

Seminar Summary, 10/22

Today's topic was collaborative learning

- We started by telling the students the importance of going to talks, colloquiums, etc, both for research purposes and for the purpose of "getting their name out there." There are upcoming statistics talks for the stats students, and some math professors are up for tenure, meaning they will be presenting some of their research, too.
- We discussed group work as a group (irony?). We pointed out that it gets a bad name, and that most people only remember bad experiences while working in groups. We asked students to think about sessions in classes or in their professional lives where collaboration was positive.
- The key: making group work worthwhile, effective, and efficient.
- We talked about negative experiences while trying to incorporate group work. Tim has lots of stories from his teaching experiences about this. Elliot had a lot of experience from his professional background.
- We then focused on group work and collaborative learning from the students' perspectives. We asked our students to put themselves in the students' shoes and ascertain what they looked forward to while working in groups (things as mundane as meeting the cute guy/girl in the third row) and things they dreaded.
- We briefly digressed into a discussion about the reading assignments. See reflections for more thorough descriptions of these.
- The lecture portion of the class remained on the topic of group work. Elliot started with Tim writing, then Tim finished as Elliot wrote. The topics discussed were:
 - A further examination of why students have trepidation about group work,
 - The importance of group work from a pedagogical standpoint,
 - How to get the group together using Elliot's fancy mnemonic device (forming, storming, norming, performing, and adjourning),
 - The ideal number of students per group (two or four),
 - The design of the group (homogenous or heterogenous, etc)
 - How to get buy-in from students without (and this is key) asking them directly for it,
 - The amount of teacher-imposed structure on the group,
 - The amount of structure on the assignment,
 - Whether you stick with one group or rotate,
 - How the layout of the classroom affects the work,
 - Time-effective strategies,
 - Juxtaposing group-work with the necessary and appropriate amount of lecture time,
 - How to evaluate the performance of the students.
- Dr. Huerta also graced us with his presence and discussed the questions that came up in a previous meeting regarding qualifying exams.