both antecedents and consequences of certain behaviors were made and discussed. Other topics that drew forth the specific terms "civility" and "incivility" included perception, self-fulfilling prophecy, communication, and espoused vs. enacted values.

Frequently, opportunities for discussing or pointing out civil and uncivil, in terms of acceptable and unacceptable, behaviors were in response to events in the classroom in which "interventions" were deemed necessary to quiet laughter or end sidebar conversations and redirect students' attention. While these focused on student behaviors, they were instances in which behaviors were pointed out that disrupted the class and could be considered uncivil. In two situations, for instance, the professor used her own stern reaction to student misbehaviors as "teaching moments" in civil/uncivil professor and student behaviors. No specific discussions about uncivil professor behaviors were conducted otherwise. In sum, the only structured lessons in civility came in the form of using the term, as well as incivility, whenever relevant to reinforce learning about and awareness of civil vs. uncivil behaviors. The intent was to focus student attention, when necessary or opportune, on common behaviors that when acted out in a classroom could be considered by some to be offensive or uncivil.

Participants

Sixty-seven students completed the pre-test survey on day three of the course, and 74 students completed the post-test in the final class meeting. The difference in participants between pre- and post-test is likely due to required attendance on the last day of class. Male respondents comprised nearly two-thirds of participants; females one-third. Two-thirds of respondents were juniors, one-third were seniors. The age range of respondents was 20-27-- 63% aged 20-21, 24% aged 22-23, 11% between ages 24 and 27, and 3% not known. The university is a small private mid-Western school in a metropolitan area of over 1 million inhabitants, approximately fifteen miles outside of the city, matriculating approximately 5000 undergraduates and graduate students. The course is in the traditional day program (as opposed to the adult/ non-traditional) in the business school; students are primarily from a multi-county area surrounding the city and most are the first in their families to attend college.

DATA ANALYSIS

Following return of both pre- and post-surveys, data were entered in a SPSS database. Item responses were collapsed from six categories to three to demonstrate differences in perceptions more clearly: 1 = not offensive (from 1 = not at all offensive - 2 = somewhat offensive), 2 = somewhat offensive (from 3 = fairly offensive – 4 = quite offensive), and 3 = offensive (5 = offensive – 6 = extremely offensive). Ages were collapsed into three groupings: 20-21, 22-23, and 24-27. The relationships between age and sex and professor behaviors were examined using cross-tabulation. The paired t-test was used to confirm the differences in means between the items (N=56) on the pre-test and the post-test, and sex and age on the most offensive behaviors (N=8).

Table 1: Pre-test results of perceived professor behaviors in descending order of offensiveness by means

	Pre-Test Professor Behaviors	Mean	SD
1.	Humiliating, intimidating students	2.81	.398
2.	Not helping students when assignments or tasks are unclear to them	2.77	.422
3.	"Hitting on" a student	2.75	.472
4.	Embarrassing a student	2.72	.454
5.	Talking about a student who is not present	2.70	.523
6.	Keeping the class overtime	2.69	.467
7.	Punishing the entire class for one or few students' misbehavior/lack of performance	2.66	.509
8.	Using a student or a student's work as a negative example	2.63	.546
9.	Play favorites	2.61	.521
10.	Acting superior/asking questions no one knows answers to	2.60	.524
11.	Not answering a student's question, but referring him/her to course materials	2.57	.609
12.	Commenting on a student's looks	2.55	.558
13.	Not grading assignments in a timely manner	2.49	.504
14.	Degrading or criticizing another professor /administrator	2.49	.587
15.	Cutting a student off	2.49	.533
16.	Not giving students feedback	2.39	.523
17.	Being very authoritative	2.39	.549
18.	Appearing unprepared for class.	2.39	.521
19.	Start class early	2.37	.599
20.	Criticizing students	2.37	.517
21.	Not appropriately advising a student	2.31	.467
22.	Appearing to have arbitrary rules	2.31	.556
23.	Not correcting student misbehavior/rudeness	2.31	.583
24.	Talking on a cell phone	2.30	.718
25.	Singling a student out	2.29	.674
26.	Not making the class interesting	2.28	.598
27.	Dressing inappropriately	2.28	.647
28.	Coming late to class	2.28	.623
29.	Appearing disorganized	2.27	.592
30.	Cancelling class without prior notice	2.24	.653
31.	Being very permissive	2.22	.546
32.	Calling on the same student repeatedly	2.22	.573
33.	Reading power point slides	2.22	.670
34.	Inflating grades	2.21	.565
35.	Calling unprepared student when student is likely to be unprepared or unwilling to speak	2.21	.509
36.	Reading lecture notes to the class	2.21	.664
37.	Talking too fast or slow	2.16	.539
38.	Lecturing the entire class period	2.13	.649
39.	Not talking loudly or too loudly	2.13	.575
40.	Not having sanctions /punishments for student bad behavior/non-attendance/non-performance	2.10	.581
41.	Talking in a monotone	2.10	.606
42.	Sitting behind a desk while teaching	2.08	.594
43.	Not calling on students who raise their hands/offer to respond	2.03	.521
44.	Not making eye contact with students	2.03	.521
45.	Giving too much feedback or criticism	2.00	.632
46.	Not offering teacher evaluation forms	1.91	.773
47.	Eating while teaching	1.88	.663
48.	Leaving classroom during class	1.88	.640
49.	Wandering off topic	1.87	.600
50.	Changing assignments and due date	1.82	.737
51.	Swearing	1.79	.749
52.	Talking about his/her personal life	1.66	.664
53.	Offering strong opinion	1.58	.631
54.	Grading on a curve	1.43	.557
55.	Ending class early	1.27	.570
56.	Drinking a beverage while teaching	1.07	.317

