Case Notes

# Chapter 8: Establishing a Constructive Climate

# Case 8.1: A Tale of Two Classes

## Case Summary

This case study highlights two different approaches to a college communication class, noting the difference in structure and the techniques each professor uses in their respective courses.

Professor Gardner is described as a more formal and traditional instructor, limiting the use of outside technology and distractions in his course, and focusing on growth and development through interaction with other students. Professor Morgan is less structured, and encourages the students to be responsible for their own learning.

When comparing professors, students indicate enjoying both, but acknowledge how different they are due to their different approaches in their classes.

Case Analysis

Both professors in this case study teach the same discipline (communication), however, the **structure** of each class is very different for the students who take each course. Professor Gardner’s course has a clearly defined structure in order to meet the **norms** he established for the course. Gardner’s teaching philosophy reflects **cohesiveness**, where students become a community of learners and interact with each other without being permitted to use technology.

Professor Morgan’s course operates on less formal **structure** than Gardner’s, with students being permitted to use technology during class, including computers and cell phones. Students also control discussion and are responsible for their own learning of the concepts presented throughout the class.

The responses from the students seem to be more positive for Professor Gardner’s course, noting that his structure and style is consistent with the rest of the institution and they can easily track their progress and learning in the course. For Professor Morgan’s course, students are not sure on how the projects are related to her lecture, or more importantly the final grade.

## Sample Answers to Case Questions

*1. In establishing a constructive climate for his or her class, what kind of structure has each professor put in place?*

Professor Steve Gardner has created a classroom environment structured to be free from distractions. Structure is formal and used to create a community of learning in the class. Students are required to be “fully present” during lectures in order to establish comradery.

Professor Marissa Morgan is less concerned with formal structure and more concerned with individual accountability. Students are free to learn in whatever fashion they would like and present and discuss their ideas in any form they would like.

*2. How would you describe the group norms for each class?*

In Professor Steve Gardner’s class, he has created an environment that allows for synergy. Because the students have taken the time to learn each other’s names and also are not distracted by technology, they can be fully engaged and build relationships with each other than continue even after class ends. It is noted that many of the students interact with each other outside of class, and professor Gardner knows all of their names.

In Professor Marissa Morgan’s class, discussion and group norms are very open-ended. Students discuss what they want to speak about related to the course topics, and students do not tend to interact with each other outside of class. Group norms aren’t present, but may be implicit if the students share common interests in the communication topics that are being discussed in class.

*3. What actions has each professor taken to establish cohesiveness in his or her class?*

In Professor Steve Gardner’s class, cohesiveness is established through consistent standards and assignments. Students know there is a reflection paper due every other week and can prepare for their midterm and final exam. Students have the ability to measure their own personal learning progress in the course.

In Professor Marissa Morgan’s class, personal observation papers are required, however, they are short papers that are marked as turned in or not. The final presentation in the class on interpersonal communication, counts as the students’ final grade in the course. Students appear to not understand how their professor will arrive at their final grade, and are confused at how to measure their own personal learning progress in the course.

*4. What standards of excellence has each professor established for his or her course?*

Professor Steve Gardner requires results, reviews results, and rewards results. Clear and articulate directions and expectations are provided for students, and constructive feedback is provided on their reflection papers, and performance is rewarded through final grades.

It is unclear how specifically Professor Marissa Morgan demonstrates the three standards of excellence as discussed in this chapter. It can be assumed that the students’ grades at the end of their final presentations are reflective of their results, however, students appear to be confused regarding the expectations related to their final grade and even their final presentation.

*5. Which class atmosphere would you do best in? Why?*

***As this is an opinion question, answers will vary from student to student.***