

NEAR, FAR, WHEREVER YOU ARE

THE QUEST FOR COMMUNITY IN THE NEW 1ST-YEAR EXPERIENCE

RESOURCE HANDBOOK



ACS PANDEMIC PEDAGOGY WORKSHOP

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BREAKING THE ICE

ICE BREAKERS DON'T HAVE TO BE BORING. HERE ARE A FEW OF OUR FAVORITES.



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Ask students to **snap a photo** of some spot that is meaningful to them. It could be a nook in the house where they work, a painting on the wall, a shady spot to read, etc. Have them share their photos in your virtual classroom and describe them like a classic “show and tell.” You'll find that students share more substantive things about themselves than name, major, and where they're from.

Ask students to **arrange themselves chronologically** according to their birthdays without using any form of verbal or written communication. Time the exercise so that they can actually complete the task, while still feeling a sense of urgency. Students must think creatively about other ways to communicate, which creates a festive air as students try to beat the clock.



Katherine A. Troyer

Assistant Director, Collaborative
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Cathy Jellenik

Associate Professor of French
Hendrix College

Assigning a **syllabus scavenger hunt** helps students take ownership over the course expectations and content and can lead to the creation of a collaborative syllabus. Pose a series of questions that cover essential features of your syllabus, then ask students to find the answers for themselves. Students can complete the activity individually or in small groups. Have them report their findings, and be open to incorporating especially thoughtful suggestions.

Ask each student to **share a rose**--something positive that happened to them recently, a small victory, or moment of happiness--and one *thorn*. The thorn should be framed as a challenge rather than a mere gripe or a bummer lacking remedy. The activity can be extended further by asking students to identify a bud, i.e., new ideas or opportunities that seem especially fruitful or exciting.



Michael Hughes

First-Year Experience Coordinator
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Special Spot Show & Tell

Peter Gess

How It Works

Have the students leave their computers for about 5-10 minutes and take a photo of a spot in their house or yard (or wherever they are living) that is meaningful to them in some important way. It could be a nook in the house where they work, a painting on the wall, a well-decorated part of their bedroom, a relaxing tire swing, a shady spot to read, etc. Then, they share the photos in the virtual meeting chat and talk about it like a classic “show and tell.”

Why I Like It

In my experience, students show and tell a bit about themselves in ways more substantive than “name, major, where they're from.” Further, in this time of pandemic, I suspect students and I will bond over shared experiences of social isolation and “stay at home.”

Modality

In the description above, all students are learning remotely. For a hybrid model, the students in the classroom can post photos to a shared drive which the instructor accesses during the class meeting and projects on a screen through the virtual meeting platform (so that remote learners can also see). The photos added by on-campus learners can be of a favorite spot on campus. But they also can also pull a home image from digital photos archived on their devices. If all students are on campus, all students post to the shared drive.



Don't Speak (I Know Just What You're Sayin')

Katherine A. Troyer

How It Works

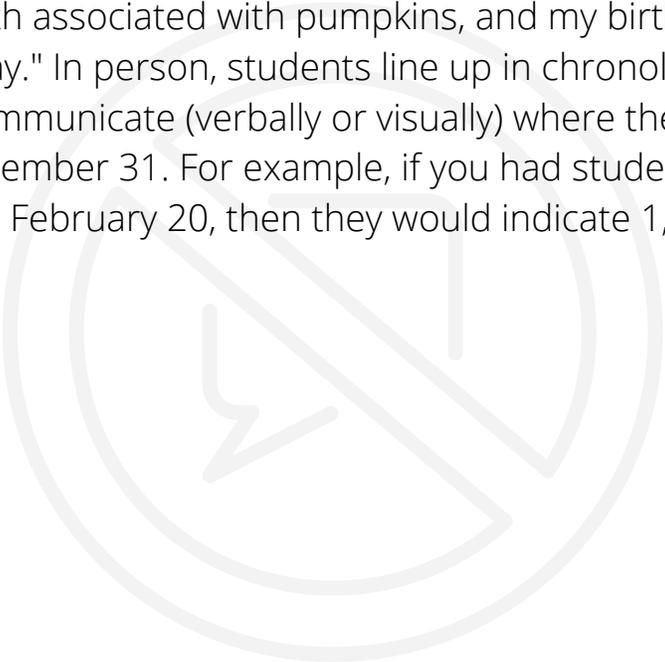
Ask students to arrange themselves chronologically according to their birthdays without using any form of verbal or written communication. Time the exercise so that they can actually complete the task, while still feeling a sense of urgency. 5-7 minutes is usually enough time for 15 students.