RESULTS

Results on the Student Perceptions about Professor Behaviors (SPPB) indicated that students perceived the most offensive behaviors on the part of professors as: keeping students overtime, embarrassing a student, using a student's work as a negative example, "hitting on" a student, humiliating a student, acting superior, not helping a student with something that is unclear to him or her, and talking about a student who is not present. Less offensive, but still offensive to a substantial degree were these behaviors: reading from slides, not talking loudly enough, and appearing unprepared or disorganized. Cutting a student off, criticizing students, inflating grades, and commenting on a student's looks were examples of less egregiously perceived behaviors, but still moderately uncivil. The majority of students found those behaviors offensive, but some students were equivocal, feeling markedly more or less strongly than the average student. Professors' behavior of not making eye contact, not calling on students who raise their hands, staying seated behind a desk, giving too much criticism or feedback on an assignment, and not offering students the opportunity to evaluate the professor and the course were very offensive. Wandering off topic, swearing, talking about his/her personal life, and changing assignments were only mildly offensive. Drinking beverages, ending class early, and grading on a curve were not at all offensive to students. Table 1 shows all behaviors in descending order of perceived offensiveness at the pre-test point or start of the course.

Table 2: Professor Behaviors rated most offensive in order of means at pre-test;
changes from start to end of course (pre-test to post-test).

Professor Behaviors	Pre-Test			Post-Test	
	Mean	SD	% of students rating behavior as offensive	Mean	SD
Humiliating, intimidating students	**2.81**	.398	**80.6**	**36.5**	**2.20**	.702
Not helping students when assignments or tasks are unclear to them	**2.77**	.422	**76.1**	**35.6**	**2.23**	.657
"Hitting on" a student	**2.75**	.472	**76.1**	**38.4**	**2.21**	.726
Embarrassing a student	2.72	.454	71.6	32.4	2.07	.764
Talking about a student who is not present	2.70	.523	73.0	28.8	1.96	.789
Keeping class overtime	2.69	.467	68.7	**37.8**	**2.20**	.721
Punishing the entire class for one or few students' lack of performance	2.66	.509	67.2	**39.7**	2.18	.770
Using a student or student's work as a negative example	2.63	.546	65.7	24.7	1.95	.743
Playing favorites	2.61	.521	62.7	27.4	2.03	.726
Acting superior, i.e. asking questions no one knows the answer to	2.60	.524	61.2	35.1	2.14	.746
Not directly answering a student's question, but referring to course materials	2.57	.609	62.7	31.5	2.12	.706
Commenting on a student's looks	2.55	.558	58.2	27.0	1.93	.782
Cutting a student off	2.49	.533	50.7	24.3	1.91	.762
Degrading or criticizing another professor	2.49	.587	53.7	23.0	1.85	.771
Not grading assignments in a timely manner	2.49	.504	49.3	28.8	2.04	.735

