

[< Back](#) | [Home](#)



Vanessa White and Professor Nwachukwu pose with students after class.



White shook each student's hand as part of the exercise.



The web area of the hand should be used in a proper handshake.

Do as I Do

Etiquette Instruction for Lehman students

Annie Shreffler

Posted: 11/1/06

Dressed in a tailored navy suit, her hair pulled neatly back and her smile gleaming, Ms. Vanessa White positioned herself outside the room before class began, greeting students as they entered the room. Professor Nwachukwu, of the Political Science Department and Freshmen Year Initiative Program, had invited Ms. White to speak to the class on corporate etiquette.

"I believe it is important to prepare students for success beyond these college walls," said Nwachukwu. "Like Ms. White said, 'Fifteen percent of why you get a job depends on your technical skills; 85 percent of why you keep a job and advance in your career depends on your people skills.'

When White began her talk, she explained that she had been outside the door, assessing students' skills at addressing her as they entered the room. She gave the class her evaluation: they all have to sharpen their skills. "Being etiquette-savvy distinguishes you from the competition," she warned.

Trained at the Protocol School of Washington, White's system of etiquette is based upon three R's: Recall, Record and Recreate. She addressed students she had met by name during her talk, thanks to her ability to record pertinent information. She urged the students to LISTEN when others speak, recording interesting details they can later recall and turn into conversation. To illustrate the need for concentration, she asked the class to perform an exercise with her:

"Please place your finger on your nose. Now touch your cheek [pointing to chin]," she ordered. Most students were caught touching their chin, thanks to her power of suggestion, rather than following the directions she gave.

White covered a wide range of topics informing students of how to succeed in a job interview. First, dress a notch above the job level you apply for, "Suits can't fail"; avoid the clammy handshake, "Arrive EARLY and wash your hands in cold water"; tone down that natural flashy style, "Easy on the scent or jewelry and wear dark colors"; and come prepared, "Know your resume, research the company and turn it ON for an interview."

One student wasn't sure of White's instructions to speak about oneself in an interview or conversation. She asked, "What if you think your hobby is boring to other people?" This question wasn't a problem for White. She encouraged everyone to believe in their own tastes and values, and to exude confidence.

Leaving no *soft skill* unaddressed, White challenged students to evaluate their posture, their sitting positions, even the direction they faced during her talk. She invited some students to stand up and practice walking with confidence. She stressed the importance of making small talk. "Be well informed, read, know a little about everything," she urged.

The school where White received her training says it is imperative to anyone in a workplace to get trained in proper etiquette. On its website, it says business niceties, "those little things denoting class and style," are the "power tools" that can give one, or one's company, the edge. The school's founder says to potential clients, "Class-how to get it and how to use it-is the hot topic in corporations worldwide."

POL 166 student Jennifer Martinez said, "I think students needed this [coaching] because a lot of students come from places [where] these tools aren't often seen or used."

White easily established a rapport between herself and the students, encouraging them to ask tough questions. She advised one student not to be afraid to politely ask a boss for a day off, as long as the request was reasonable and asked with plenty of notice. She said it's always better to be prepared and prevent a problem.

LEH 101 student, Francine Weeks, commented, "Some people aren't that nice," which White acknowledged. But she warned that even here proper etiquette can be employed. "If they're rude, tell them to have a good day, even if it's your boss. Keep being yourself and you'll break down that undesirable behavior. Don't give attitude. There is a way of telling people off without using expletives," she said.

True to form, by the time class was over, White had students talking with her quite comfortably. Her charm and genuine warmth were perfectly displayed to students who otherwise might not have considered all the care that can go into a delightful presentation.

© Copyright 2007 Meridian