Student Incivility: An Engagement or Compliance Model?

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Abstract

This critical essay describes two community college faculty members’ experience of student incivility in a learning community. Situated within the context of the tremendous recent growth in community college enrollment, the authors explore the negative consequences of heavy-handed, compliance based approaches to inappropriate student behaviors in the classroom. The authors “theorize up” from their classrooms on ways to address student incivility that motivate student agency and foster engagement in learning over simple compliance to rules. They propose several innovative interventions aimed at diminishing negative student behaviors and promoting student self-regulation in defining and enforcing civility on campus.
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“…arguments based on ‘authority’ are no longer valid; in order to function, authority must be on the side of freedom, not against it.” - Paulo Freire (2007)

Community colleges throughout the United States have been flooded with students since the economic downturn began in 2008 (Boggs, 2010).1 Our home campus, one of six community colleges in the City University of New York, is no exception. This fall, enrollment peaked at almost 18,500 – up from 14,500 just three years earlier – with students showing up to enroll and register for classes until just days before the semester began (Office of Institutional Research Assessment and Planning, KCC, 2010). This surge in community college enrollment brings, to higher education, many students, who, barring the economic crisis and the high unemployment rate for young adults (Community Service Society, Rutkoff, 2010), would not necessarily have chosen college. ii The enrollment of so many youth for whom college is a last resort coincides with a widespread perception on the part of higher education faculty that student incivility on our campuses is on the rise (Bjorkland & Rehling, 2010; Cabony, Hirschy, & Best, 2004; Rookstool, 2007; Summers, Bergin, & Cole, 2009). This reflective essay explores one experience of student incivility in a community college and what we perceive as the negative consequences of heavy-handed, compliance based approaches to inappropriate student behaviors. We “theorize up” from our classroom experience in order to stimulate dialogue among our colleagues on ways to address incivility that motivate student agency and engagement in learning over simple compliance to rules.

Incivility on Campus

Classroom incivility is generally defined as student behaviors that interfere with a productive learning environment in the college classroom (Bray & Del Favoro, 2004; Clark & Springer, 2007; Feldman, 2001). It is often framed around complaints by instructors concerning students walking in late or leaving a lecture early, using cell phones during class, disrupting lectures through chatting with other classmates, and engaging in activities that are not directly related to the topic-at-hand (Patron & Bisping, 2008). Feldman (2001) broadly defines incivility as any action that interferes with a cooperative and
harmonious learning environment and cites a number of instances in which students’ learning has been impaired by various forms of classroom misconduct. Across college campuses, a large proportion of students report fair amounts of incivility within their classrooms and the need for faculty and administrators to enact strategies aimed at maintaining a civil classroom environment (Bjorklund & Rehling, 2010). Further, Connelly (2009) argues that civility involves more than just abiding by the rules, but includes “a mixture of both moral principles or precepts, like respect for others, and manners” (p. 50). Ultimately, classroom civility is about more than just behaving well and not getting into trouble. It is about creating and maintaining a college culture that allows all students to learn, grow, and get the most out of their educational experience.

On our campus, like many others, the recent influx of new students has coincided with a widespread perception that student incivility has increased. Despite deep faculty reluctance to report incidents not directly involving physical threats or violence, close to 90 incidents per semester have been reported to the Dean’s Office of our college the last few years (Office of the Dean of Students, personal communication, 2010). The perceived increase in disciplinary issues at the college prompted, for the first time ever, a college-wide campaign for civility. This campaign has involved the posting of a code of civility in every classroom, an effort to get faculty to include a civility statement on their syllabi, the development of an Assessment and Care Team (ACT) dedicated to monitoring and responding to “students that may pose a threat to themselves and/or the college community,” and a forum on civility in which more than a dozen panelists from a variety of college programs and offices spoke about the ways in which a civil campus environment was critical to a safe and productive academic experience (KCC, ACT website, 2010). Though touted as a “student-driven” campaign, the initial impulse came from the college administration and remains largely faculty and staff driven. The campaign combines promoting respect for human diversity and a strong stance against bias/discrimination on campus with concern over student conduct in class. A draft survey on college civility circulating on campus includes many questions about the appropriateness of student behaviors such as chewing gum, arriving late, and texting in class, as well as a few concerning hostile verbal attacks and harassing comments or behavior. Thus, civility on our campus seems ill-defined, with little consensus as to what constitutes incivility and where to draw the line between criminal offenses such as sexual harassment and more mundane infractions such as sleeping in
class. Similarly, the consequences for violating the civility code are not yet fully defined or consistently enforced, since many faculty – the frontline in experiencing and reporting incivility – are unaware that such a code or campaign exists.