Most Offensive Professor Behaviors: Changes from Pre-Test to Post-Test

Humiliating or intimidating students, *not helping them when tasks are unclear*, and *"hitting on"* or being flirtatiously suggestive to a student remained the three most offensive ways students perceived professors could act. However, from the start of the course to the end of the course, the perceived egregiousness as measured by student responses fell by nearly half on these items from 80.6 to 36.5 (humiliating), 76.1 to 35.6 (not helping), and 76.1 to 38.4 (hitting on) percents. *"Hitting on" a student* rose from the third most offensive behavior in the pre-test perceived so by 80.6 % to the first most offensive in the post-test, but was perceived as offensive by only 38.4% of students. *Humiliating or intimidating a student* was the second most egregious behavior at 36.5% and *not helping a student* fell to third at 35.6%. *Punishing the entire class for the behavior of one or a few students* (from seventh to first in egregiousness by percent responses), and *keeping the class overtime* (from sixth to third most egregious by

percent responses) rose in rank order in perceived offensiveness from the start of the course to the end. *Talking about a student who is not present* (73%) and *embarrassing a student* (71.6%) were ranked highly in pre-test, but fell in the post-test (32.4% and 28.8%). The variations (SD) from the mean scores in the post-test were somewhat larger than in the pre-test, suggesting a wider range of opinions in the post-test than in the pre-test. Table 2 shows the 25% most egregiously perceived behaviors, in descending order, with the pre-test scores M<2.49 as the benchmark for most offensive behaviors. The 25% cutoff mean for post-test scores on the most offensive behaviors is M<1.94. Means, standard deviations and percentages are given for both pre-test and post-test.

Pre-test responses on student perceptions of professor behaviors tended toward "offensive" where post-test responses tended toward "not offensive." The mean of the pre-test was 2.22 (SD= 0.368; N=55), of the post-test 1.74 (SD=0.309; N=55); the mean difference of 0.476 is significantly greater than zero, t (55) = 16.122, one-tailed p=0.000. Students' perceptions about uncivil professor behaviors clearly softened over the time; all of the most uncivil behaviors fell in perceived offensiveness from the pre-test by approximately half in the post-test given at the end of the course.

Table 3 presents, in descending order, the most offensive professor behaviors as perceived by students at the end of the course (post-test).

Table 3: Professor behaviors most offensive, by mean, at post-test

Professor Behaviors	Post Test	
	Mean	SD
Not helping students when assignments or tasks are unclear to them	2.23	.657
"Hitting on" a student	2.21	.726
Humiliating, intimidating students	2.20	.702
Keeping class overtime	2.20	.721
Punishing the entire class for one or few students' lack of performance	2.18	.770
Acting superior, i.e. asking questions no one knows the answer to	2.14	.746
Not directly answering a student's question, but referring to course materials	2.12	.706
Embarrassing a student	2.07	.764
Not grading assignments in a timely manner	2.04	.735
Playing favorites	2.03	.726
Starting class early	1.97	.781
Talking about a student who is not present	1.96	.789
Singling a student out	1.96	.772
Using a student or student's work as a negative example	1.95	.743

Table 4 shows the most offensive professor behaviors as perceived by students by sex and age and offers percentages for sex and age differences in both the pre- and post-tests. These are presented in order of most egregious at post-test. Males appeared to be most sensitive to *humiliation and intimidation* (76.7%) and to *not helping a student* (76.2%) in the pre-test, but to *keeping the class overtime* (37.8%) and *punishing the whole class* for infractions of a few (36.4%) in the post-test. Females, on the other hand, were most offended by *humiliating* behaviors (87.5%), *"hitting on,"* (83.3%) and *not helping students* (79.2%) in the pre-test. In the post-test, *"hitting on" a student* (48.3%) was still most uncivil, but at a much reduced level, and *punishing the whole class for the lack of performance of one or a few* (44.8%) was second. On only a few behaviors were male and female responses very similar (*keeping class over time, humiliating, and not answering a student's question*). Paired samples t-tests confirm that the mean differences between males' and females' perceptions of offensiveness on all eight items of highest egregious behaviors (M =-1.20 to -1.40; SD = .627 to .686; N = 66) were lower for males. Differences were significantly greater than zero, t (66) = -14.42 to -20.26, one-tailed p = 0.000. Similar results were found in the post-test (M = -0.67 to -0.81; SD =.776 to .893; N = 73), t (73) = -0.65 to -0.89, one tailed p = 0.000, although, as previously noted, the differences were slighter in the post-test set of responses. Overall, males consistently recorded perceptions with significantly lower scores than females, and more definitively in the pre-test than in the post test.

