

# Teaching from a Distance

## Community Building and Connection

The Learning Innovations Team

# Today's Objectives

- Define a Community-Centered environment
- Identify concrete steps to address challenges and support a community centered class
- Locate resources for further exploration.
- Discuss and address specific needs that you may have

# Definition

“Community-centered environments foster norms for **people learning from one another, and continually attempting to improve**. In such a community, students are encouraged to be active, constructive participants. Further, they are encouraged to make—and then learn from—mistakes. Intellectual camaraderie fosters support, challenge and collaboration.”

- *How People Learn*



# Challenging Norms

## Community-Centered Approach

- Student engagement with one another and with the instructor is central to the learning process
- “Intellectual camaraderie fosters support, challenge and collaboration.”
- Encourages seeking out and engaging differing perspectives.

## Non Community-Centered Approach

- Student engagement with one another does not play a role in the learning process.
- Students record the instructor’s performance.
- Avoidance of multiple perspectives or challenging conversations, especially when there is disagreement.



# Challenging Norms (cont.)

## Community-Centered Approach

- Encourages taking risks; prioritizes exploration over being “right”. Students are encouraged to make and learn from mistakes.
- Emphasizes student-student interaction, peer-instruction, and exploration

## Non Community-Centered Approach

- Instructor and students actively conceal lack of knowledge and mistakes. “Don’t get caught not knowing something” Students are discouraged from asking for clarification, taking risks and exploring new hypotheses.
- Discourages peer-peer interaction; reinforces concept of instructor being the only source of knowledge.



What are some  
challenges to building a  
community in courses?

# Student-Student

# Peer Instruction Helps Students Learn

Research shows that:

1. Peer instruction outperforms traditional lectures on a common test and drop withdrawal and failure rates are lower.
2. Students can better answer a similar question after talking to their peers.
3. Peer discussion + instructor explanation works better than either one alone.



# Student-Instructor

# The instructor is the touchstone of the community

- Express high expectations.
- Foster Intellectual camaraderie among students. Show what it looks like and encourage them to practice. This can be reinforced with rubrics.
- Model and promote a [growth mindset](#) for students.
- Identify questions and uncertainties that you have. Show what you do when you have questions and uncertainties.



# Tips

- Establish presence in the course immediately.
- Model the behaviors that you value and set the standards for the community.
- Put yourself out there. Introduce yourself, upload a photo and provide and introductory activity where students can do the same.
- Ensure frequent contact and prompt responses.
- Communicate in consistent and predictable ways.



# Techniques for Building Community and Connection

- **Create activities that promote interaction** - Classroom interactions happen by proximity in the brick-and-mortar classroom, but in the online classroom you have to be deliberate about student-student and student-faculty interaction.
  - Introductory activity
  - Norms activity (Weiman)
  - Rubrics (self and peer assessment)
    - Engagement criteria (quality of collaboration and feedback)
    - Critical thinking criteria (quality of thinking)
  - Rules of etiquette
  - Create spaces for exploration



# Getting More In-Depth

# Introductory Activity

- Using a discussion board, or another collaborative environment, ask students to:
  - Introduce themselves, their interests and to connect with others in the class
  - Ask students to talk about their interest in the course: their goals, assumptions and expectations.

# Setting Community Based Norms

## Sample Norms

- Everyone has the right to be heard.
- Be respectful while still being critical.
- No name calling.
- One person speaks at a time.
- Maintain confidentiality.
- Hold yourself and each other to high standards of excellence at all times.
- Have the humility to recognize that you do not know everything and that everyone can stand to improve.
- Recognize that everyone will start from different bases of knowledge.

- Stone Norton (2008) cited in Salazar, et.al., 2009, pg. 214.



# Implement norms

- Create your own list of classroom norms and present them to the class.
- Have students contribute additional items.
- Have the class create their own items and decide on the list of norms as a group.
- Include these norms in the course syllabus.
- Present norms as a contract students must sign.
- Have you and your students use norms as a tool throughout the semester. Revisit them periodically to reinforce.
- In the event of conflict, use classroom norms to dictate how to address difficult situations.





# Spaces for exploration

- Create and encourage the use of a back-channel
  - Helpful for identifying misconceptions and areas of confusion
  - Encourages peer-instruction
- Peer-study groups
  - Student-driven spaces

# Critical Engagement Criteria

Criteria	Novice	Proficient
<b>Listens</b>	Pronounces answers right or wrong. Overuse of authoritative responses.	Demonstrates a willingness to listen to and consider other viewpoints. Willing to question assumptions and change perspective when presented with solid evidence.
<b>Questions</b>	Does not probe, question, or encourage interaction	Prompts further explanation of core concepts and issues; points to current "real world" examples. Identifies authorities in the context of controversies, debates, or pressing questions.
<b>Synthesizes</b>	Does not engage other students in analysis and synthesis. Does not acknowledge different perspectives	Engages other students the analysis and synthesis of concepts and issues. Encourages integration of different perspectives.
<b>Provides Supportive Feedback on the Quality of Critical Thinking</b>	Does not provide feedback to peers in terms of the quality of their critical thinking.	Actively helps peers to improve the quality of their critical thinking. Refers to the criteria in the critical thinking rubric appropriately to provide useful feedback to peers.

# Online

- Use the Announcement Tool to communicate consistently and frequently to the class as a whole
- Set up a Q&A discussion board forum to respond to student questions. This makes question answering more scalable. Also shows students that everyone has questions.

# Collaborative tools that encourage community

- Perusall (collaborative reading and annotation)
  - Scalable feedback to student questions
- Zoom (synchronous online meeting)
  - Active learning online
  - Breakout Rooms
- Voicethread (asynchronous collaboration around multi-media)
  - Precise annotation and threaded discussion on a variety of media
- Discussion Forums (Asynchronous threaded discussion)
  - Time for criteria based discussion and peer interaction



# Questions?

# Your Turn

- Break into groups
- Short write identify important norms you would set for your class
- Share with your group, combine and create a list that you can share with us.

# Other Resources

- Group Work Tip: <https://li.wsu.edu/2020/01/31/group-work-revisited/>
- Creating a Supportive Climate for Engagement: <https://li.wsu.edu/2019/01/11/creating-a-supportive-climate-for-engagement/> (challenging lecture focus)
- Structured Team Collaboration: <https://li.wsu.edu/2018/11/09/structured-team-collaboration-strategies/>
- Activities to Promote Student Engagement: <https://li.wsu.edu/teaching-tool-boxes/student-engagement-strategies/>





Academic Outreach & Innovation

# LEARNING INNOVATIONS

**Contact us**

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**Let's explore the possibilities together!**