Why I Like It

Students must think creatively about other ways to communicate, such as through gestures, drawings, or showing their student IDs. In person, it gets students up and moving; however, whether face-to-face or online, this icebreaker creates a festive air as students try to beat the clock. And once everyone has shared their birthdays, I make a point of writing down those dates so I can wish my students a happy birthday throughout the year.

Modality

This icebreaker works just effectively in an online, synchronous environment as it does face-to-face, but using a chat feature is cheating! You could also adapt the activity to permit some verbal communication while disallowing certain kinds of information (e.g., days, months, holidays, or numbers) to be articulated. A student with an October 13th birthday, for example, could say, "I was born in a month associated with pumpkins, and my birth date is famous for being on a Friday." In person, students line up in chronological order; online, they can communicate (verbally or visually) where they fall in order from January 1-December 31. For example, if you had students born January 14, February 3, and February 20, then they would indicate 1, 2, and 3 respectively.



Syllabus Scavenger Hunt

Cathy Jellenik

How It Works

Use this activity to replace your typical syllabus presentation. Create 20 or so questions, e.g., what is the attendance policy? What is the grade breakdown? What is the instructor's middle name/dog's name/something funny that has been planted in the document. Put students into groups, and ask students to present their findings to the class. Consider including a syllabus in which some texts or policies remain open to discussion. Use the scavenger hunt and resulting discussion to forge consensus around these questions, thereby authoring a collaborative syllabus. Performance in the scavenger hunt might even count as a nice early quiz grade on which everyone inevitably performs well. To set a tone of inclusion and diversity, include (here and elsewhere) instructor's preferred gender pronoun.

Why I Like It

This activity helps students take ownership over the course expectations and content and can lead to the creation of a collaborative syllabus.

Modality

In-person: break students into partners/groups; have them introduce themselves to one another; work together to find answers. First dyad to correctly identify all the answers wins. Have partners/group members introduce one another along with an interesting tidbit.

Distance learning with tech: instructor pre-arranges partners; students video-chat or telephone one another, post on campus LST. Note: In-class and distance-learning activities can be combined for hybrid classrooms.

Distance-learning with no tech except cell-phone: instructor obtains permission to share cell-phone numbers; students are asked to phone/Facetime their partners; information is shared back to group by either phoning the instructor (students can remain on the line with the instructor for the class period, and thus participate auditorily and verbally) or via email.

Rose and Thorn

Michael Hughes

How It Works

Be a horticulturist. Tend to your garden.

Ask each student to share a *rose*--something positive that happened to them recently, a small victory, or moment of happiness--and one *thorn*. The thorn should be framed as a challenge rather than a mere gripe or a bummer lacking remedy. The activity can be extended further by asking students to identify a bud, or new ideas or opportunities that seem especially fruitful, exciting. For example, I might give the following answers:

Rose: I'm a soccer player--and our team made the playoffs!

Thorn: I got a D on my chemistry quiz. I knew it was coming; I put off studying until too late the night before.

Bud: My poor quiz grade was the nudge I needed to seek extra tutoring, and my first session with a Chem tutor was really helpful! I'm sure I'll bring my grade up next time.

Why I Like It

As an icebreaker, or as a prompt for semi-structured discussion, Rose & Thorn gives students an opportunity to disclose something about themselves, and thus to be more holistically understood and cared for. But R&T can also be run as an assessment exercise, administered periodically during the semester. This gives instructors an opportunity to see what is working, what's not, and where students need additional support.

Modality

Rose and Thorn can be run in any classroom environment, physical or virtual, synchronous or not. Students can share their answers in real time or supply them outside of class via email or learning management system.

Community Aspect	Pre- or Early Semester	Mid-Semester/In Progress	Finals, Post-Semester, and Beyond
Trust	1. CLUE Pre-class	2. Shadow Classroom in Slack	3. Groups that Last Beyond Group Work
	4. Like, Subscribe...	5. Quirky Daily Questions	6. Goodbye, Hello
	7. Share Your Story	8. Extra Credit Engagement	9. Report Back
Support	10. It's Me, Your Instructor (and Everyone Else!)	11. Self-Care	12. Resources
	13. Syllabus Collaboration	14. Student-Led Discussions	15. Let's Unpack That
Responsibility	16. Assigning Roles & Solving Problems	17. Virtual Museum	18. Advice Column for Future Students

Descriptions and Supporting Materials for Activities:

Includes:

Activity name and number

Description

How the activity builds community/pedagogical justification

Inclusivity considerations

How the activity works

1. Pre-Class CLUE

Description: Before the semester begins, the instructor initiates a series of group emails whereby he/she/they introduce themselves and invites students to do the same.