The forum on civility was followed by another event organized by a student association comprised primarily of young men of color called “Brothers United.” This group challenged the concept of “civility” as an attack on freedom of speech and argued that the college community ought to focus on building tolerance through education and help students develop a sense of ethical behavior in relation to issues such as homophobia, religious intolerance, sexual harassment, and the self-segregation of different cultural and ethnic groups on campus. Their concerns dealt primarily with creating an environment, within and beyond the classroom, in which all students feel safe to express who they are and what they believe without fear of silencing or recrimination. This group advocates for allowing students to voice all opinions – even those deemed offensive – so that, through open and honest dialogue, students gain an understanding of the personal and social origins of prejudicial views and come to greater acceptance of diversity on campus. Simply put, the Brothers argue “not to limit by force, but out of love.” Consideration of incivilities such as students talking or texting in class was not part of their agenda. Overall, Brothers United defines civility as “ethics not behavior” and underscores the importance of raising awareness so that students recognize that “words have weight” and self-regulate (Brothers United, personal communication, 1/5/11).

The college’s campaign for civility and the Brothers United event underscore the complexity and potential contentiousness of defining and enforcing campus civility, particularly given this enormous influx of new students. These initiatives illustrate the diversity of opinions on how to best foster an environment that honors student freedoms while concurrently setting parameters for classroom behavior that is conducive to students’ intellectual growth. In this reflective essay, we depict our own first-hand struggles to find a balance between freedom and limits in our classrooms and call for a dialogue on how community colleges might develop protocols that effectively address student incivility while avoiding the sorts of authoritarian dynamics that compel compliance to rules at the cost of authentic student engagement. We convey our struggles to set and enforce limits without denying our students the opportunities to take active leadership roles in class, debate controversial ideas, voice unpopular opinions, and begin to “own”
their college educations. We also express our concerns about institutional responses that fail to consider the psycho-social origins of student behaviors and/or take disciplinary actions that inadvertently alienate students from the larger college community and disengage them from learning.

**Incivility in the Context of our Learning Community**

Like many colleges that are struggling to retain students and improve graduation rates, our campus has embraced learning communities as a strategy for promoting student success. Our college is a nationally recognized leader in learning communities which are intended to increase student persistence, in large part through increasing student engagement in learning (Scrivener et al., 2008). Research indicates that, when learning community courses are student-centered, provide integrative assignments aimed at satisfying the objectives of both courses, foster active learning, and provide opportunities for both social and intellectual interactions among students, learning community students tend to have higher rates of retention and greater satisfaction with the college experience (Tinto, 1997; 1998; Scrivener et al., 2008). Our classes, Developmental English and Introduction to Psychology, linked as part of a first semester learning community and consistent with learning community philosophy, are generally characterized by a high degree of student participation, pedagogies that encourage active learning, and significant curricular integration. We share a cohort of 22 students who not only take our two classes, but are also enrolled in a one credit student success course taught by their academic adviser and intended to ease the transition to college. As part of the learning community, students work on three long-term integrative assignments intended to encourage connections across our courses and promote higher order thinking skills as they gain disciplinary knowledge in psychology and develop their academic reading and writing abilities.