Age differences in respondents also provided variations in scores. For the eight most uncivil behaviors, in seven of eight items, older students (ages 24-27) perceived behaviors to be less offensive than did younger students in the post-test. Only the item *acting superior* was perceived more offensive by some in the post-test (12.5%) than it was in the pre-test (0.0%). "*Hitting on" a student* was rated offensive by 100% of oldest students in the pre-test, but by only 12.5% in the post-test. In each of the seven remaining most uncivil professor behaviors listed in Table 3 except for one, *humiliating and intimidating students*, youngest students (ages 20-21) perceived the highest levels of offensiveness of behaviors. In that one item, youngest students and oldest students felt equally as strong while the middle students (ages 22-23) perceived somewhat less offensiveness. In all remaining items of egregious offensiveness other than *acting superior*, all age groups of students perceived less offensiveness in the post-test than in the pre-test.

Table 4: Most offensive professor behaviors by percent-- pre-, post-, sex, and age

Professor Behaviors		% all	Male	Female	Age 20-21	Age 22-23	Age 24-27
Punishing the entire class for one or few students' lack of performance	Pre	67.2	65.1	70.8	73.8	64.7	33.3
	Post	39.7	36.4	44.8	45.5	36.8	0.0
"Hitting on" a student	Pre	76.1	72.1	83.3	81.0	58.8	100.0
	Post	38.4	31.8	48.3	43.2	36.8	12.5
Keeping class overtime	Pre	68.7	65.1	75.0	66.7	76.5	66.7
	Post	37.8	37.8	37.9	40.0	47.4	0.0
Humiliating, intimidating students	Pre	80.6	76.7	87.5	83.3	70.6	83.3
	Post	36.5	35.6	37.9	35.6	47.4	0.0
Not helping students when assignments or tasks are unclear to them	Pre	76.1	76.2	79.2	83.3	68.8	50.0
	Post	35.6	31.8	41.4	36.4	42.1	12.5
Acting superior, i.e. asking questions no one knows the answer to	Pre	61.2	53.5	75.0	76.2	47.1	0.0
	Post	35.1	31.1	41.4	37.8	36.8	12.5
Embarrassing a student	Pre	71.6	72.1	70.8	73.8	64.7	66.7
	Post	32.4	31.1	34.5	35.6	31.6	0.0
Not answering a student's question, but referring him/her to course materials	Pre	62.7	55.8	75.0	71.4	47.1	33.3
	Post	31.5	31.8	31.0	34.1	31.6	0.0

Least Offensive Professor Behaviors: Changes from Pre-test to Post-Test

As with the most offensive behaviors, perceptions about the least offensive behaviors changed from pre-test to post-test. *Drinking a beverage* was rated by students as the least offensive professor behavior in the pre-test (94%), followed by *ending class early* and *grading on a curve*. No behaviors were seen consistently as so completely inoffensive as was *drinking a beverage* however, as clearly noted by the mean scores in Table 4. In the post-test, *ending class early* (95.9%) and *leaving the classroom during class* (93.2%) were seen as least offensive professor behaviors. Perceptions changed in least offensive behaviors from pre-test to post-test as they did in most offensive behaviors. Eight items in the post-test were viewed as less offensive than the three least offensive behaviors in the pre-test, as indicated by percentage of students' responses. In addition to the three mentioned above, *wandering off topic* (87.7%), *grading on a curve* (85.1%), *giving too much feedback or criticism* (66.2%), *swearing* (65.8%), and *talking about his/her personal life* (65.3%) were all perceived as inoffensive by more than 60% of respondents. Males and females did not vary more than two percentage points except on *leaving the classroom* (95.6% to 89.7%), *talking about personal life* (67.4% to 62.1%), and *giving too much feedback* (64.4% to 69.0%). Attitudes about *swearing in the classroom* varied the most between males and females on the least offensive items (Table 5). Females found swearing more offensive than males did.