High Impact/Low effort: This activity is high impact in that it allows students to meet their classmates before the first day of class; it is low effort because it merely requires an email and some cleverness.

How this Builds Community: This activity helps to build trust, which is conducive to a community-minded environment, as the instructor introduces him/her/themselves and invites students to do the same. Students tend to be more willing to be vulnerable via email than face to face.

Inclusivity: This exercise is available to all students, in that all students are expected to access their university email.

How it Works: The instructor initiates a class email which serves as an introduction. The instructor tells something about him/her/themselves, and invites students to do the same. The instructor invites the students to reveal something about themselves that will make them identifiable on the first day of class (I will be wearing my favorite pair of orange sneakers; I have two different colored eyes, I will be wearing a pink carnation, etc.). Instructor invites students to make notes of one another's clues and to attempt to identify students on the first day of class.

Class size is a consideration, here. Students and instructors alike may not be keen on receiving 20+ emails. We might, in that case, consider setting up a blog or other sort of online document.

2. Shadow Classroom in Slack

Description: Slack is a virtual workspace and collaboration hub in which members can send messages, thread replies, and share files. Like a superpowered group text, it prizes efficiency, informality, and fun. Instructors can create different topics for discussion using Slack's channels, e.g., one about assignments, one about reading questions, one about general questions, and so forth.

How this Builds Community: Whereas email can be intimidating, with its professional (read: stuffy) conventions, Slack allows us to meet students where they live, on terms already familiar to them. It "cuts through the red tape and opens a judgment-free line of communication" (de Peralta & Robey **2018**). It also gives the class an asynchronous component, a way to extend participation beyond the requisite contact hours, which may include contributions such as: crowd-sourced notes; discussion prompts; observations on or questions about texts; unexpected pop cultural connections (e.g., memes) to course material. Slack may also prove amenable to shy or anxious students, a way to rehearse ideas they would be reluctant to raise in person. As Stanford's Janae Cohn told the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, digital workspaces such as Slack can be a great way for students to connect with one another, thus creating a sense of community. Per Cohn, "students are pretty great for creating their own tools and communities."

Inclusivity: Users can access Slack via iPhone or Android app, or in a desktop browser. Slack is compatible with screen-readers and voice assistants.

How it Works: Require students to create a shared social workspace, but entrust them with the particulars. Allow them to customize the space, to own it, to make it an environment they'll elect to spend time in. Instructors must not absent themselves, of course. They will need to browse at least periodically to ensure that discussions are civil and productive.

3. Groups That Last Beyond Group Work

Description: Students spend all semester working consistently with at least one small group of fellow classmates. While this group may be assigned a large group assignment, many low-stakes tasks are assigned, in and out of class, to help the students build a sense of camaraderie and trust that is rarely possible for a group that is only working on a “make it or break it” type project.

How this Builds Community: By developing relationships that span the course of the semester, students begin to truly trust each other. Because the groups are engaging in smaller-stakes tasks (as well as bigger projects), students also have the opportunity to enjoy the company of one another without a major grade hanging over them. Allowing small groups to become not only vehicles for producing work but also for companionship increases the likelihood that they will keep meeting up (even informally) into the next semester.

Inclusivity: The instructor plays an instrumental role in helping the groups to remain inclusive, beginning with the formation of the members of the group. Allowing students to work with at least one person of their choice can help students feel more comfortable with joining a group of other people. Throughout the semester, the instructor should assign specific tasks and roles to each group (and to each group member)—in consultation with the group members themselves—and meet regularly with the group to help them learn how to rely on each other and fairly distribute the labor.

How It Works: Early in the semester, the instructor creates small groups (3-4 students is ideal). The instructor builds in time for the students to establish an informal way to communicate with their team, so that they have a built-in network of support. Throughout the semester, students break into their teams for fun exercises, small group discussions, low-stakes assignments, as well as any major high-stakes group projects. While students will work with other students in the course, it is this team with whom they will form the most intense bonds, increasing the likelihood that they will continue to trust and depend on these students once the semester is over.