Despite their many positive outcomes, one well documented downside to learning communities is that the cohort model can lead to what is commonly referred to as “hyper-bonding,” or the development of overly close relationships among students that result in unproductive behaviors in class (Jaffe, 2004; 2007). These unconstructive student behaviors generally resemble those more commonly associated with high school: the formation of cliques among students, classroom behavior dominated by incivility, and a general sense that the familiarity of the learning community “breeds contempt.” Despite our deep
commitment to learning communities as a highly effective strategy for increasing student engagement, persistence, satisfaction with the college experience, and a sense of “belonging” among students who are usually the first in their families to attend college (Bloom & Sommo, 2005; Engstrom, 2008), we have seen our fair share of “hyper-bonding” in our learning communities as well. At different points in the semester, when too much togetherness has frayed our collective tempers, we’ve been witness to the formation of cliques, students who have momentarily, and quite colorfully, “lost it” in class with their peers, and the constant background murmur of excessive student chattiness that has seriously distracted the class from learning. But these behaviors have never, in our own minds, outweighed the significant benefits of participation in a first year learning community. Rather, as educators, we have tried to respond in creative, pedagogical ways to decrease these negative behaviors and engage students in thinking deeply about what actions promote and enhance student learning. We now hold a joint class at the beginning of each semester dedicated to engaging students in collaboratively defining the parameters for what constitutes a positive and productive learning environment. We always leave that session pleased that students are readily able to name the actions – on their parts and ours – that will enable us to work collaboratively in the semester to come. And, though there is often some slippage – cell phones usually emerge again around the fourth week in the semester, side talk is always hard to combat – this investment in taking seriously students’ beliefs and values about what makes for a positive learning environment generally pays off.

Unfortunately, this semester seemed qualitatively different. A clique of four students, based on bonds of gender, age, and race (three African American young women and one Black Latina young woman), threatened to upset the equilibrium of our learning community in ways we had not previously experienced. What began as excessive chattiness in class, and a reluctance to change seats at our request, soon escalated into outright disregard for us and the rules we’d attempted to co-create with students at the beginning of the semester. Jason’s request that students permanently change their seating, to diminish the distraction of non-stop chatter, was met with absolute refusal. Emily’s insistence that the ban on cell phones in class be respected led to the confiscation of one student’s cell phone and Emily being “cussed out” in class by a member of this clique. Our initial responses to this new level of student disruption were to meet with these students outside of class, to set clear limits, and to reaffirm our
sincere desire to engage them in learning. Though there were some bumps in the road, in Emily’s class, this group of students began to reassert their leadership in an entirely new and productive dimension, redirecting their smarts as proactive and engaged members of the learning community. Confronting them about their negative behaviors and recommitting to work with them as learners seemed to lead to a breakthrough of sorts. When the predictable teacher crackdown never materialized, it seemed that these students realized Emily was serious about their learning. Now, these young women were raising their hands right and left, emerging as leaders of class discussion, and, most importantly, using their time in the computer lab to work diligently on their writing rather than chatting with their peers and checking Facebook!

In the psychology class, the young women became particularly engaged in the context of group activities, debates, and presentations, with one of the young women always the first to volunteer to document on the chalkboard what her small group had accomplished and the others eager to present orally what they had done with a cooperative learning task. However, they continued to struggle with participating in whole class discussion and paying attention to the interactive lecture format of the psychology class, often resuming the chatter and cell phone usage when other students would voice opinions or Jason would attempt to explain a difficult concept. However, our early interventions appeared to open up enough of an understanding between Jason and the four students that he could bring them back to the conversation with less disruption and attempt to discover with them the reasons for their resistance and unwillingness to listen to others’ ideas. In fact, outside of class, they began opening up to him, sharing both their anxieties that they would not understand the material (thus, their attempts to preclude Jason from presenting it) and mental health concerns that they believed kept them from focusing in class.

