

Proposed Civility Clause

In any environment in which people interact in meaningful ways to gain knowledge, it is essential that each member feel as free and safe as possible in their participation. To this end, it will be course policy and expected that everyone will be treated with mutual respect. We certainly do not have to agree, but everyone deserves to feel they are heard. We learn by engaging in constructive evidence-based dialogue. Therefore we shall establish in this course a general understanding that members of this class (including students, instructors, professors, and teaching assistants) will be respected and respectful to one another in discussion, in action, in teaching, and in learning.

Rationale for Inclusion of Civility Clause:

College is intended to prepare students to become contributing and educated members of society. As members of society and especially the workplace, they will be expected (and rewarded) for being respectful of others.

Students and faculty thrive and education is at its best when there is a culture of respect in the classroom. Students and faculty both suffer when the content of course is lost due to lack of respect among class participants and between students and instructors/professors. While faculty members have a great deal of power in the classroom, it only takes one student who intentionally or unintentionally disrespects another student or the faculty member, for the classroom to become a place of hostility instead of a place of learning. Ideally students should see the classroom as a place in which they are encouraged to engage with the material and a place free of intimidation from others. Faculty are encouraged to include a Civility Clause which is contextualized to their course materials in their syllabus as a mechanism to create a respectful learning environment.

Even in courses where issues of diversity have not traditionally been addressed, a Civility Clause will encourage students to ask questions of the instructor and of each other in the comfort of knowing that the Civility Clause is in place. Such a clause communicates to the student that the instructor will take an active role in mediating classroom interactions to ensure respectful and constructive dialogue. To truly encourage diversity in the student body, it is essential that faculty recognize that students from diverse backgrounds are present in the classroom which may lead to different life experiences and perspectives. The use of the Civility Clause assists in creating an inclusive learning environment as students from various backgrounds collectively learn course material.

Even if the Civility Clause is not discussed at length, the appearance of such a clause should serve to raise awareness of the ways in which academic conversation can be conducted with respect for all persons. This is especially important for those who may be new to academic settings and unsure of how course interactions among students and with professors are expected to take place.

What does this mean? The spirit behind such a clause is to encourage expression and engagement from all students and faculty in the classroom. At this level of education, exposure to a diverse set of ideas is part of the educational experience and should be encouraged with appropriate facilitation by faculty to ensure these are shared in respectful ways.

Civility Clause Examples

Example 1:

College of Law Diversity Statement

The University of Idaho College of Law recognizes and supports the value of diversity within the law school community and the legal profession. The law school learning environment is an inclusive, measured, and respectful forum for the discussion of legal principles, concepts, and practical skills. As a preparatory ground for the future practitioners of the legal profession, we adhere to the standards of legal professionalism within our classrooms, our offices, our hallways, our student organizations, our gathering places, and our activities. The calling to law is an important one with significant impacts on society and as a law school we take that significance to the core of our purpose. Diversity in race, gender, ethnicity, culture, religion, life experience, sexual orientation, philosophy, citizenship, and opinion are welcome components of the University of Idaho College of Law and require legal professionalism from all sectors of our community to provide an appropriately respectful learning environment.