Table 5: Professor swearing behavior by student sex

Swearing	Not offensive %		Somewhat offensive %		Offensive %	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
Males	44.2	75.0	39.5	18.2	16.3	6.8
Females	33.3	51.7	41.7	27.6	25.0	20.7

Table 6 indicates the 25% least offensive behaviors leading with the pre-test scores M>2.04. The cut off for least offensive behaviors in the post test at the 25% level is M<1.25. Means, standard deviations, and percentages are given for both pre- and post-test.

Table 6: Professor behaviors tending toward the inoffensive, in order at pre-test; changes from pre- to post-test.

Professor Behaviors	Pre-Test			Post-Test	
	Mean	SD	% of students rating behavior as not offensive	Mean	SD
Drinking a beverage while teaching	**1.07**	.317	**94.0**	85.1	1.19	.488
Ending class early	**1.27**	.570	**77.5**	95.9	**1.04**	.199
Grading on a curve	**1.43**	.557	**60.0**	85.1	1.18	.449
Offering a strong opinion	1.58	.631	49.3	58.3	1.50	.650
Talking about his/her personal life	1.66	.664	44.8	65.3	1.42	.622
Swearing	1.79	.749	40.3	65.8	1.47	.709
Changing assignments/due dates	1.82	.737	37.3	47.9	1.62	.659
Wandering off topic	1.87	.600	25.4	**87.7**	**1.12**	.331
Leaving the classroom during class	1.88	.640	26.9	**93.2**	**1.07**	.253
Eating while teaching	1.88	.663	28.4	48.6	1.77	.837
Not offering teacher evaluation forms	1.91	.773	34.3	57.5	1.59	.761
Giving too much feedback or criticism	2.00	.623	19.7	66.2	1.42	.641
Not making eye contact with students	2.03	.521	11.9	46.6	1.66	.692
Not calling on students who raise their hands	2.03	.521	11.9	41.1	1.77	.736

DISCUSSION

We indicated earlier that we expected three environmental factors to influence findings in the post-test: 1) planned class content and discussion on the topic of civility, 2) consciousness about civility as a result of "priming", and 3) particularized specificity about the course professor when thinking about "Professor Behaviors."   Other possible bearings on changes were likely to be the opportune discussions, unknown events involving the course professor or other professors in the same term, expectations about grades, differences in general well-being, and many other factors that can impact both attitudes, interest, and attention to task. Expectancy, reactivity effects, experience, attribution, halo effects, gender or age stereotypes, and liking or disliking a professor all may affect students' perceptions of offensiveness of behaviors.

We cannot clearly measure the effects of opportune classroom interactions-between professor and students on the post-tests of the instrument. And without replication with other professors, we cannot determine if changes occurred because the course professor became familiar to the student participants. It is possible that the pre-test of the survey had a priming effect on the outcomes of the post-test. Students had completed the survey a second time just fifteen weeks, from start to finish of a semester course, from the first time. The second time they may have had an easier time of reading through it, more understanding of what the questions were asking, and retained some memory of words, phrases and context of the subject matter.   It was our plan to take advantage of a common threat to validity and use the survey as a teaching tool. Our hope is that the pre-test prepared students to consider civil and uncivil classroom behaviors and to be consciously or subconsciously aware of them during the course lessons and while acting or reacting in the classroom environment. Any occurrence of this is un-measurable in this study design, and any conclusions about this are purely speculative.

The only finding we are sure of is that perceptions changed in favor of less offensiveness in professor behaviors with the post-test. Several explanations of this are possible. Students very likely considered the course professor first when answering the questions on the post-test surveys in her classroom. The course professor's demeanor is serious but nurturing, and by the end of the course students were likely to have a reasonably positive view of her, while at the beginning they did not know her. Where the professor did not fit the behavior being queried, students were most apt to consider other current professors who might have exhibited or could be imagined to exhibit the behavior, so different professors may have been envisioned for different behaviors. The course

professor was an older woman who was not likely to strike students as predatory, unconcerned, or incompetent, yet they would not know this at the start of the course. Students also came to know the course professor, and therefore expectations for her behaviors, as just any professor before knowing her would likely be modified after 45 class meetings. On the last day of class, students may have felt relieved, content, generous, or some other neutral or positive emotion that could have influenced them to rate the course professor positively. And it is possible that students did not experience many offensive behaviors in their courses that term, so expectations at the beginning did not materialize by the end. Our intention was to have students think of professors in general and not one they currently had, however we had no way to ensure this. Testing students in various courses with various professors in multiple disciplines will eliminate this confounding factor in this first test of the survey.