Despite the relative improvements in both English and Psychology, in the student development class, the situation continued to devolve into outright rebellion with the level of distraction generated by this clique making it close to impossible for the instructor to teach. About a month into the semester, the situation exploded. After arriving 20 minutes late to this one hour class, the four young women proceeded to engage in rude and uncooperative behavior that included plotting to cross a classmate’s name off of the attendance sign-in sheet, rearranging classroom furniture so that one of them could put her feet up on
the desk, and loudly whispering amongst themselves that the class was “bullshit.” When confronted about their behaviors after class, the students claimed that the instructor was unfairly singling them out and accused him of being racist. The meeting ended with the four young women storming out of the classroom and proceeding to walk down the corridors of the college loudly proclaiming that they were the victims of unfair treatment.

We attribute the focus of student resistance to the student success course to several factors. Despite the college’s efforts to bolster the legitimacy of this one-credit course, it is perceived by students as “soft” in its focus on self-exploration and growth (rather than academic literacy skills or disciplinary content), and it was taught by a particularly young and inexperienced staff member who is not part of the full-time faculty. In a sense, we believe that these students found what they perceived as the “weak link” in the learning community and acted out accordingly. After this particularly egregious class session, the instructor made a formal complaint to the Dean’s office. Though Emily had some reluctance about this course of action due to the marked improvement in student behavior in her class, she supported the student success instructor’s actions, because the disruption and disrespect seemed so extreme and unrelenting. In addition to our commitment to supporting our learning community colleague, we also saw the importance of making it clear that certain behaviors are simply not appropriate in the college classroom, and we clearly had not been able to communicate this effectively enough through our own interventions.

After the official complaint was lodged, several days passed, and we received no response from the Dean’s office. As the students’ positive (or at least, passable) in-class behavior continued, it seemed like the whole issue might fade away on its own, so we were surprised and concerned to receive an email one Friday from the supervisor of the student success course informing us that uniformed security guards would pull these students out of class on Monday morning and escort them to the Dean’s office for disciplinary action. Emily’s initial reaction was to express her concern via email. She wrote:

I find it terribly disturbing to have a security officer come pull them out of my class after I have worked extremely hard to set appropriate limits and move beyond their disruption to establish the foundation of trust upon which all learning is based. To have an officer enter my classroom and take them to the Dean of Students would undermine everything I have done to move these
students from disruption and disrespect to engagement with the learning process. And that engagement is beginning to happen -- I have seen evidence of them following the parameters we have laid out for them and real work on learning in the last couple of classes! ... These are young people, who perhaps have never been in a positive learning situation before. Clearly, they are testing the limits in deeply inappropriate and disrespectful ways. However, what I would like them to take from this experience is a belief in the positive potential of their participation in education -- not a confirmation of their alienation from teachers and the teaching and learning process.

(10/22/10)

Despite this, and several follow up phone calls on her part, it looked like the college’s response was entrenched and unwavering. Ultimately, the students were “picked up” after their psychology class by uniformed guards and, in their meeting with the Dean, were compelled to sign a contract of “acceptable behavior” that covered five specific points: 1. No cell phones in class; 2. Continue to sit apart; 3. No talking/disruptiveness in class; 4. No foul language in class; and 5. Treat professors with respect. Should they not heed the parameters of the contract, the next course of action would be daily suspension.

Responding to Disciplinary Measures with Compliance

Our students' response to the college’s disciplinary intervention was disturbing and disheartening to us and represented a dramatic disjuncture from the increased engagement that Emily, in particular, had been seeing in her classroom in the weeks prior. While the students mostly respected the letter, though definitely not the spirit of the contract (strategically positioning themselves one seat apart, for example, or putting their cell phones away when asked but not of their own accord), we worry that their actions represented compliance at the expense of real engagement. In compelling them to sign a contract with the Dean, we believe that students’ choice to engage in learning was taken away from them. When this educational conflict over power and authority in the classroom – the heart and soul of pedagogical theory since John Dewey – was turned into a disciplinary issue, it only served to heighten students’ original sense that perhaps they “did not belong” in college. This was particularly disturbing, given that learning communities are largely aimed at fostering a sense of college connection and commitment among students who are the first in their families to attend college and whose relationship to higher
education is often tenuous at best (Cohen, 2003; Engstrom, 2008). Along with eradicating the very inappropriate behaviors that these young women were enmeshed in, current disciplinary measures inadvertently squelched the very real evidence, and possibility, of student engagement Emily had begun to see in her classroom.

