

PRIORITIES

THE PROVOST'S NEWSLETTER

SEPTEMBER 2016

The purpose of this newsletter is to communicate timely information from the Office of the Provost to all faculty and staff in Academic Affairs so that everyone has the opportunity to learn about the strategic issues, activities, and goals that drive our work. We hope that the topics we cover will encourage you to ask questions, offer your observations, and share your ideas.

The Provost's office is committed to building a culture in which faculty, staff, and students can thrive as we accomplish Boise State University's mission. Thank you for doing your part, and let us know how we can support you.



Marty Schimpf
Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs

CIVILITY

Last spring President Kustra assembled a task force to initiate a campus-wide conversation on civility. As part of that conversation, this fall we held a civility conference on Sept. 8, attended by faculty, staff and students. The morning symposium was opened by Dr. Kustra and followed by a panel discussion in which I participated. The following is my reflection from that discussion, supplemented by additional excerpts gleaned from the references cited below.

My preferred definition of civility is a simple one: civility is treating other people with respect, even if you disagree. By contrast, uncivil words and actions are those that are rude, disrespectful and often harmful.

Why do we need a civility initiative on campus? The Educational Advisory Board, which is a source of material on current events in higher ed, gives three potential reasons: student conduct issues on campus; incidents at other higher ed institutions; and national events, like what we're seeing in the current presidential election.

I don't follow a lot of blogs but I do read enough online content to know that uncivil discourse has become an element of our web-based culture. Even in articles written by and published for those of us in higher education, readers' comments can sometimes be downright rude. And when you consider the national conversation, whether it's talk shows, certain so-called news shows, or political debates, it seems like incivility has become the new normal.

At the same time, we're seeing more and more incidents of extreme incivility on college campuses, like the secret videotaping last year of homosexual activity by a Rutgers student, or the YouTube video post by a UCLA student that prompted accusations of racism and death threats.

One of the questions asked during the panel discussion was around how we can ensure that underrepresented voices have opportunities to express dissatisfaction or even anger at the status quo without being shut down in the name of being civil. In other words, how can we untangle the need to have often contentious civil or civic discourse from the common definition of civility — the imperative to be "nice?" We, as a society, cannot avoid difficult issues simply because they are unpleasant to address. Therefore, we must first accept and then learn to deal with the natural tension between allowing free speech and requiring those who wish to express that right to be civil in doing so. Only then can we deal with difficult issues without acting in ways that are destructive and inappropriate, even if they are legal.

As the [University of Missouri's Show Me Respect Steering Committee points out](#), many people who act in an uncivil manner don't intend to — they think they are civil but they're really not. While we may be able to dismiss some minor instances of incivility as inconsequential, in other situations incivility and disrespect interfere with our relationships and our work and learning environments. Therefore, we must actively encourage respect and tolerance, while being sensitive to the counterbalancing force of tolerance for free speech.

As we continue our conversation about civility over the next few months, let us keep several questions in mind.

- How do we define civility at Boise State, and what are the issues around incivility on our campus?
- How do we engage faculty, staff as well as student leaders and organizations in this initiative?
- In the future, how do we first introduce the concept of civility to new students?
- How can we use our discussions of civility as an introduction to the more specific issues of tolerance and diversity?
- And ultimately, how do hold each other accountable for upholding a code of civility?

References

Erin McDougal and Sarah Moore, Educational Advisory Board, "Campus-Wide Initiatives to Promote Student Civility," 2012.

Mary Beth Marklein, USA Today, "Civility Problems Cause Uproar on College Campuses," 2011.

Guy Burgess and Heidi Burgess, University of Colorado, "The Meaning of Civility," 1997.

"Show Me Respect: Promoting Civility at the University of Missouri," <http://civility.missouri.edu/>, 2016.

KRC Research and Powell Tate (a Division of Weber Shandwick), "Civility in America: 2013."

Have questions, comments, or suggestions for newsletter topics?

Contact Marcy Harmer at marcyharmer@boisestate.edu.

Wonder who to contact in the Provost's Office for general questions?

Visit the Office of the Provost website to see the [staff listing](#).

| PROVOST AND VICE PRESIDENT FOR ACADEMIC AFFAIRS |

Dr. Martin Schimpf

Dr. Martin Schimpf joined the faculty at Boise State University in 1990. He has held several administrative appointments at the University, including Chair of Chemistry, Associate Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences. He currently serves as Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs, a position he has held since 2010.

Dr. Schimpf holds degrees in chemistry from the University of Washington and the University of Utah. His interdisciplinary research on thermophoresis and the characterization of nanomaterials has led to more than 80 internationally distributed publications in the Scientific literature.



BOISE STATE UNIVERSITY OFFICE OF THE PROVOST | PROVOST@BOISESTATE.EDU
1910 UNIVERSITY DRIVE, BOISE, ID 83725-1001 | ACADEMICS.BOISESTATE.EDU/PROVOST

#BoiseState

