

### Strategy: Building Classroom Community

Developing a sense of community in the classroom is directly related to student engagement (learning and motivation). Weaving community-building approaches through courses of all sizes and formats will have positive results.

### Origin

University of West Florida. (2011). Building community in class. Retrieved from [http://uwf.edu/cutla/building\\_community\\_in\\_the\\_class.cfm](http://uwf.edu/cutla/building_community_in_the_class.cfm).

Allison, J. (2011). The front row: A small group feel in a large class. Retrieved from <http://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/teaching-and-learning/the-front-row-a-small-group-feel-in-a-large-class/>.

Barkley, E. (2010). Student engagement techniques: A handbook for college faculty. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Bart, M. (2011). Tips for creating a participatory classroom environment. Retrieved from <http://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/teaching-and-learning/tips-for-creating-a-participatory-classroom-environment/>.

Eggleston, T. & Smith, G. (2004). Building community in the classroom through ice-breakers and parting ways. Society for the Teaching of Psychology. Retrieved from [teachpsych.org/otrp/resources/eggleston04.pdf](http://teachpsych.org/otrp/resources/eggleston04.pdf).

### Application

#### Use Greeters

Assign students to arrive early and serve as greeters for the class. These students should greet students who arrive, introducing themselves and welcoming students to class. Students can use this opportunity to learn each other's names and faces and facilitate the development of a greater sense of community in the classroom.

#### Con-Venn-Tions

Involving everyone in class discussion through pairs or groups supports class community. This activity asks individuals to write the 5-8 most significant points from the reading, assignment, topic, etc., on individual index cards, pieces of paper, etc. When students are done, they share and organize their ideas, sorting them into piles by unique student ideas and shared student ideas. Depending on the number of students in the group, they develop a Venn diagram of their ideas to demonstrate their individual and group knowledge.

#### Deck of Cards Assignment

As students arrive for class, give them each a card. When class begins, have students find other students with the same card (e.g., all of the fours, kings, etc). Once students find their groups, assign them an introductory question related to your topic for the day and group roles: Diamond is the Leader, Spade is the Note Taker, Heart is the Reporter, and Club is the Moderator and Time Manager.

## The Front Row

Throughout the course (weekly if possible) utilize this approach to focus on a smaller group of students. This may be especially important in a larger class. Assign students ahead of time one class period during the semester when they will sit in “The Front Row”. When they are assigned to do so, use this opportunity to restructure your class period, for example, turning a lecture into an interactive discussion with “The Front Row” by calling on students directly by name and having the other students observe and take notes. Alternatively, individuals in “The Front Row” could be used as group or discussion leaders, be involved in role play or debate, or perform another community-building function in the course. Doing this weekly and on an appropriate scale for the size and structure of the course allows each student an opportunity to be involved in the course.

## Invite Students to Start Class

Assign students individually or in groups to give a short presentation at the beginning of the class. This will serve as a way to involve all students, allow students to get to know one another, signal that class is beginning, and promote students making connections between inside and outside of the class. Students may show a video, profile a concept or organization, do a short activity based on the class topic, etc.

## Reflection

- What is something about this idea that confirms a current practice in your course?
- What is something about this idea that you would adapt for your course?
- What is something new from this idea that you would like to remember?