After this intervention, instead of raised hands, Emily often found one of the students with her head down on her desk refusing to engage in collaborative learning activities with other classmates. She began to see record numbers of what appeared to be coordinated latenesses (12, 17, 20 out of 36 classes in the semester!) in which all four young women walked in together, dramatically and distractingly late, and an improbable number of absences all on the same dates (enough to warrant unofficial withdrawal from the course). More disheartening, these students were turning in work late, and, jeopardizing their chances of passing the course and moving out of remediation, a stated outcome of the learning community. In fact, only two of the four young women passed the developmental English course at the end of the semester, though all of them had strong enough reading and writing skills to move to the next level of remediation.

In both Jason’s class and the one credit student success class, these students did a better job at arriving on time and allowing others to speak without interruption. However, Jason noticed that these young women were less likely to appear animated during small-group activities or to volunteer to share the outcomes of their tasks. Overall, their interest in the course material appeared to dissipate, despite the fact that students generally find the second half of the Introduction to Psychology course more interesting and relevant to their lived experiences. Their behavior seemed to directly contradict Schussler’s (2009) depiction of student engagement as “a deeper connection between the student and the material whereby a student develops an interest in the topic or retains the learning beyond the short term” (p. 115).

Feeling disappointed at the lack of engagement we witnessed following the Dean’s intervention, we began to consider why these students might have been so eager to test classroom limits, reject traditional authority figures, and resist the more heavy-handed, compliance-based response to their inappropriate behaviors. A review of their personal essays, written at the start of the semester, provides a few clues. Each of these students’ early essays, a personal narrative about an important learning
experience, detailed some degree of personal trauma: a father with many, many children from multiple partners taught his daughter never to trust men; a grandmother’s death after a protracted illness led another student to feel responsible for this untimely death; another young woman’s family conflict led her to abandon her home in the first weeks of the semester and seek temporary housing with relatives and friends; another wrote about being sent to live with a grandmother in another country for several years as an adolescent because her mom could not take care of her during this time. In short, these essays revealed that each student grew up feeling disempowered from decision-making and betrayed by traditional authority figures. We can only assume that, by following a compliance-based model and turning these students in to the Dean for discipline, we confirmed for them the notion that authority figures are not to be trusted. We deeply regret the lost opportunity to show these ambivalent young people that teachers can be counted among those who are on their side.

Addressing Incivility through Strategies that Foster Engagement, not Compliance: A Modest Proposal

Defining the fine line of limits and freedoms in a community college classroom will never be easy. Over the past semester, we have often asked ourselves: what is the answer to inappropriate student behaviors when we are in the trenches and sometimes just can’t stand any more distractions? How can we create a culture in which students behave in ways that promote learning because they choose to? How can we nurture more student self-regulation? This article represents our attempt to acknowledge the complexity of the problem, the very real tension over student rights and responsibilities, and ultimately argue against the notion that heavy-handed interventions put students on the right track toward learning and college success. We believe there are steps colleges and instructors can take to diminish incivility and promote engagement among students for whom a positive college outcome is anything but secure.

Campus Initiatives

Our proposal begins with a more serious and sustained dialogue within and across urban community college campuses about what constitutes a civil campus environment. We believe that these conversations must include both faculty and diverse student perspectives concerning where and how
limits on students’ freedoms bump up against faculty and staff desires for certain kinds of conduct. The “Brother’s United” group, mentioned earlier, proclaims that civility need be promoted “not out of limits, but love” and by reaching the hearts and minds (not fears) of fellow students. One challenge would be to include not only those model students who are the first to volunteer for extra-curricular and civic-engagement focused activities on campus, but also those who often resist collaborations with faculty and cause the disruptions to teaching and learning about which we write. In contrast to typical classroom dynamics, we might invite students to take the lead in these discussions and both consider the reasons for underlying classroom conflicts and propose strategies for moving forward. For those of us who believe in the educational theory of student agency and empowerment, this could be an opportunity to turn the deeply enervating process of controlling student incivilities into an emancipatory educational experience.

