Overview: It is critical for schools of nursing to co-create cultures of civility with faculty, staff and students, to candidly approach each other with respect and collegial discourse, in an environment that values caring and diversity. The added benefits of a productive learning environment, reduction in turnover and faculty cooperation, outcomes of a civil community, can make significant strides in achieving such a high level objective. However, research indicates that individual’s lack of ability, belief that it is “not their job,” and low confidence that it will do any good to engage in crucial conversations are the three primary obstacles to direct communication (Patterson, Grenny, McMillan, & Switzler, 2005).

A helpful method to address issues of incivility within the academic environment is to engage leadership, faculty, staff and students in open and courageous conversations. Because these conversations are not easy and the stakes are high, it is best to use the expertise of a skilled facilitator. Deeply felt emotions are often intense. Successful dialogue results when all members of the academic community feel safe enough to “add their meaning to the shared pool” of understanding and respectful dialogue (Patterson et al., 2005; Patterson, Grenny, McMillan, & Switzler, 2011, p. 21).
The NLN suggests that meaningful and impactful dialogue to address fundamental issues essential to the establishment of a community of colleagues dedicated to civility can be accomplished through the lens of these questions:

- **Diversity:** Diversity, an NLN core value, comes in all forms and should be valued. By advocating for inclusive environments, diversity in thoughts, beliefs, and actions will emerge. Self-awareness and self-reflection are important factors to consider when deepening understanding about the impact of conversations with individuals, teams, and organizations, when diverse ideas, perspectives and cultural influences are addressed and valued.
  - How do we foster inclusive organizations that embrace diversity of opinion, perspective and ideas?
  - Biases, both implicit and explicit, attitudes and beliefs that influence one’s behavior, are malleable. To what extent do we engage in or provide meaningful ways to address and mitigate bias?
  - Is our organization one that champions diverse voices by creating opportunities, both formal and informal, within the organizational system?

- **Caring:** Genuine respect and caring demonstrates the true legitimacy of every individual. Aligned to caring is promotion of self-care and professional well-being. Because of the nature and complexity of academic and healthcare organizations and the demands of providing safe care to patients or teaching students, sometimes anxiety and stress occur. Before nurses can care for
others, they must first care for themselves. Thus, there must be a space where nurses and nurse educators can heal and rejuvenate themselves.

- Is the organization committed to creating safe places where nurses’ voices are encouraged and appreciated, where faculty engage in dialogue about experiences with students and faculty that may have been hurtful as a way to heal and learn?
- Are advocacy and humility valued and respected and power dynamics explored and mitigated?
- How is self-care of faculty, staff and students advocated for and protected within the structure of the academic organization?

• **Core Values:** There should be a strong foundation of core values, inclusive of diversity and caring, in organizations. Values have a purpose which means that members of an organization must live up to organizational values and goals. The key purpose of values is to establish absolute trust inside and outside the organization. However, it must be acknowledged that sometimes there may be a collision of values between individuals the organization and the profession of nursing.

- Values of an organization define the organization in a way that nothing else does. Is the organization supportive in a way to communicate the key goals and values of the organization?
- How do we explore this in a safe environment and help individuals (faculty, students, and nurses) to create an alignment between individual
values and the organization’s values, between different and sometimes competing values?

- What are the consequences when values differ?
- How do mixed messages negate consistency of values and beliefs?
- Values define an organization and lead to action. Values must be followed by action. Does your organization have measures to determine that organizational behaviors represent the core values? How are your core values “lived” by your community?

- **Organizational Culture:** A transformed organizational culture serves as the foundation for co-creating civility in organizations. Shared vision, mission, norms and measures for individual and organizational accountability are essential. Maintaining personal and professional boundaries is also important. Principled, ethical leadership is required at all levels in the organization.
  
  - Are there power imbalances within our organization culture? What factors influence negative power interactions that result from power imbalances? What strategies can we institute, as a group, to address power imbalances?
  
  - How does the leadership in the organization create a culture of intolerance for lack of civility?
  
  - Do leaders in the organization demonstrate a vision of civility and intolerance of lack of respect?
- How does the organization provide resources to address incivility when encountered?
- Is the entire organizational system committed to a solid ground of civility and respect?
- Is their organizational ownership of the shared vision?
- Do all organizational members participate in the development (and/or revision) of a shared vision, leading to endorsement of the vision, and a willingness to implement it?

References


Members of the NLN Strategic Action Group:

Ann Marie Mauro, PhD, RN, CNL, CNE, FAAN
*NLN Board of Governors Liaison*
Associate Dean and Professor
Director, Center for Educational Research and Innovation
Rutgers University School of Nursing

Kenya Beard EdD, AGACNP-BC, NP-C, CNE, ANEF
2012 Josiah Macy Faculty Scholar
Co-Producer and Moderator, HealthCetera Radio Associate Professor
Senior Fellow, Center for Health Policy & Media Engagement at GWU
Associate Professor
The CUNY School of Professional Studies

Cynthia Clark PhD, RN, FAAN, ANEF
Strategic Nursing Advisor: ATI Nursing Education
Professor Emeritus
Boise State University
Tamika Curry, MSN, RN  
Assistant Professor  
Department of Nursing  
Community College of Philadelphia

Susan Luparell, PhD, ACNS-BC, CNE, ANEF  
Associate Professor  
Montana State University College of Nursing

Cheryl Taylor, PhD, RN, FAAN  
Chairperson, Graduate Nursing Programs  
Associate Professor of Nursing  
The Jewel L. and James Prestage Endowed Professor/Kellogg  
Southern University and A&M College

**Staff Liaisons**  
Barbara Patterson PhD, RN, ANEF  
Distinguished Scholar, NLN Chamberlain University Center for the Advancement of the Science of Nursing Education

Elaine Tagliareni, EdD, RN, CNE, FAAN  
Consultant  
National League for Nursing