

3D: Assessing Discussions

Jay R. Howard, PhD, Dean, College of Liberal Arts & Sciences, Butler University [00:00:02] Students respond to incentives, even if it's a tiny number of points for participating in discussion. The difficulty for the faculty member is, well, how are you going to assess that?

Jess Butler, PhD, Instructor, Department of Sociology & Criminology, Core Curriculum, Butler University [00:00:16] Fairly assessing participation is really hard. It's easy to notice who talks a lot, but that's not always the best kind of participation, just saying something all the time.

Student [00:00:27] So, like, not all of us may, actually have . . .

Jess Butler, PhD [00:00:29] So how, other than quantity, can we measure quality participation? I make it really clear to students that it's not just about shooting your hand up every time I ask a question, but that the quality of your participation is actually what I'm looking for. Like, are you responding to what your fellow students are saying? Are you making connections to course readings? Are you bringing in that video that we watched at the beginning of class?

Student [00:00:51] Kind of equivalent to alcohol.

Jess Butler, PhD [00:00:52] Good.

Tara Lineweaver, PhD, Professor, Department of Psychology, Butler University [00:00:52] I have a rubric that I use to help set those standards. So there are four things I am looking for in their discussion. One is, do they understand the articles and demonstrate that they understood those articles? One is, did they articulate their ideas clearly and carefully? The third is, were they thoughtful in their responses? Did they think about the big picture and what it all means together? And the fourth is, did they make the links that I was looking for in their discussion? So I grade them on a rubric from one to five on each of those four aspects.

Tara Lineweaver, PhD [00:01:24] Remember that everybody is getting graded on their performance today. So make sure everybody gets an opportunity to speak.

Student [00:01:31] Because there's the debate we've learned about in, whether faces are special or not. Doesn't that suggest that faces are different if there's a disorder that specifically . . .

Tara Lineweaver, PhD [00:01:39] As I'm listening to the discussion, I take notes myself. I have a column for each student in the fishbowl and I write in their column a few notes to remind me what they contributed. And I have that separated into the four sections that I am looking for. So was it a comment that showed they understood the article? Was it a comment that showed a link? And I put it in the right section so then I can look to see how well they covered each of those four aspects. And I star the comments that I want to make sure to thank them for later.

Jay R. Howard, PhD [00:02:05] I'll have a grade roster in front of me and I'll make a little check mark every time a student talks. But I'm not that good. I find that if I try to do that, I'm trying to find their name on the list and then I've got to put a check down, and by the time I've done that, I haven't heard what the student has had to say. I think what's better to do is at the end of the class period, ask students to do some reflection on their contribution to discussion.

Tara Lineweaver, PhD [00:02:30] I also ask the students to self-reflect. They fill out a reflection sheet, they grade themselves.

Tara Lineweaver, PhD [00:02:39] So you have a self-rating form in front of you that will allow you to think about how you did as part of the discussion today. And there's four different categories here. So the, the first one is, wow, everybody in this room is now smarter because of what I said during the discussion today. A three is, I was a really active participant. I asked some intriguing questions. People responded and I helped generate a good discussion. Two is, I was here. I was listening. I was making comments. But a lot of my comments were kind of responding to what other people said or reiterating what other people said, and my comments didn't really guide the discussion in a new direction. And then a zero is, well, I probably could have stayed home today because I really didn't bother to contribute anything. I want you to really think about which of these best describes your contributions. Then at the bottom of the page, you're also going to give me a little brief description about why you gave yourself that evaluation and then other than yourself, who you thought did a particularly good job today. So take a few minutes to fill that out and I'll collect it before you leave class.

Megan, Student, Butler University [00:03:48] Doing the self-ratings at the end I think helps because maybe if you wanted to reiterate something that you thought you did really well, it gives you the opportunity. But it also, you can shed light on who else you think did really well.

Dan, Student, Butler University [00:04:01] It makes you reflect more on how much you really contributed during the discussion.

Tara Lineweaver, PhD [00:04:06] At the beginning of the semester, most of them think they nailed it, that they got fours, you know, on a scale from zero to four in terms of their participation. Towards the end of the semester, they will start to use the full scale of responses to note, this was not my best work and here's where I need to get better. I see them thinking more about what did I do well and where do I need to improve, um, then I did at the beginning of the semester. And I believe what's even more important is providing the student with written feedback. This is written feedback that I provide to them, as well as a rubric that I use, helps them to see, here's where I need to grow and improve. I always try to include something that they said that I really appreciated. I really appreciated your comment about this or the link you made here or how you tied this to that. And that allows me to give them some positive feedback. And then I say, I need more in this area for you.

Jay R. Howard, PhD [00:04:58] In many, if not most workplaces, people tend to work in teams, so you've got to be willing to speak up and you have to stop and reflect, am I contributing to my team? Am I helping with the achievement of our project or the goal that is set for us? Am I contributing in a productive and helpful way? Participation and discussion prepare students for the 21st-century workplace.