**Addressing Incivility and Bullying at Wayne State University's College of Nursing: A Framework for Prevention and Accountability**

**Wayne State University College of Nursing: Zero Tolerance for Bullying and Incivility**

**Introduction**

The Wayne State University College of Nursing (WSU CON) is committed to fostering an inclusive, respectful, and supportive environment for all students, faculty, and staff. Bullying and incivility undermine the educational and professional setting within nursing programs, and the College maintains a zero-tolerance stance for any bullying. Such behavior is incompatible with the values of respect and professionalism that are essential to nursing.

**Definitions**

**Bullying**: In the context of nursing academia, bullying refers to a pattern of hostile, offensive, or intimidating behavior, typically from faculty, peers, clinical staff, or other members of the academic community, that undermines an individual's dignity, self-confidence, or capacity to learn or work effectively. This behavior often involves repeated incidents where one person exerts power or control over another through verbal, nonverbal, or psychological means.

Specific examples of bullying in nursing academia may include:

- **Verbal Harassment**: Insults, derogatory comments, or yelling directed at students, faculty, or staff.
- **Public Humiliation**: Embarrassing or belittling an individual in front of others, often with the intent to shame.
- **Isolation or Exclusion**: Deliberately excluding individuals from group activities, discussions, or clinical opportunities.
- **Unfair Criticism**: Providing excessively negative feedback without constructive guidance or in a way intended to demean rather than improve.
- **Intimidation and Threats**: Using one's position or authority to make an individual feel fearful or pressured.

In nursing academia, bullying disrupts a supportive learning and working environment, contributing to increased stress, anxiety, and burnout among students, faculty, and staff. It can lead to negative academic or professional outcomes, impact mental health, and ultimately deter individuals from continuing in their nursing studies or practicing safely and confidently in clinical or academic settings.

**Incivility**: In the context of nursing academics, incivility refers to behaviors that are rude, disrespectful, or disruptive, which detract from a respectful and productive learning and working environment. Unlike bullying, which is typically intentional and repeated, incivility may be less overtly aggressive and can include a range of discourteous actions that may or may not be intentional. Incivility can occur between students, between faculty and students, among faculty, or among staff, and it negatively impacts the learning experience, academic success, and emotional well-being.

**Addressing Incivility and Bullying at Wayne State University's College of Nursing: A Framework for Prevention and Accountability**

Examples of incivility in nursing academics include:

- **Disruptive Behavior**: Talking over others, texting during lectures, or interrupting discussions in a way that shows disregard for the speaker or learning environment.
- **Dismissing or Ignoring Others' Contributions**: Not acknowledging input, giving preferential attention, or visibly disregarding certain participants in class or workplace discussions.
- **Passive-Aggressive Actions**: Eye-rolling, sighing loudly, or making sarcastic comments that convey disrespect.
- **Poor Communication**: Delayed or lack of response to questions or needs, or providing unclear guidance or expectations.
- **Dismissive Feedback**: Providing non-constructive criticism or harsh feedback that lacks specific, helpful guidance for improvement.

Incivility in nursing academics creates a toxic environment that can hinder learning and working conditions, decrease engagement, and contribute to stress and anxiety. Addressing incivility is crucial in fostering a culture of professionalism and respect, which are essential for the development of competent, compassionate nurses and effective faculty and staff.

**Guiding Principles**

This "College of Nursing Code of Professionalism and Respect" document establishes clear standards for behavior, reinforcing the commitment to professionalism, mutual respect, and a zero-tolerance policy for bullying and incivility. The following guiding principles and ethical foundations are critical to ensuring a positive learning and working environment:

- **Respect and Dignity**: All members of the College of Nursing are expected to treat each other with respect and value each person's dignity and contributions. Disrespectful or demeaning behaviors, including bullying, harassment, and intimidation, will not be tolerated under any circumstances.
- **Professional Communication**: Communication, both verbal and non-verbal, must be conducted in a professional, constructive, and courteous manner, in alignment with the ANA Code of Ethics. This includes in-person interactions, written correspondence, and digital platforms.
- **Accountability and Responsibility**: Each individual is responsible for their behavior and for promoting a respectful environment. Members are encouraged to hold themselves and each other accountable, as incivility affects the entire college community.
- **Zero Tolerance for Incivility**: The College upholds a zero-tolerance policy for incivility, including bullying, harassment, verbal abuse, discrimination, and any actions that disrupt the learning or working environment.

