Implementation of Active Learning in a 50+ Student Class

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Students demonstrated greater engagement and preparedness ahead of major assignments, which accompanied improved course retention.

Course Background

CLSX 316, Magic and Ritual in the Ancient World, is an in-person course with about 50 undergraduates. It teaches students about the role of magic and ritual in ancient Greek and Roman culture and how it continues to influence modern culture today.

Learning goals for this course include:

- Summarize, analyze, and critique scholarship on ancient magic and witches; you will also make your own contribution via an exhibit and final project.
- Give and receive feedback that will improve your own work and the work of your peers in class activities and assignments.
- Work effectively with others in small groups or teams.
- Understand and negotiate differences in values between yourself and people who are not from your culture.
- Communicate idea(s) and/or argument(s) clearly and effectively to the group in an oral presentation.
- Reflect on your own learning and successfully identify barriers to your progress, enabling you to proactively shape your own study for the better.

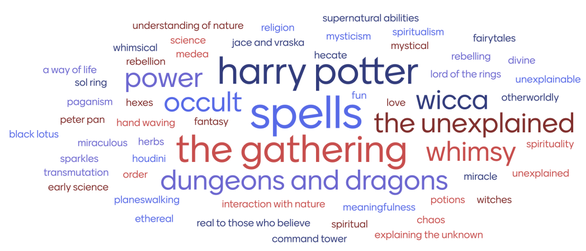
What I Changed

Course changes focused on increasing the amount of active learning students engaged in. Changes included:

- Use of Mentimeter (polling software which embeds into slides) to make every class fully interactive
- Use polling tools to sequence learning, recap past learning, find out what students already know, find out what students want to spend more time on
- Pacing lectures for student involvement about every 7 min
- Writing a community agreement on how to create a positive learning environment, choosing their own behaviors and reflecting on what facilitates learning from the start
- Separating students into 10 learning pods of 5 students which became the structure for discussion activities, class debates etc. This meant each group could feed back to the larger class and everyone's voice could be heard

Example Word Clouds from Mentimeter

What is Magic?

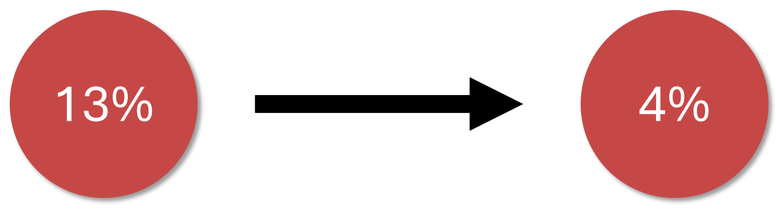


What sort of problems did 'erotic' spells aim to solve?

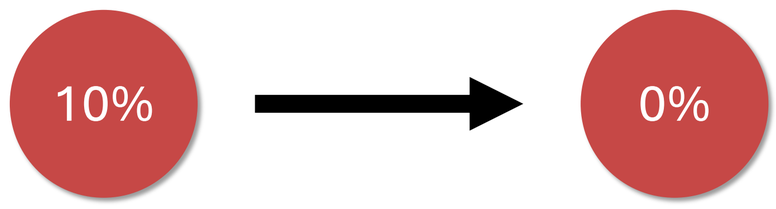


Student Metrics

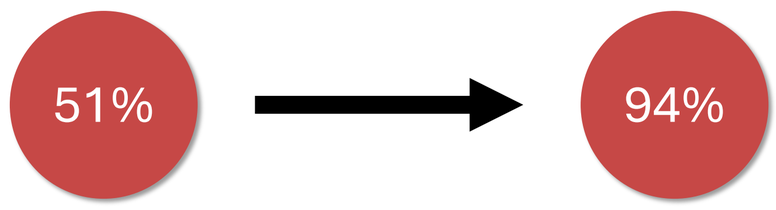
Withdrawal rate for this class has decreased from 13% in the previous three semesters of equivalent courses to 4% in this semester.



D/F rate for this class has decreased from 10% in the previous three semesters of equivalent courses to 0% in this semester (all students in the course currently have a C+ or higher).



Student confidence for the course topic has increased from 51% to 94% by week 7 (Q: I am confident in my knowledge of this topic and my likelihood of success in the exam)



Results Summary

CLSX courses like this have been struggling with very high DFW rates. I speculate this is due to these courses usually being traditional lecture-style classes with very low interaction outside of a weekly discussion session. Integrating active based learning and interactive check ins through the course was a means to reinvigorate student excitement for this course.