

Exploring the commons in the classroom

Learning and teaching collaboration through experience

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Why are we here?

“It is vital for interdisciplinary students to learn why cooperation matters for solving complex problems. This workshop will demonstrate how to teach and train cooperation, using the class Common pool resource challenges as an example. You will experience how cooperation within a group plays out and what skills it requires.”

Let's play a cooperation game

Pass out worksheets to individuals.

Some jargon

A society cannot thrive (or even survive) without providing or protecting “non-excludable goods,”

A common-pool *dilemma* occurs when public goods (e.g., security, vaccination, food security) are under-provided or common-pool goods (e.g., public areas, groundwater, fish, tax revenues) are over-appropriated AND “institutions” can be reformed to address the dilemma.

Elinor Ostrom is famous for studying this topic, which crosses many academic boundaries (economics, politics, anthropology, sociology, sustainable resource management, etc.)

I designed a class to teach “the commons” to LUC students. After three years of teaching, I wrote a paper summarizing the class.

Here's the paper

Abstract: This paper describes the structure, incentives, assessments, and results of a course in common pool resource management (CPRM) that can be run in 8+ weeks with 15-30 students. The course structure helps students learn about the complexity of CPRM by grouping students into “too large” groups where coordination will be difficult *as well as* tasking those groups to find and address a local CPRM problem. This “play within a play” structure creates numerous opportunities for feedback, adjustment and reflection for students as well as the instructor. Data and results from three iterations of the course are discussed.

Download from: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2906697>

How I ran my class — assessments

NB: Text was Ostrom et al. (1994)

Extrinsic motivation:

15% Participation

5% Quiz (you just did that)

30% 2 Homework + CPR example (10% each)

20% Individual contribution to group presentation*

20% Individual contribution to the group report*

Individual contributions via “your individual role will be assessed by your peers”

Peer assessments

- ▶ “How has the team done, in terms of organizing and producing the project?”
- ▶ “What role have you filled, in terms of helping the team and producing the project?”
- ▶ “How could you or other members improve the team’s work?”
- ▶ “Who (besides you) has been most helpful? Why?”
- ▶ Divide 100% among your other team members according to their contributions.

Those questions were asked twice. The third time asked:

- ▶ “What was the best part of your project and team work?”
- ▶ “What part would you have done differently, if you had to do it again with new, random partners?”
- ▶ “What lessons have you learned that you would apply to future team projects and/or common-pool problems?”
- ▶ Divide 100%...

How I ran my class — timing

By week. . .

1. Define CPR; make groups
2. Approve project; theory; homework #1
3. First feedback; CPR examples;
4. Quiz; homework #2
5. Swap 30-40% of students
6. Finish Ostrom; second feedback
7. Presentations
8. Reports due; third feedback

Results

“I definitely learned a lot. More life lessons I'd say than anything else. The group project trying to resolve an actual issue has been an incredible life lesson in the frustrations and benefits of working as a group on an issue. Also it is interesting to see how what at first glance seems like a simple issue, can actually be incredibly complex once you get more into it. Exploring creative solutions and trying things out whether or not they fail or succeed has been really fun. And it is actually quite empowering to take on what seems like an impossible mission and break it down into little doable bits and then actually do it. And yes, it is so refreshing to have something practical in LUC for once, and not just theories and more theories. ”

Questions?

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