**Ethical Foundations**

The ethical standards outlined in the American Nurses Association (ANA) Code of Ethics provide the foundation for the zero-tolerance stance on bullying:

**Addressing Incivility and Bullying at Wayne State University's College of Nursing: A Framework for Prevention and Accountability**

- **Provision 1**: Nurses must practice with compassion and respect for every person's inherent dignity, worth, and unique attributes. This mandates a zero-tolerance approach to bullying or any behavior that diminishes the dignity of another.
- **Provision 5**: Nurses owe the same duty to themselves as to others, including maintaining integrity and supporting their colleagues' safety and mental health.
- **Provision 6**: The ethical environment must be conducive to safe, quality education and work, requiring the elimination of bullying behaviors to promote a positive learning and working experience.

## Creating a Safe Learning and Working Environment

To effectively address and prevent bullying within WSU CON, the following strategies are employed:

## Students

- **Education and Awareness**: The curriculum and professional development programs incorporate education on bullying, its impact, and how to recognize it. Emphasis is placed on ethical standards and professional behavior expectations derived from the ANA Code of Ethics and the WSU Student Code of Conduct.
- **Reporting Mechanisms**: The Dean of Student Office provides a transparent, accessible system that allows individuals to report bullying incidents without fear of retaliation. Confidentiality is maintained throughout the reporting and investigation process. Faculty and staff can speak with their direct report in the college.
- **Role Modeling**: Faculty and staff must always model professional, respectful interactions. Addressing incivility or bullying behaviors in real time demonstrates accountability and upholds professional standards.
- **Support for Victims**: Counseling and support services are available for individuals who experience bullying, e.g., WSU CAPS. These supports may include peer support groups, access to mental health services, or mentorship programs to help victims regain confidence and a sense of community. EAP is available for all employees at the university.
- **Disciplinary Actions**: Depending on the severity of the incident, violations of the College's code will result in disciplinary actions ranging from formal warnings to suspension or dismissal from the program or employment. Disciplinary actions will be communicated to ensure that individuals understand the consequences of bullying and the commitment to maintaining a safe environment for all.

## Faculty and Staff

- **Modeling Professional Behavior:** Staff are essential role models in demonstrating respectful, professional behavior. By consistently treating students, faculty, and peers with dignity and respect, they help set a positive example that contributes to a supportive environment.

**Addressing Incivility and Bullying at Wayne State University's College of Nursing: A Framework for Prevention and Accountability**

- **Maintaining Professional Communication**: Staff members ensure that verbal, non-verbal, or written communication is conducted constructively and courteously. This includes promptly addressing concerns, providing clear guidance, and maintaining open, respectful communication channels.
- **Supporting Reporting Mechanisms:** Staff contribute to creating and maintaining a transparent and accessible reporting system for bullying and incivility. They help individuals report incidents and ensure that reports are taken seriously and handled confidentially.
- **Providing Support to Victims:** Staff can offer support by directing students, faculty, or other staff members to appropriate resources, such as counseling services or mentorship programs. Their involvement ensures that those who have experienced bullying or incivility receive the help they need to recover and regain confidence.
- **Promoting Accountability:** Staff are responsible for holding themselves and others accountable for a respectful environment. By identifying and addressing bullying or incivility when it occurs, they help ensure that all community members understand the expectations for behavior and the consequences of misconduct.
- **Creating an Inclusive Environment:** Staff can help foster a welcoming and inclusive atmosphere by ensuring that all individuals feel valued and included regardless of their role. This may involve supporting group activities, assisting in organizing educational events, and being mindful of how everyone is treated in the college's day-to-day operations.

**Conclusion**

The Wayne State University College of Nursing is dedicated to creating an environment where students, faculty, and staff feel safe, respected, and supported. Faculty and staff will actively contribute to this environment by modeling professionalism, maintaining open and respectful communication, addressing bullying and incivility when they occur, and supporting victims of such behavior. They will also foster accountability and uphold the values of respect and integrity in all interactions. Bullying and incivility have no place in nursing education or practice, as they undermine the core values of the nursing profession. By aligning with the ANA Code of Ethics and the WSU Student Code of Conduct, the College ensures that all individuals have the opportunity to learn and work in an environment free from intimidation and harassment. Together, we strive to create a culture of respect, accountability, and support, preparing students to be ethical and compassionate nursing professionals and ensuring faculty and staff can contribute effectively to the College's mission.