4. Like, Subscribe, and Ring that Bell

Description: Show students the person behind the “Professor.” Introduce yourself in a short video. Keep it brief, two or three minutes. Better yet, record a series of videos, each one describing a different aspect of yourself, your class, or whatever topic you choose. Consider describing your academic journey, for example. What first attracted you to your discipline or current research area? What most excites you about your field? You might elect to record from locations that reveal something about yourself, such as your favorite places on campus or around town. Think of yourself as a correspondent, giving students the lowdown on a fascinating subject—yourself!

How this Builds Community: Introductions, especially warm ones in which instructors show some vulnerability, begin to build trust in students. “Trust allows them to feel safe reaching out to us down the line when they need help” (Nunn 2019). This is even more critical when teaching remotely. Videoconferencing is a technological marvel, but it impoverishes the richness of communication and expression, especially by limiting body language and gesture. Giving students an early opportunity to know the instructor will make the first day of class less awkward. In turn, it will incline students to share video of themselves, which is critical to engaged learning in the virtual classroom.

Inclusivity: Low barrier to entry for YouTuber and viewer alike. Most students have smartphones with which to view the videos at their leisure. The same goes for faculty, who should be encouraged not to worry about making a great video but merely one that does the job of making themselves better known and understood.

How it Works: Most instructors know how to work a smartphone’s camera, but they may wish to enlist a cinematographer, if only because it’s often easier to “perform” for an audience. If instructors don’t know how to upload content to YouTube, YouTube supplies creators with [tutorials](#) on using the platform. Remember to “unlist” your video to prevent it from turning up in search results.

5. Quirky Daily Questions

Description: Students are asked, at the start of each class period, a question that they must answer within the first 5 minutes of class. This becomes not only a great way for students and the instructor to get to know each other better, but it also becomes an easy mechanism for taking attendance.

How this Builds Community: Through either a paper passed around in a face-to-face setting or through a shared collaborative digital document, students are able to not only share their answers but to see other students' answers as well. This helps students to know each other as individuals, which can make it easier for them to feel comfortable engaging in class discussions. It also becomes a perfect opportunity for students to talk to each other informally as they discover people with shared interests.

Inclusivity: Everyone gets to participate in this exercise and, because the answers are written down, everyone has the opportunity to see other people's ideas. If the exercise is done face-to-face with paper, the instructor should alternate which sides of the room get to see the paper first (as the last people who have the paper will naturally see more answers). If the exercise is done virtually, a couple of minutes could be built into the end of class for students to see their classmates' answers.

How it Works: Students are given the question at the start of class and have an opportunity to share their answers in the first 5 minutes of class time, during which time class activities can start. The goal is to get to know the group as unique individuals, so it is important to ask open-ended questions. As the semester progresses, students become better at quickly answering questions...so it is helpful to start the semester with easier questions (i.e., favorite color, favorite holiday, intended major) and then increase the quirkiness of the questions (i.e., if you could taste any intangible thing, which Disney character are you, what fictional world you would want to live in).

6. Goodbye, Hello

Description: As the fall semester comes to a close, remind students that the end of the class needn't mark the end of your time together. Most instructors probably do something like this already: we encourage students to drop by during office hours and update us on their progress; we tell students we'd be glad to write letters of recommendation on their behalf. This year, let's go a step further. Devise an activity that ensures the continuation of relationships into the spring semester and beyond. Consider sending each of your students a handwritten letter, for example, one that describes a trait or two that you admire about them. These personalized notes will give students a boost of confidence as they begin the spring semester. Never underestimate the emotional resonance of a tangible totem!

Or consider this local example. Michael and Katie are teaching a first-year class on monsters this fall. They had planned to play a zombie-themed board game with their students, but in light of a partial campus shut down they've had to scrap those plans. When they assign the game in 2021, however, they plan to invite their current monster students back to help them playtest the game. The game is an excuse for a rendezvous, a delayed opportunity to come together, in person, in the way they had originally hoped to do.

See if you can't find a reason to stage your own reunion. It could be a movie night. It could be a poetry reading. And remember the turnout-enhancing magic of free food.

How this Builds Community: As Lisa Nunn writes in *33 Simple Strategies for Faculty*, first-year students are "still getting the hang of building relationships with professors, so it is helpful to make it clear to them that relationships are ongoing." This is of the utmost importance for students who are learning online and for whom campus remains an idea rather than a place (much less a home).

Inclusivity: Unlike other activities in this handbook, this one is untethered from course work and spans semesters. It needn't be managed by Zoom or your LMS; in fact, it may not draw on computing technology at all. Because one "Goodbye, Hello" will look quite different from another, inclusivity considerations will be in large part determined by the activity you design.

