

# BUILDING COMMUNITY IN THE COLLEGE CLASSROOM

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# A little background . . .

- ASMCUE in the summer of 2020
- Implemented community questions in University Seminar and Principles of Biology in Fall 2020
- Concerns about
  - Decreased interactions between students
  - Decreased interactions between students & instructor
    - In class, in office hours, but not by email

# Some caveats . . .

- This is an interest and not my area of expertise.
  - The ideas presented here are from literature and webinars and not my creation.
- Let's learn from each other.
  - I know you are doing this in your classes.
- You do you.
  - Not every idea works for every class or every professor

# A thought . . .

“The learning experience of every student and the effectiveness of every teacher is influenced by what goes on among and between people who populate the classroom” (Ehrman & Dornyei, 1998)

# What does community mean?

- A group of people with a common purpose, shared values, and agreement on goals (Bickford & Wright, 2006)
- A group whose members have made a commitment to communicating with one another on an ever more deep and authentic level. (Peck, 1998)

# The Connected Classroom Inventory (Dwyer et al, 2004)

1. I feel a sense of security in my class.
2. I have common ground with my classmates.
3. I feel a strong bond with my classmates.
4. The students in my class share stories and experiences with one another.
5. The students in my class are friendly with one another.
6. The students in my class respect one another.

# The Connected Classroom Inventory

7. I feel included in class discussions in my class.

8. The students in my class are courteous with one another.

9. The students in my class praise one another.

10. The students in my class are concerned about one another.

11. The students in my class smile at one another.

12. The students in my class engage in small talk with one another.

# The Connected Classroom Inventory

- 13. The students in my class are non-judgmental with one another.
- 14. The students in my class laugh with one another.
- 15. The students in my class are supportive of one another.
- 16. The students in my class show interest in what one another is saying.
- 17. The students in my class cooperate with one another.
- 18. The students in my class feel comfortable with one another.



# Sense of Community and Learning

- Sense of community is a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group and a shared faith that members' needs will be met through their commitment to be together (McMillan & Chavis, 1986)
- Sense of community is associated with learning as well as students' well being
  - In all modalities (face-to-face, synchronous, asynchronous)
  - In all levels of education (K-12 and the way through doctorate)

# Benefits of Community

- Both student-student and student-instructor connectedness in the classroom are linked to out-of-class communication and peer learning (Sidelinger et al, 2015)
- Student involvement and courtesy are positively related to affective learning and perceived cognitive learning (Myers et al, 2015)
- Connectedness is positively related to persistence (Tinto, 1993)
- A positive relationship has been found between a sense of community and course quality satisfaction (Lui et al, 2007)
- Retention and graduation rates

# Setting the Tone – Before Classes Start

- Welcome to **our** class emails
  - Notice the terminology.
- Having course sites ready to go

# Setting the Tone – First Day

- Getting to Know You Surveys
  - Paper versus electronic versions
  - Basic information
    - Name the student wants to be called
    - Pronouns
    - Major / minor
    - Year they enrolled at Northwest

# Setting the Tone – First Day

- Getting to Know You Surveys
  - Things I find useful
    - Are you a first-generation student?
    - Where did you graduate high school?
    - How many were in your graduating class?
    - What interests you in this course?
    - What scares you about this course?
    - Anything else you want me to know about you?

# Setting the Tone – First Day

- Getting to know you as an instructor
  - Getting to know their classmates
  - Gathering contact information
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- Let's take a moment to get to know one another.

# The Importance of Names

- Name cards
  - Take up and pass out name cards daily to take attendance
- Seating charts
  - Students usually sit in the same seats anyway

# Setting the Tone – Early On

- Office hours visit
  - Make it worth a small number of points
- A quick tour of our course site
  - Include recommendations for success from previous students
- Establish a pattern of communication
  - Weekly updates on Northwest Online and by email
    - What we did that week, what we will do next week, other reminders



# Setting the Tone – Early On

- Clear expectations
  - Guidelines and rubrics
  - Outcomes and objectives
  - Dates that don't change
- Make them aware of Northwest and community resources
  - Academic, Health & Wellness, Financial, etc.
    - You can access the list I use in Canvas Commons by searching for Thornsberry.

# Day to Day and Week by Week

- As much as possible, create and stick to a course schedule.
- Announcement slide at the beginning of class.
  - Due dates
  - Advising and other reminders
  - Campus events
  - Resources
- Use objectives and outcomes so students know what to study
- Being predictable helps students feel safe in the classroom.
  - Daily flow.
  - Use cold calling judiciously.

# Community Questions

- A way to get students to talk to one another and to you
  - Hearing your own voice in a space is empowering.
- Can be related to content or not.
- Can be used at the beginning to focus the class or in the middle as a brain break

# Attendance Check in BIO 310

- Q1 – What type of transmembrane protein is activated in the MAP kinase cascade?
- Q2 – Have you met with your advisor to choose your spring courses?

# Community Builders in BIO 106

Please answer at least one of the following questions with your neighbors.

- What is your favorite spooky movie?
- Is cereal soup?
- Marshmallows or whipped cream for your hot chocolate?
- Can you drive a manual transmission vehicle?

# Shared Experiences

- This is OUR class.
- Group work
  - Assign groups or let students choose
- Service learning
- Let students choose some content if appropriate
- Slack or discussion boards
- Check ins to remind students that stress is a normal part of college

# Online Learning

- Quality Matters
- Let them see you.
- Provide ways for students to interact with each other.

# Learning from Colleagues

- What additional things do you do to build community in your classes?
- Feel free to email me ideas and questions.
  - [gthorns@nwmissouri.edu](mailto:gthorns@nwmissouri.edu)



# Learning from Colleagues

- Randomly assigning groups so that everyone works together by the end of the semester
- Using an object (a fish) to indicate when a student needs to talk about something
- Wearing a hat (a tinfoil one) to indicate when a student is talking
- Bringing in news items to initiate discussion – the weirder the better
- Singing “I’m a Little Teapot” with choreography to show that there’s no need to be embarrassed in class

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