Ideally, we envision these cross-campus conversations enabling more student-driven committees and initiatives that respond to specific complaints of student incivility. Hence, instead of calling students before the Dean’s office, they might meet with a committee that includes fellow students to ascertain both the students’ and instructor’s perceptions of the conflict (which are likely at odds) and develop strategies for improving classroom dynamics. If struggles appear driven, at least in part, by mental health issues, then mental health counselors might be brought in as facilitators, and counseling might become part of the student-instructor agreement.vi Bringing in public safety would be used exclusively as a last resort. As leaders in Brother’s United passionately explained, “You might as well bring in the NYPD” (Brother’s United, personal communication, 1/5/11). As young men of color -- for whom higher education is often seen as an escape route from poor Black and Latino neighborhoods in New York City where “stop and frisk” is standard practice and police presence has terribly negative connotations and implications – this is not what they want in their college. These young men see involving public safety in cases of incivility as “being put in the slammer before you get a slap on the wrist” (Brother’s United, personal communication, 1/5/11). For our students, this disproportionate response to their infractions led to their withdrawing from real engagement with the learning process.
Classroom Initiatives

Within the context of individual classrooms, we believe that the push towards engagement once again begins with faculty engaging students in real dialogue about what constitutes appropriate college behavior in class and, ultimately, working with students to collaboratively establish ground rules and consequences for violating them. It would be especially important for instructors to remain open to learning about those faculty behaviors that students consider unprofessional and/or ineffective and to accede to some behavioral guidelines (i.e., mutual respect, constructive criticism) set down by students. To the extent possible, violations of the agreed-upon ground rules would be addressed in class by both the instructor and fellow students.

Although this might not come easily, instructors could also express a willingness to negotiate certain previously non-negotiable issues, such as the use of cell phones and other electronic devices in class. Of course, in the spirit of true negotiation on both sides, we would urge our students to make good choices concerning classroom guidelines, sharing evidence that those students who have access to laptops and other forms of technology are less likely to remember as much of the material that is presented as compared to those who were denied access to technology (Hembrooke & Gay, 2003).

Alongside this more genuine collaboration with students concerning rules and consequences, we might also afford students greater opportunities to test out whether or not faculty beliefs concerning engagement and ultimate learning will be supported empirically within our individual classrooms. At the very start of the term, we might randomly select a group of students to place their cell phones in a bin at the start of the class and, at mid-point, compare the grades and quality of writing of those students to the rest of the class who have had the opportunity to retain and make use of their electronic devices. We might ask students early on to agree that, if those not having access to electronic devices outperform other classmates by midpoint, then the rest of the class would agree to renounce cell phone usage for the rest of the term. Depending on the results, we might have a more solid basis for prohibiting cell-phone usage or, at the very least (if we don't get the anticipated results), students' belief that we are genuinely working with them to discover effective teaching strategies and not simply imposing them haphazardly. For those classes with greater initiative at the start of the term, we would certainly encourage students to generate testable hypotheses concerning various classroom behaviors (positive and negative) and
eventual student outcomes. Throughout the term, we would integrate their experience of the experiment into class work via student reflection papers and, at the end of the term, perhaps invite students to co-author a paper on the results.

Finally, we should probably acknowledge explicitly that, at particular junctures, we might need to privilege the teacher’s over the students’ classroom prerogatives (though ideally these would become merged) and use the authority vested in us if we believe some students’ behavior is limiting other students’ learning. However, we need to be explicit when we occasionally make this more authoritative choice and acknowledge that we might be in violation of those mutually agreed-upon guidelines for teaching and learning established early-on. Although this is not ideal, we trust our students to recognize that we are doing our best and that the structures of education (and their individual teachers) are imperfect. Moreover, if we do our best to stick with our original agreements, revisiting and revising when necessary in a democratic fashion, then those exceptions would hopefully substantiate (rather than disprove) the democratic and egalitarian structures that we hope to promote.