Student characteristics are also likely to affect their responses. Engaged students with good attendance who work for good grades and mastery of the subject may respond differently to items than students who are disinterested, frustrated, annoyed, overwhelmed, or distracted. Personal feelings such as stress, interest, tiredness, will likely affect generosity or harshness of opinions about a professor at the moment of questioning. The friendliness or "safety" of the classroom environment and demands of the class period or day would also sway student perceptions and subsequently their responses. The pre-test was given in the first week of the course when students may feel excited or inspired by a new term and course or overwhelmed and distressed. The post-test was given on the last day of classes amid multiple evaluation forms, questionnaires, and final exams. Students may have dashed off responses without giving much thought to them, favoring mid-scale or low offensiveness ratings because they didn't have to or want to think too much about them. These influences will be controlled for or managed as well as can be in future iterations of the survey development and testing.

What do students make of professors' behaviors in the classroom? Students who participated in focus groups provided the only data on reasons for their opinions about behaviors that were offensive or uncivil. We can only extrapolate to the survey respondents because of their similarities in age, course selection, school and course professor to the focus group participants. Nearly all of them said they had never actually been the target of a professor's uncivil behavior, and had never seen a professor treat a student badly. However, they were vocal about the kinds of behaviors they remembered from high school, heard others describe in anecdotes (or saw on TV or in the movies), or could imagine would be out of place in a college classroom. The students whose thoughts led us to items for the surveys, for the most part, said that the professor could more or less behave as he or she wished, because it was his or her classroom. Many agreed with the statement that students were in class to get an education, and whether or not the class was interesting or the professor's behaviors were civil or fair did not absolve them of the responsibility to focus and learn as best they could. However, when a professor did behave badly, it would make it difficult to pay attention, as it would if the professor did not control the uncivil behavior of other students. Then they said they would feel frustrated or angry that their learning time was being compromised, and their time in the classroom was being wasted. They also believed that civil behavior meant everyone should help maintain an atmosphere in which anyone who wanted to learn could.

Students in the focus groups were also aware of and critical of behaviors that demean students or embarrass them, and felt strongly that those behaviors were inexcusable and should be reported. However they said they were not likely to do the reporting. They believed professors have the obligation to solve problems of disrespect or distraction in the classroom, and some felt those uncivil students should be made examples of to deter other students. More than half of the students invoked, or agreed with, the consumer ideology that since they pay for college, they should be treated as consumers by professors – grading practices, types of assignments, and classroom preparation for tests should be thoughtfully considered. They believe that professors should listen to students' opinions, be prepared to teach, make concessions, and state clear but flexible guidelines. These are all areas in which students have rights. In the same vein, professors should not "cold call" or pick on students whom they expect are unprepared, let students sleep and eat if they do so quietly, and understand when a student is overwhelmed or is bored. Sometimes students just don't want to pay attention or be called on; they want to be doing something else like text-message their friends, and if they are not disturbing anyone, they should be left alone.

Results on this first wave of the Student Perceptions about Professor Behaviors (SPPB) survey instrument suggest, through factor analysis, two domains, unwillingness or inability to respect students as individuals, and incompetence and disinterest on the part of the professor. Students perceive those behaviors on the part of professors

as uncivil or offensive which disregard the students' individualism – behaviors that suggest the professor cares less about students than he/she does about him/herself or cares less about each student than the student cares about him/herself. This interpretation is in accord with the desire for respect that all people have, but may be more salient to members of this generational cohort if narcissistic tendencies are assumed as demonstrated by some researchers (Sacks,1996; Twenge,2006).   Less offensive but still marked to a substantial degree are behaviors that appear to students to indicate lack of competence, first, and the interest in and willingness to teach, second. Students are acutely aware of a professor's incompetence or lack of interest, but may project this view into a personalized feeling of being irrelevant to the professor. It is possible that regardless of the reason a professor acts badly, students internalize it as a lack of respect for them in the student role. This means that if a professor is mean and arrogant, the student perceives himself as irrelevant to the professor except as an object on which to project power relations. If the professor is an incompetent teacher or is not interested in teaching or is not knowledgeable in the subject matter, the student believes her presence is irrelevant except as an object for meeting job obligations. Power differentials, beliefs about the rights and responsibilities of those in authority, cultural differences, personal experiences and values, and the characteristics of the professor and the student are just some of the influences on students' perceptions of the behaviors of professors.

