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 an 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.
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

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


• Activities to Promote Student Engagement: https://li.wsu.edu/teaching-tool-boxes/student-engagement-strategies/
LEARNING INNOVATIONS

Contact us

aoi.li@wsu.edu
li.wsu.edu

Let’s explore the possibilities together!