
Sticky Participation Points

Framing the Active Learning Classroom

Objectives

To encourage student participation during class by indicating that the instructor values participation and by visibly rewarding that participation. To create a climate that invites participation.

Activities

I carry a pad of colorful "post-it" notes. Anytime a student answers a question of mine or asks a particularly good question I hand them a "participation point." They write their name on the sticky and give it to me at the end of class. In my class it is worth one clicker question, and clickers represent 10% of their grade, so each participation point is worth maybe 1/10th of one percent of their grade. By the end of the semester they might raise their grade 1%, and the tangible effects are remarkable! They seem to get a lot of immediate gratification from being given a "point" for their contribution, and I've been handing out an average of 12 per class.

How these are graded: I say that the points are worth about 1 clicker question. I give participation points as extra credit (they are in a separate column in our LMS). The sticky points are worth 1/600 of the class grade, so I take the number of sticky points, divide by 600, and add this to their total score. A very participatory student might get 12 sticky points, increasing their grade by 2%.

Comments from Stephanie Chasteen: Another benefit of this technique is that it gets you out from behind the podium, giving a tangible reward directly to a student who contributes to class. It makes the class more dynamic, as well as visibly rewarding the behavior you are looking for. Another option for grading is to add the number of sticky points to the number of clicker questions that the student gets credit for, so that they are part of the required participation grade (10% in our class).

Effectiveness

By the end of the term around 2/3 of the 160 students have spoken out in front of the large class. That is a lot of discussion for a big class. More than any of the ones I took as a student, that's for sure.

I'm not sure I could have managed conversation in a classroom of 160 when I came here 10 years ago. I can now. I do a lot of metacognitive discussion: how do you learn in this class?, Is it as good to listen as it is to be the one talking (no!)?, and encourage participation and set up a good class climate.

Comments from Stephanie Chasteen: I also found this technique very effective at rewarding student participation.

Author

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Materials & Resources

None

Classroom Context

Introductory Astronomy; 160 students in stadium seating with a central aisle

Time Requirement

Varies

About this Project

This is one of a set of materials compiled for instructors to draw upon in order to frame non-traditional modes of classroom teaching for their students. Our hope is that these materials can help reduce any student resistance to such techniques.

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Other materials available online at www.colorado.edu/sei/fac-resources