7. Share Your Story

Description: You and students take turns telling the story of how the pandemic changed the summer.

How this Builds Community: By putting yourself out there, you show that it is okay to be vulnerable. This starts the process of building trust. As students reveal private moments from the summer, they begin to trust each other. This helps develop bonds that last through the semester and beyond.

Inclusivity: If you go the more technical route, be sure that students have access to necessary platforms and connectivity. If the class is hybrid with some students in person and other remote, you will have to think through sharing strategy if students are using images or video (video can be especially challenging through video conferencing platforms). Importantly, you may need to work to move students beyond the superficial to reveal important details. This can be done with clear instructions or with targeted questions during the presentation phase (you may want to encourage students to ask questions of each other).

How it Works: Before the first class (or during the first class as an assignment for the second), ask students to think about how their summers were changed by the pandemic. You may want to specify topics to which students should attend, such as travel plans, work opportunities, family life, interactions with friends, and preparing for college. As a twist, you can ask them to capture these changes using images or video. For example, a creative student may curate “prison-like” images of boredom stuck inside the same four walls during the summer. Then in a class meeting, share the stories. Importantly, the instructor participates, perhaps even going first.

8. Extra-Credit Engagement with the Campus

Description: Students earn extra credit for attending any physical or virtual event on the campus and reporting back. In the event that all co-curricular events are cancelled, instructors might invite students to research the history of the college. Consider scheduling a visit from your special collections librarian or university archivist!

How this Builds Community: Students participate in the life or the history of the campus, and then share their experiences with their peers.

Inclusivity: if campuses resume in-person classes and events, this should pose no problem. If campuses resume classes on-line, internet access might limit some students' ability to participate in events; in that case, instructors would invite students to research a given aspect of the history of the college: was the college always co-educational? What was our position on Vietnam? What is our history regarding civil rights, etc.

How it Works: instructor offers students extra credit to attend campus events or to study the history of the college. Students then present or turn in a 250-word description of their activity.

9. Report Back

Description: Once students have completed the semester and moved onto a new one, the instructor invites them to “report back” on how the course affected them, academically, socially, emotionally, or in another way.

High impact/low effort : this activity is high impact in that it motivates the student to reflect on their experience and to continue to utilize skills acquired in the course throughout their academic career. It is low effort for both the instructor and the student: the instructor merely issues and then reads the reflection, and the student merely writes and submits it. This would be potentially higher impact if the instructor created a blog for the submission of the reflections.

How this Builds Community: this activity reminds students that the instructor still cares about them and their learning even after the class has officially ended. Faculty/student relationships is a major factor in student satisfaction with their college experience. If the reflections were included in a blog, the community-building aspect of the exercise is increased, as students are able to reconnect with one another.

Inclusivity: this exercise is available to all students regardless of access to technology: the reflection may be hand-written, typed and emailed, video-recorded, or even included in a blog.

How it Works: Instructor asks students to apply what they learned/a particular reading/a specific assignment or discussion in the class to some aspect of their life. Instructor invites students to write a 25 or 50-word "report back" or reflection. If this is done in blog-form, students might be invited to offer affirming responses to their peers' submissions.

10. It's Me, Your Instructor (and Everyone Else!)

Description: Instructors create a brief video (anywhere between 60 seconds and 5 minutes) in which they introduce themselves. They then ask students to do the same and post it (on the LMS or through something like Flipgrid). Everyone is asked to watch the videos and comment on at least two prior to the start of the semester (or within the first week of the course).

How this Builds Community: By starting the course with introductions, the instructor models best practices of being part of a community: engagement, sharing, trust, and listening. Asking everyone to not only create but watch (and comment) on people's introductions shows students that everyone matters and everyone contributes to the dynamics of the larger group.

Inclusivity: Regardless of whether a student is joining a class synchronously or asynchronously, they can be included in this activity. By creating the first video, the instructor can demonstrate how everyone's unique background is an asset to the class community. It also becomes a good way for the instructor to explicitly articulate their inclusive teaching policies and to express how they will be running a class intended to foster inclusion and celebrate diversity.

How It Works: In addition to determining the length of introductions (90 seconds-2 minutes is recommended), the instructor should also explicitly specify what information students should share. Recommended information includes preferred name, preferred gender pronouns, intended major, and where the student calls home. The instructor should also ask the students to all answer the same two or three questions. These questions could be academic in nature (i.e., why they chose this class, what they hope to get out of the course); used to remind the students they are all first-years (i.e., what excited you the most about coming to X university, what is your biggest fear about being a college first-year); or created to get to know people's personalities without sharing too personal of information (i.e., what one superpower would you want, what is your favorite TV show). Whatever questions the students must answer, the instructor should answer as well in their own introduction.

