Building Classroom Community

A strong classroom community—one characterized by a sense of collegiality and teamwork among students, and between students and faculty—might show up in vibrant class discussions (both face-to-face and online), deep engagement in peer review, or something as simple as calling classmates by name. When students feel a sense of belonging in their classes, they are often more motivated in their coursework; indeed, scholars have linked this sense of belonging to academic achievement and college retention. Furthermore, a cohesive classroom culture often allows students to raise and engage challenging academic issues, learn from one another, and take productive risks in their work.

Some ways to build classroom community:
Facilitating classroom community calls on the “soft skills” of pedagogy, although it is often most effective when it joins social activity with academic learning.

- Set the tone with the first class of the semester. Plan a thoughtful format for introductions—and space for students to engage conceptually with some aspect of the course, perhaps sharing interests, concerns, or questions about the syllabus on index cards.
- Learn students’ names (and how to pronounce them correctly), and hold them accountable for learning one another’s names, too. Seating charts, name placards, or ice-breaker activities can be helpful, particularly in large classes.
- Wherever possible, arrange the classroom to ensure students can see one another’s faces.
- Integrate low-stakes, informal group work into class time, perhaps building up toward peer review of their work in progress.
- Invite students to engage with course content by instituting regular reflective, in-class writing exercises, and ask students to briefly share responses in pairs.
- Celebrate course milestones such as the completion of major projects or exams, and share exemplary work with the whole class.

References

See also
Inclusive Pedagogy
Peer Review
Teaching with Small Groups