

# CSC 226 Class Participation: Rationale & Grading

*Tell me, and I'll forget.  
Show me, and I may not remember.  
Involve me, and I'll understand.*

It can be a challenge for students to be willing to actively and constructively participate in class discussions. Our teaching philosophy—why and how we teach—affects every activity we do in the classroom: We believe that the most profound and lasting learning comes *NOT* from listening to our lectures but from actively engaging in conversations with others about the concepts and their application. Our teaching philosophy emerges from personal experience and from well-established research.

Education researchers agree that "student involvement is the key to learning." Here are some selected quotes:

"Analysis of the research literature...suggests that *students must do more than just listen*: They must read, write, discuss, or be engaged in solving problems" (Bonwell & Eisen Executive Summary).

"The body of research on the impacts of the college academic experience is extensive. The strongest general conclusion [is that] the *greater the student's involvement or engagement in academic work or the academic experience* of college, the *greater his or her level of knowledge acquisition and general cognitive development*" (Pascarella & Terenzini 616).

"Knowing and learning are *communal acts*. They require many eyes and ears, many observations and experiences" (Palmer, "Community, Conflict, and Ways of Knowing." *Change* 19 (1), 1987, 27).

"The theory...*students learn by becoming involved*...seems to explain most of the empirical knowledge gained over the years about environmental influences on student development.... Quite simply, student involvement refers to the *amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience*" (Astin 133-51).

"Learning is not a spectator sport. Students do not learn much just by sitting in class listening to teachers, memorizing packaged assignments, and spitting out answers. *They must talk about what they are learning, write about it, relate it to past experiences, apply it to their daily lives.* They must make what they learn part of themselves" (Chickering & Gamson 3).

"*You understand it only if you can teach it, use it, prove it, explain it, defend it, or read between the lines....* The students must perform using knowledge to convince us that they really understand material that quizzes and short-answer tests only suggest they understand.... *Understanding is developed through discussion, not instruction*" (Wiggins and McTighe 41, 159).

"Learning is least useful when it is private and hidden; it is most powerful when it becomes public and communal. Learning flourishes when we take what we think we know and offer it as community property among fellow learners so that it can be tested, examined, challenged, and improved before we internalize it." —Lee S. Shulman, *Teaching as Community Property: Essays on Higher Education* (36-37)

"When white college students are placed in *discussion groups* with a black student—or with students holding opinions in the minority (a student whose opinions on the topics under discussion were at odds with those of the other participants)—they display *higher levels of complex thought*, and that pattern shows that racial and other forms of diversity have *positive effects on education and thought....* Although *homogeneity* of group members may increase solidarity and cohesiveness, it also tend to increase 'groupthink.' By contrast, '*minority influence*' leads to *more-divergent thinking and Perspectives, better critical thinking, and willingness and ability to change*" (Anthony Lising Antonio, Stanford University Department of Education).

## References for Rationale:

- This evidence was modified from <http://letsgetengaged.wikispaces.com/file/detail/ClassParticipation.pdf>
- Most quotes were compiled by Barbara Walvoord, the Director of the John A. Kanel Center for Teaching and Learning, University of Notre Dame.
- The Wiggins and McTighe quote is from from *Understanding by Design*.
- The diversity study is from Stanford published in *Psychological Science*.

In light of this overwhelming evidence, we encourage each and every student to constructively participate in class discussions and teamwork. It may be unfamiliar or uncomfortable at first, so you will be graded for your efforts over the whole semester. Clearly, *you must be present to participate*, but presence isn't enough for participation. **Effective class participation involves making constructive contributions to both discussion and to teamwork, being active and creative in problem-solving, maintaining a consistently positive attitude, keeping unfailing focus on tasks, and communicating with others productively.** Below, you will find our class participation rubric (detailed criteria for different levels of performance). Please ask us periodically how you're doing if you're unsure.

<b>A</b>	<p>Students always takes a voluntary, thoughtful, and active role in their own learning, challenging themselves on a daily basis, frequently offering creative or original responses/interpretations/observations beyond the obvious. Through participation and inquiry, they consistently demonstrate a genuine desire to learn and to share important ideas with the instructor and with their classmates. Always treating classmates and the professor respectfully, they do not dominate but regularly initiate discussions, ask significant questions, listen actively to others, and consistently support the work of their classmates. These students are always well prepared to contribute to the class as a result of having thoughtfully completed all reading and programming assignments, and the thoroughness of their work demonstrates the high regard they hold for learning and for their fellow students.</p>
<b>B</b>	<p>Students consistently take an active role in their own learning, offering consistently appropriate and occasionally creative or original responses/interpretations/observations. They participate frequently in class discussions and are active in teamwork, volunteering their ideas, asking thoughtful questions. They listen respectfully to their classmates and are willing to share ideas as a result of having almost always completed reading and programming assignments. These students are almost always well prepared to contribute to the class as a result of having thoroughly completed all reading and programming assignments. Though never causing disruption to the class, these students do not always demonstrate a consistent commitment to make the most out of our class time each and every day.</p>
<b>C</b>	<p>Students inconsistently take an active role in their own learning, sharing relevant ideas and asking appropriate questions. They contribute to class discussions and teamwork occasionally offering responses/interpretations/observations but typically offer little beyond the obvious. Many comments are merely factual statements or merely entertaining comments, neither of which demonstrates careful and intelligent responses to class content. These students do generally listen to their classmates and respect their opinions. As a result of having generally completed their reading and programming assignments, these students are prepared to answer questions when called upon. Though not causing significant disruption to the class, they may need occasional reminders to stay on task, to make the most of our class time, and to increase their level of commitment to the course.</p>
<b>D</b>	<p>Students only occasionally take an active role in their own learning and are frequently a non-participant meaning that they participate and ask questions only infrequently. They hesitate to share their ideas, and they may not always listen to or respect t the work of others. These students usually participate only when called upon and even then offer only brief or irrelevant responses. As a result of reading and/or programming assignments being sometimes incomplete or missing, they may not be prepared to answer meaningfully with detail or substance. These students need regular reminders to stay on task; they occasionally disrupt class by such activities as coming to class late, failing to contribute to the learning environment by blankly staring off into space or by working on something else during class, talking with someone while someone else is speaking, being off topic, or being merely entertaining with little purpose beyond clowning around. They may intermittently treat classmates, TAs, or a professor disrespectfully causing occasional disruption to the learning environment.</p>
<b>F</b>	<p>Students consistently fail to take an active role in their own learning. They almost never participate in discussion and only rarely share ideas or ask questions even during teamwork. These students display poor listening skills, and serve primarily as a disrupting voice in both teamwork and discussion. They typically let others do the work. As a result of being unprepared for or disengaged from class, these students often refuse to offer ideas even when called upon. By treating classmates, TAs, and/or the professor disrespectfully, these students are frequently more of a liability than an asset to the overall progress of the class as well as to their own learning.</p>

**Reference for rubric:**

This grading rubric was primarily adapted from <http://web001.greece.k12.ny.us/files/479/Class%20Participation%20Rubric.doc>