11. Self-Care

Description: Start each class (or a portion of them) with a mindful moment or meditation (and model it).

How this Builds Community: Instructors and students realize “we are in this together.” Students understand the instructor cares holistically about wellbeing, beyond just academic performance in the class. Attention to self-care often improves academic performance. Community is enhanced by asking students to take leadership turns in leading the self-care sessions.

Inclusivity: Class meditation and mindful moments may be foreign to many students. Some may be embarrassed to participate. This is easily overcome by practice.

How it Works: Begin each class session, or some subset, with a mindfulness or meditation exercise. Alternatively, assign self-care practice between classes, and check in with students to see how these exercises are working for them. There are many resources available to help with this. For example, see:

- <https://www.csusm.edu/fc/teachingandlearning/innovationsandresources/teachinginnovations/mindfulnessintheclassroom.html>
- <https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/contemplative-pedagogy/>

12. “Resources”

Description: Students create a list of helpful resources throughout the semester.

How this Builds Community: Students take the lead on building the resource list. Students contribute to the resources list from lived experiences and needs throughout the semester. Students learn to support each other. And to trust the instructor as a source of trusted support.

Inclusivity: Important to consider resources from a diverse group of authors, organizations, and providers; the resources should speak to a diverse group of students. It is important to acknowledge that the resource list will not be complete. Must be careful not to embarrass or single out students. For example, instead of asking if a student is homeless, simply include homeless resources on the list.

How it Works: As various issues and challenges arise during the semester—academic, health and wellbeing, financial, etc.—have students identify helpful resources. These issues, such as intercultural communication, might arise naturally from course materials, topics, and discussion. Or they might emerge as part of a larger conversation on campus. Or a student may volunteer a personal concern. These resources are added to a common shared file or space, perhaps through a course management system. At the completion of the semester, students are provided the resource list, including an invitation to connect with the instructor in the future, as a safe person with whom to talk.

13. Syllabus & Learning Goal Collaboration

Description: Students along with the instructor participate in the construction of the syllabus and an articulation of the learning goals.

High impact/high effort: This activity is high effort/high impact: the instructor must articulate guidelines for the development of the syllabus and learning goals; the students participate in the creation of those elements of the course documents. The impact of this exercise is high in that it involves students in the authorship of the class; they become involved in its creation and are thus engaged and accountable.

How this Builds Community: students are immediately involved in the course, they feel that the syllabus *belongs* to them; this exercise creates dialogue and an improved sense of engagement with the course materials.

Inclusivity: this exercise is available to any student with a cell-phone, and requires no other materials than the thought processes of the students.

(<http://openpedagogy.org/course-level/collaborative-syllabus-design-students-at-the-center/>)

How it Works: On the first day, the instructor distributes a preliminary syllabus and tells the class they will work on “finishing it” over the next couple of weeks.

The instructor invites the students to help develop the learning goals and identify the skills and dispositions they needed to succeed in the course. Example of an avenue for discussion: should “increased joy” be a learning goal?

The Instructor might issue a **Learning Community Invitation:**

This syllabus is labeled “preliminary” because it needs your input. I have designated some objectives for the course and invite you to help me articulate how the group would like to achieve them over the first few class sessions. The tentative class schedule lays out a road map for topics and standard readings (from the required texts), and I have identified some “tangibles” for everyone who completes the course. I invite you to help finalize the particulars in accordance with the interests, aptitudes and preferences of the group. Once the group has agreed on all of this – and I have approved it – we will “finalize” the syllabus.

The instructor asks students what they hope to learn in the class, or perhaps create a poll with a series of suggestions: I took this class because it’s required/I love history/it fit my schedule/I want to know more about Greek mythology/I want to better

understand government... This can be done verbally or anonymously (on Padlet, for example).

The instructor generates a list of learning goals along with the students.

Once everyone agrees with the list, the instructor adds it to the syllabus.

Other possible avenues for discussion: : discuss and agree on expectations for grading (class-developed definitions for A, B, C...grades), etc.

Students might even work together to spell out some instructions for the instructor as well (without instructor present): what time-frame to expect for returned papers/exams, what sorts of feedback students hope to receive, etc.