Concluding Thoughts

We conclude, with a little preliminary evidence, that a more democratic classroom in which decision-making is shared, the reins are loosened, and engagement (rather than compliance) is fostered leads to better pedagogical outcomes and a more positive learning experience for all. Given our concerns that the compliance-based model enforced by the college did not foster positive learning among our students, we made a conscious decision to violate their contractual agreement with the Dean and afford them agency over who they worked with in a final integrative presentation which asked them to highlight the connections made between the concepts covered in psychology and the work done in English. Hence, three of the women involved in the earlier incident (the other had already unofficially withdrawn) chose to work together, using the Johari Window (Luft, 1969), a self-awareness tool, to analyze how the feedback they had received from us on their essays enabled them to develop a newfound self-awareness, particularly with regards to their writing abilities. Their presentation illuminated a newfound passion and fervency in their work, enabling us to glimpse the knowledge they had likely obtained earlier in the term but refused to demonstrate within a compliance-oriented classroom.
It also appeared in great contrast to the compliance-oriented behaviors that had dominated our classroom interactions since the Dean's intervention. Hence, we believe that, when these three young women felt that they (finally) were not simply being forced to do what their teachers and the college dictated, they started the process of more substantively engaging in the course material and connecting their newfound disciplinary knowledge within psychology with the readings and academic skills-building supported in their English class. The possibility that we overcame the previously stifling compliance-based model by semester's end was also substantiated by reading one of these students' final self-assessment essays and learning that, by the end of the semester, she had, in fact, stopped “trying to please the professor” and instead realized she “had something to say” and “felt for the first time ever, that… I was not so bad [at writing] after all” (Personal communication, 12/6/11).

As community college educators, we embrace the complexities and challenges our students bring to the classroom, even when, at times, they confound and frustrate us. We hope to inspire a passion for learning in our students, especially in those who initially seem most resistant or disengaged. We clearly need to continue developing the sorts of pedagogical strategies that motivate students' learning without simply forcing them to follow the letter of the law. In short, by giving students choice and greater opportunities for self-regulation, self-reflection, and the capacity to collaborate in the parameters we set, we have a better chance at enabling them to develop the intellectual interests and intrinsic motivations needed to persist in college long-term. Although the implementation of more engaging, less compliance-oriented strategies would probably mean more work for us, we're betting it might also make our experience as community college teachers a far more gratifying one.
References


Endnotes

i The enrollment of credit-earning students at community colleges in the U.S. increased 16.9% to approximately eight million per term in the last two years.

ii Unemployment among 16 – 24 year olds in New York City hit 21.5% in 2009.

iii It is important to acknowledge the three instructors in this link are White.

iv The damaging consequences of applying a compliance-model to the treatment of psychologically vulnerable youth has been well-articulated by Lorraine Fox (1994) who describes the “catastrophe of compliance” for a group of adolescents in foster care who were obliged to “comply to the rules,” rather than given opportunities to test boundaries, develop a sense of assertiveness, and become prepared for independent living.

v Nationally, only forty percent of community college students graduate within six years (Bailey, Crosta, & Jenkins 2006), and these numbers are significantly lower for students who begin at the developmental level of reading and writing (Attewell & Lavin, 2007).

vi The ACT team (mentioned earlier) draws on counselors to help in evaluating and making decisions concerning some cases of student incivility.

vii Students would need to trust their instructors to share the results of these studies honestly, since we could not publicly display students' grades. Additionally, as in much research, there would be a selection bias since participation in the study (particularly for those randomly selected to disavow ownership of their cell phones for the duration of class time) would be voluntary.

viii The Johari Window is a self awareness tool that persons use to identify those dimensions of themselves that are known (what the person knows about her/himself and also makes known to others), hidden (what the person knows about her/himself that others do not know), blind (what is unknown by the person but others know), and unconscious (outside of everyone’s awareness).