What can faculty do with an understanding of how some college students view civil and uncivil behaviors? Emotions flow from the more dominant person in an exchange or environment to the lesser. In a classroom, whether today's students always agree, the professor is the most socially dominant. One of a teacher's roles, outside of conveying information and helping to build a knowledge base in others, is social -- to help students learn to manage stress and redirect frustration and boredom. Doing this, and with empathy, enhances cognitive performance, keeps minds from wandering, and improves motivation and focus which enables students to learn to develop solutions to problems (Goleman, 2006). Calling on students when they are unprepared may have greater costs than pay-offs. Students feel anything but challenged when they are feeling impaired in the classroom, for whatever reason the impairment. Professors should be aware of what they are trying to accomplish when they embarrass or single out a student intentionally, and when they do so inadvertently. The security of the learning environment is comprised, and enthusiasm and achievement wanes. A professor's positive regard for students in their student role, and awareness of their needs and concerns, enables students to like and respect their teachers, and in turn behave predictably and well. A tuned-in mood, clear expectations, flexibility, and some routinization enhance a student's learning environment. In concert with compliments and good appraisals of students, "well managed doses of irritation" can motivate people by focusing their attention (Goleman, 1996, p. 275). However, harsh judgments, veiled or unveiled threats (including flirtation), and arrogance by professors in dominant positions cause students in subordinate positions to feel injured, angry, frustrated, and eventually powerless and resigned. Brain circuitry continues to develop into a person's mid-twenties; learning occurs best when secure and harmonious environments enable neurons to connect and strengthen. Distress, emotional upsets, and resentments hamper brain organization of new information; we focus on the upset and remember the event better than we remember the subject matter. This is especially true for smart and focused students (Goleman, 2006). There is little doubt that young people in our classrooms have complex and stressful lives, and are likely to be searching for reinforcement of their individualism. We should know what works for them to have them work for us and accomplish their goals as we accomplish ours.

CONCLUSION

Naturally, variations in student experiences and backgrounds as well as belief systems and values have an influence on how students perceive classroom environments and professor behaviors. Further research should attempt to measure beliefs and demographic variables with perceptions about professor behaviors. Given the generational variations assumed by social scientists for this age group, correlations with measures on narcissism could provide credence to the judgments made about this cohort, or defy them. Another possible correlating theme is perceived stress and coping skills of students. Students may have differing perceptions about civil and uncivil behaviors on the part of their professors depending on how resilient they are, how well they block distractions, and how well they cope with the many stressors that this age group faces.

A wider range of college environments would improve generalizability of any findings about student perceptions of professor behaviors. It is not likely that this sample is representative of college students in the U.S. given that the college is small, private, and the students are locally drawn and first time college attendees. For

instance, the wide range of multicultural variations in how young people view authority figures and power distance, direct and indirect behaviors, as well as their level of uncertainty avoidance (Hofstede, 2001) are certain considerations to take into account. Preferences for rules or exceptions to rules, as well as individualist vs. communitarian perspectives, inner or outer directedness, and how much specificity compared with diffuseness students thrive under also surely affect how students perceive and tolerate offensive or uncivil behaviors by professors.

AUTHOR INFORMATION

Elizabeth Stork, Ph.D. is Assistant Professor of Organizational Studies and Leadership, and doctoral faculty in the Doctorate of Science in Information Systems and Communications at Robert Morris University, Pittsburgh, PA. Her M.A. in Sociology, M.S.W., and Social Work Research doctorate were earned at the University of Pittsburgh, and her B.A. in The Classics at L.S.U. Research interests are how to teach multicultural diversity and the sociology of leadership, as well as how adult learners develop their mental models of abstract concepts.

Nell Tabor Hartley, Ph.D., Professor of Management holds degrees from Agnes Scott College, University of Illinois, and Vanderbilt University. Her teaching and corporate training interests are in the areas of understanding and utilizing individual differences. Most of her publications have been in the Journal of Management History. Teaching and learning with university students in the School of Management at Robert Morris University remain her vocation and avocation. In addition to winning teaching awards, she has held numerous administrative positions over her twenty-five year RMU career.

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