Together, as a community, the instructor and the students finalize the syllabus.

14. Student-Led Discussions

Description: Students participate in a scaffolded assignment where they help guide the learning during a specific class period/on a specific topic. More than facilitating discussions, students essentially team-teach with the instructor.

How this Builds Community: Because everyone will lead a discussion at some point, there is a real sense of *quid pro quo*: students are more likely to participate regularly when they know they will, in turn, be reliant upon the participation of others. Part of the assignment includes creating a learning activity; these regularly create memorable moments of camaraderie and conversation.

Inclusivity: This assignment encourages active leadership from everyone in the class; all voices will be heard and all students will have an opportunity to guide the learning of their classmates. At the end of each student-led discussion there is an opportunity, through a polling mechanism, to share the most impactful moment of that day's class with the leader. This assignment is also scaffolded to include a required conference with the instructor, which can help reduce the anxiety of visiting office hours for other coursework.

How it Works: The assignment helps students think about the narrative of learning, to consider not just *what* we learn, but *how* we learn it, by engaging in a 3-part process: a pre-conference with the instructor, a student-led discussion, and a post-session reflection. Throughout, students are encouraged to consider the following questions: What are the most effective ways to think about/discuss course concepts? How can you be an active member of your learning community? What creative methods produce significant learning? What is the key take-away, or "nugget," that you want people to remember? Students complete the assigned material prior to the pre-session conference, scheduled one week before their discussion. During the conference, students share their nugget ideas, discussion questions, and an active learning activity that will reinforce/communicate that nugget. Instructors then help students refine these teaching strategies. During the discussions (~20-30 minutes), students do not lecture or try to "school" the uninformed. Rather they serve as knowledgeable guides, helping to improve understanding of the course and its materials. Finally, students write a reflection (due one week after discussion), using their own impressions and peer feedback to assess what worked, what didn't, and what they might have done differently. The entire assignment is graded based on how well the student incorporates pre-conference feedback, expresses familiarity with the course materials, facilitates learning, and reflects on their work.

15. Let's Unpack That

Description: “Let’s Unpack That” is an activity of associations and definitions. It helps students identify and understand key concepts, and to explain the relationships between them. This version of the activity was devised by Dr. Lindsey Wieck and her history students at St. Mary’s University, San Antonio ([source](#)).

Pedagogical justification: Dr. Wieck reports that this exercise is “incredibly fun to watch,” and that “questioners seem to feel empowered as they guide their classmates through unpacking ideas.” Unpacking key terms and concepts help students “question the assumptions that lie within their beliefs and understandings, and this can be a very powerful way of defining terms and breaking down assumed connections.” You can hear students complete the exercise in [this episode](#) of Dr. Wieck’s podcast, *PUBLIC History*.

Inclusivity: “Unpacking” is a low effort exercise; it draws on previously learned material, and students participate in top-of-mind discussions. But it can greatly reinforce learning, especially when the activity is used for syncretic review, e.g., helping students prepare for exams. Since unpacking basically amounts to semi-structured discussion among students, it can be adapted to suit any learning environment: in-person or remote, synchronous or not. If you elect to run the activity asynchronously, on a message board for example, be sure to specify the level of effort you expect in terms of polish or substantiation.

How it Works:

- Choose a theme word like “activism.”
- Each person in the room does a simple word association, sharing the first word that comes to mind for them in relation to the theme, e.g., someone might choose “change” or “Civil Rights.”
- Each person then takes a turn elaborating on what they see as the relationship between the words. For example, they might explain that *activism* is rooted in a *desire for change*. Whence this desire, you ask. How is it expressed, and through which channels? You’re unpacking!
- Students then ask probing questions that encourage the speaker to further unpack this connection for the group, e.g., supplying specific examples, locating those examples within a wider context, or explaining in greater detail the dynamics by which one part of the relationship influences another.

16. Assigning Roles and Solving Problems

Description: While collaborative learning has the potential to promote academic achievement, it can be challenging to implement successfully because many students come to college without the tools they need to automatically succeed in collaborative learning contexts. One way of providing supportive structures to students in a collaborative learning environment is through assigning roles within the classroom.

High-impact/low-effort: this activity is low effort on the part of the instructor/high impact on the students as individuals and as part of a community: the instructor must create and define the roles; the students participate in the roles on a rotating basis. The impact of this exercise is high in that it involves students in the dynamics of the class environment; they become involved in its management and are thus engaged and accountable.

