

Semester-Long Exercise to Build Community in a Class

The goal of this exercise/process is to help build community and help each student feel a responsibility to the classroom community. It was inspired by my experience at the Law and Social Change Jam in 2019. It follows an exercise where we develop community agreements for the learning community we are creating together during our time together in the class. Depending upon the size of the class, I generally come up with about 4-5 “jobs” that might need doing in order to care for the community during the semester. I have done this in a clinic context, and I believe it could be adapted to other types of classes. Some examples:

- Welcoming guest speakers & sending thank-yous on behalf of the class to any guests
- Atmosphere – depending on where the class or group meets, there may be things that can be done to enhance the atmosphere
- Community building/fun – ie., tell class to wear a red shirt for Valentines Day, scheduling a class meetup (all activities are optional)
- Giving reminders for upcoming assignments, etc.
- Any other jobs that need doing? Invite students to develop any ideas.

Early in the semester, I give some class time to students and tell them the 4-5 jobs that need doing. I invite students to think it over and then physically move to a part of the room designated for that group. Their task is to name their group, and to figure out what they will do, and how they will take on their task(s) equitably.

During the semester, at the end or beginning of class, I will ask if any of the groups need a few minutes to meet, whether they might need help from other groups, or whether any groups have any announcements they want to make.

This takes very little class time and contributes to the camaraderie of the class, also models that asking for and/or offering help is normal. It also helps create a sense of responsibility to the community.

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