Fostering Community and Engagement in Large Classroom Settings

JETSET 2023
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Picturing the Classroom:
The Dream

Small groups of students, laughing and working together.

Picturing the Classroom:
The Reality

Large classrooms with potentially hundreds of students in stadium-style seating.
Professor’s goal: Facilitate Learning

We encourage, challenge and help students grow. Ideally, we have a classroom environment in which students want to engage and feel comfortable asking questions.

What gets in the way of learning?

Students are nervous and may feel they don’t belong in that classroom.

Community: a feeling of fellowship with others, as a result of sharing common attitudes, interests, and goals.
Creating a community with and for students:

1. Establishing supportive classroom norms
2. Increasing student engagement during class
3. Activities to help break up the monotony

1. Establishing supportive classroom norms

Create opportunities for students to feel connected to and supported by their classmates.

- **Syllabus Day:** invite former students to share tips and discuss challenges.
- **Student Exam Advice:**
  - *Leading up to the exam* have students discuss study tips briefly during class.
  - *After the exam* compile advice from students who (1) did well, or (2) showed improvement.
- **GroupMe:** YOU create the class GroupMe and discuss how it can be used in a *helpful* manner.
Helpful Student GroupMe posts:

- Request for student exam advice:

Remind students that they have an **active role** in their educational experience!

- **Crowd Crumple**: write down a question, crumple it, and throw it to another student.
- **The 10-minute rule**: a student voice should be heard *at least* once every 10 minutes.
  - Have students recap concepts, give examples, explain their answers, etc.
  - Cold-call students in a low-stress manner (tag-team/phone-a-friend).
- **Slides designed for engagement**: use step-by-step, animated graphs; include practice questions for **think-pair-share**, and then rinse-and-repeat if student responses are mixed.
Practice: Cost-benefit analysis with sunk cost

Peter lost his ticket to go to a concert this Friday, which had cost him $50. A new ticket will cost him $50. If he doesn’t go to the concert, then he will work at his part-time job where he can earn $40.

Peter is debating whether to go to the concert. What is the minimum level of benefits that would make his decision to go rational?

Peter’s benefit of going to the concert would need to at least $______.
A. $40  
B. $50  
C. $90  
D. $140

(A.) Economic Profit

1. Find $q^*$
2. Find $TR$  
3. Find $TC$  
4. Profit

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Price</th>
<th>MC</th>
<th>ATC</th>
<th>AVC</th>
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<td>$25</td>
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<td>$20.33</td>
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$q^*$ = 9 sweaters

$MR = Price$

$TR = MR \times q^* = 25 \times 9 = 225$

$TC = ATC \times q^* = 20.33 \times 9 = 182.97$

$\pi = TR - TC = 225 - 182.97 = 42.03$
3. Activities to help break up the monotony

Break up the potential monotony of lectures by including small scale and quick student-centered activities.

- **Price ceilings:** use balloons to help illustrate the concept of price ceilings.
  - The classroom’s ceiling prevents the balloon from rising higher just like a price ceiling prevents the price from going higher.

- **Opportunity cost:** have a student take a ‘quick trip to the dollar store’.

- **The ambiguity of ‘fairness’:** the ultimatum game (see next slide).

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**The Ultimatum Game**

This is a two-player game with real money at stake. The players do not know one another.

01. Player 1 is endowed with all the money, say $100.

02. Player 1 proposes how to divide the money between themself and player 2.

03. If Player 2 accepts the proposal, then each player gets to keep the proposed shares of money.

04. If Player 2 rejects the proposal, then neither player gets any money.

Tips for building community in large classes

- Establishing supportive classroom norms
- Increasing student engagement during class
- Activities to help break up the monotony

Remind students that they shape the classroom community with their words and actions. Their insights, voices and actions can help create a positive space for learning to take place.