

Helping others learn

While a good deal of your participation grade will be based on activities that may seem to occur in the vacuum of your own relationship to the material, there are many elements that influence this relationship that are external to you. Our class is a learning community, and much of what we will be doing involves making sense together of complex and occasionally conflicting information. Your learning will be greatly enhanced as we interact face-to-face to test and refine our understanding of the material through the dynamic process of interrogating each other's assumptions and conclusions during classroom interactions. This is why groups are smarter than individuals.

These interactions not only improve your own learning, but they can improve the learning of others as well, and I want you all to take this more public, peer-oriented educational responsibility seriously. On a practical level I expect to see three basic manifestations of this in class:

- Question-asking (directed either to the instructor or peers)
- Comment-making (directed either to the instructor or peers)
- Personal interaction (with either the instructor or peers)

I will also develop my own impressions of how helpful you have been to others learning through the course of the term based on the following criteria:

- are your questions or comments relevant to the topic being considered?
- do your questions further the topic in a way that is productive for the group?
- are your comments helpful for the group's learning?
- do your interactions (questions, comments, body language, tone) promote a respectful learning environment for all participants?

You can earn up to 50 points for helping others learn.

The Classroom Learning Assist

But I don't want to be the only person responsible for tracking how well you are helping others learn. In many sports, when a player scores as the result of a pass s/he received from a teammate, that player is credited with an "assist." It is frequently the case that the scorer physically points out the player that made that pass. Now, sports analogies don't cover everything that happens in the learning process, but I think we should all be more conscious of classmates who are "assisting" us in our learning. Therefore, I have developed a way for us all to point out a peer who provides a "learning assist."

You can use the following form to give credit to a classmate who assisted your learning:

Classroom Learning Assist form

You can use this form as often as you like, but I'd suggest taking a moment at least once a week to think about particular learning moments in class that might deserve

the awarding of an assist. The form only requires a few minutes to fill out, and I think the recognition is valuable both for the giver and the receiver of the assist.

Possible reasons to award a learning assist:

- One of your peers explains an idea in a way that enhances your understanding of said idea
- A peer's successful argumentation and explanation challenges you to reconsider or change a previously held position
- A peer adds an insightful observation to a claim that you made during class or group discussion
- A classmate makes a "productive" mistake, one that leads to clarifying discussion and learning for herself and others

I am especially concerned about learning that happens *within the classroom setting*. I suspect you all have highly valued study partners outside of class, and they no doubt contribute much to your success. With this particular element, however, I am trying to make more visible the learning that happens among peers that you may not typically study with.

Over the course of the term, I will notify the recipient of any assists they have received. At the end of the term, the assists each student earns will be factored into their "helping others learn" grade. I will keep the assist giver and the assist receiver anonymous, but if an interesting point is raised in the form, we might discuss it in class. I will also use the assist forms to help inform the "helping others learn" portion of your grade.