

## Student Perceptions of Stress, Coping, and Academic Incivility: A Longitudinal Study

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**Category:** Research Abstract

**Purpose:** Academic incivility negatively impacts faculty and student well-being, weakens relationships, and impedes effective teaching and learning. Uncivil behavior instigated by or targeted toward faculty and students jeopardizes the welfare of the campus community, the practice environment, and ultimately patient safety. Incivility can impact the academic environment so radically that learning is terminated. This mixed-method longitudinal study investigated student perceptions of academic incivility, stress, and coping in one school of nursing over a 3-year period.

**Introduction:** Studies reveal that stress plays an integral role in the display of uncivil and disruptive behaviors. When stress levels are heightened, incivility is more likely to occur. Knowing the stressors experienced by students and reinforcing effective coping strategies can lead to a safer, more civil learning environment. Incivility, whether initiated by faculty, students, or by a combination of both, presents opportunities for engagement, productive communication, relationship building, and fostering a culture of civility.

**Methodology:** A prospective mixed methodological longitudinal study followed one cohort of nursing students over a three-year period to measure their perspectives of academic incivility, stress, and coping. This study used a 9-item questionnaire to explore perceived levels of civility, major stressors, most effective coping strategies, ways to improve student-to-faculty and student-to-student relationships, and advice to improve civility in the nursing program. Data were collected from a cohort of nursing students upon entry into their nursing program (n=54), 12 months into the nursing program (n=68), and at the end of the nursing program (n=66). The numerical data were analyzed using descriptive statistical analysis and the narrative comments were analyzed using qualitative content analysis.

**Results:** Using a Likert scale ranging from extremely civil (6) to not civil at all (1), perceived levels of civility declined slightly over the course of the study (year 1=5.33, year 2=5.17, and year 3= 4.68). The top 2 stressors remained constant through all 3 measurements; demanding workload and balancing work, school, family, and personal lives; however the third stressor changed over time to include challenging clinical assignments and preparing for licensing exams. Most students coped by relaxing and spending time with others, exercising, and getting organized. Student-faculty relationships were enhanced by faculty presence and responsiveness, while student-student relationships were improved by supporting and encouraging one another. The most effective ways to foster civility included faculty encouragement and flexibility and course organization and clarity.

**Conclusions/Recommendations:** The study findings underscore the pivotal role that civility plays in students' perception of stress, coping, and program satisfaction and advocates for a more intentional, grassroots approach to equip students with knowledge and skills which prepare them to be the leaders in the nursing profession. Raising awareness about the stressors experienced by students and knowing the most effective coping strategies and ways to promote civility can have a major impact on improving the teaching-learning environment, building positive relationships among faculty and students, and addressing the challenges of academic incivility.