How this Builds Community: class roles provide all students with a clear avenue for participation. Students are less likely to feel left out or unengaged when they have a particular duty that they are responsible for completing. Along the same lines, roles reduce the likelihood of one individual “taking over,” to the detriment of others students' inclusion learning.

Inclusivity: This exercise is available to all students in all modalities, and is well suited for remote learning.

How it Works: Instructors must be transparent about why they are assigning group roles; this increases student buy-in by helping them recognize the value in establishing class roles. Instructors provide students with a list of roles and brief definitions for each role, or the instructor encourages students to develop their own roles based on the tasks that they feel will be critical to the class's success. This strategy provides the students with a larger level of autonomy in the class.

Roles can be assigned randomly through a variety of strategies, from who has the next birthday to color-coded post-it notes, or a place card that points out roles based on where everyone is sitting. Instructors must be willing to reinforce the given roles throughout the semester. For roles to work, students have to feel as though they will be held accountable for fulfilling those roles. Therefore, it is critical for the instructor to step in if they see someone taking over someone else's role or not fulfilling their assigned role. Often gentle reminders about who is supposed to be doing what can be

useful interventions. Changing things up regularly is imperative. Mixing up roles throughout the semester can help students develop communication skills in a variety of areas rather than relying on a single personal strength.

Suggested Roles

Manager or Facilitator: Manages the class ensuring that technology (audio/video/recording) is functioning properly at all times; recognizes if someone goes off-line.

Chat/remote guru: Ensures that students participating remotely are being recognized, chat entries are noticed, raised hands acknowledged, slides or other materials are visible to all.

Recorder: Keeps a record of those who attended the class, either physically or virtually; makes notes regarding participation; records critical points from the class's discussion along with findings or answers.

Spokesperson or summary guru: summarizes the class's ideas; should rely on the recorder's notes to guide their report.

Reflector or Strategy Analyst: Observes class dynamics and makes suggestions for improvement, increased inclusion.

17. It Belongs in a (Virtual) Museum

Description: Using Google Sites, create a virtual museum exhibit that elaborates a text or theme of the course. For example, see this California College of the Arts exhibit, [“Craft as Social Justice.”](#)

How this Builds Community: Many are the pedagogical possibilities in asking students to assume the work of a museum curator. The community-building benefits are twofold, however. First, students will come to know one another a little better as a result of their work. Second, the instructor can prompt students not presenting to follow up with questions: why did you select this object and not some other? What was the most surprising thing you learned from doing the research?

Inclusivity: Google Sites is free to use, with storage supplied by a Drive account. Moreover, Sites employs a WYSIWYG design framework, which makes it relatively easy to edit. Tech-set students can be paired with those lacking reliable access to computing resources, i.e., the work of adding and editing content to the site can be divided up accordingly. Or content can be sent to the instructor or peer mentor, who can handle the steps of uploading and formatting the material.

How it Works: Pair students and assign each dyad a week in which they will upload an image of some relevant text or object, then describe it with an analytical annotation. Should there be an odd number of students, ask a peer mentor to pair with a student. Each pair’s annotation will resemble the entries found in an annotated bibliography, with many of the same constituents, but the exact details will depend to some extent on what instructors want their students to understand and/or discover. Annotations can be made longer or shorter depending on the work involved, but each member of the dyad should give a short presentation of their work.

You can use this activity as a warm-up exercise, a low-stakes way to begin class, or you can make it weightier by developing a reflection component. Once the exhibit is complete, for example, you can ask students to write a 1-2 page response paper in which they critically contrast two or three of the items, or in which they evaluate the exhibit as a whole, assessing it with reference to course texts and analytical strategies.

18. Advice Column for Future Students

Description: Ask students to write a 250-word advice column (or create a 2-minute video) to future students in this course. What made them successful? What would they have liked to know in advance? Tell students their advice will be shared with future students.

How this Builds Community: Students discover that community extends beyond the semester. Students help shape future communities of a course by speaking to what helped them succeed.

Inclusivity: Everyone's voice is heard. Incoming students get to hear various perspectives from a range of individuals.

How it Works: The instructor can either ask students to address specific questions or solicit a more open-ended reflection. Specific questions could include: How/in what way did you succeed? What is one challenge you faced and how did you overcome it? What would you have liked to know in advance? The answers could pertain to the course exclusively or ask students to consider their first semester of college. The advice column prompt should encourage students (current and future) to consider their learning through a growth mindset (focused on what they can do to evolve as thinkers) as well as encourage them to take agency or responsibility for their learning experiences.