



i>CLICKER CASE STUDY: DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY, BALL STATE UNIVERSITY

Sociology Professor improves student exam scores and overall skill set to comprehend and apply course topics and material

Challenge:

Developing a learning environment that meets the needs of students from many different majors and various skill levels.

Solution:

Utilizing i>clickers to enhance student preparation for exams, while providing feedback through formative assessment.

Benefits:

Use of i>clickers demonstrates increased participation and focus from students with improved practice opportunities translating to greater understanding and success on exams.

Sociology course applies i>clickers to improve student participation and active learning, while collectively providing feedback through formative assessment.

Motivation For Using i>clickers

- Enhance student preparation for the lectures (for example, by quizzing students on the assigned reading)
- Increase student discussion in the classroom
- Provide feedback to students through formative assessment
- Provide feedback to the professor through formative assessment
- Increase student participation
- Track attendance and improve timeliness

Technology Implementation & Usage

Obtaining/Registering i>clickers: All students are required to purchase i>clickers from the bookstore.

Taking Responsibility: Students register their remote through the i>clicker website.

“ Without question, the i>clicker increased participation. Students stayed more focused on the material and were better engaged in discussion, even during course periods when i>clickers were not being used.

Melinda Messineo, Department of Sociology, Ball State University, Muncie

Classroom Application: Blackboard, the university's grade-book program, PowerPoint, videos/DVDs, and websites including YouTube are used — all of which integrate easily with i>clicker. Questions are also posed to students after films or discussions or in reference to PowerPoint information. Usually the questions are planned, but sometimes they are impromptu.

i>clicker Grading Policy: Ten quizzes are given during the course, and students can earn up to 3 points per quiz.

Daily Use/Questions Asked: In 90% of class sessions, i>clickers are used at least once and usually three times. Sometimes as many as six questions are asked in one session, but the process goes rather quickly. A variety of questions and formats are applied. These questions assess students' comprehension, poll their opinions or experiences, or check their understanding of the reading material.

The class session is started with a question to stimulate students to think about their reading assignment or a specific topic and then use the results to move into the lecture. On other days, students are asked to form groups of three or four and try the practice test questions together. This is a popular activity, especially because incorrect answers are discussed. For the opinion and experience polls used throughout the lecture, the results are reviewed of each question immediately.

Question Examples

Comprehension

This type of a question is used after course topic has been discussed:

1. *Which perspective looks at society as a struggle over power?*

- A. *social conflict*
- B. *structural functionalist*
- C. *social functionalist*
- D. *symbolic interactionist*

Opinion/Experience

This type of question helps students to connect with the material and to demonstrate where the class falls in relation to other populations.

2. *Do you believe in life after death?*

- A. *yes*
- B. *no*
- C. *not sure*

Reading Check

This type of question is used at the beginning of class to make sure that all students are at the same place in terms of basic vocabulary acquisition.

3. *In this week's chapter there was an example of an age-sex pyramid that compared U.S. population change to that of Mexico. What did that graphic demonstrate?*

- A. *The United States and Mexico are very similar in terms of population makeup over time*
- B. *The United States has an older population on average*
- C. *Mexico has an older population on average*
- D. *I do not recall*

Course Overview

Course Title/Subject: Introductory Sociology Course

Typical Enrollment/Student Information: 220 students per section; 99% are non-majors

Course Structure: The class has a lecture-only format (without a lab/discussion/recitation section), meets twice a week for 75 minutes, and is worth 3 credit hours of required core curriculum credit in the social sciences. One graduate assistant helps with the grading and grade-entry duties. The students take in-class quizzes and online tests. The i>clicker system is used with some of the quizzes, but more often it is used for survey responses, discussion prompts, feedback solicitation, and "checking for understanding" types of questions.

Course/Student Challenges

(comprehension): Most students are not especially interested in sociology or familiar with the subject. Some feel that the material is simply common sense and do not see how sociology specifically and core courses in general are worth their time and effort. The class is large, which encourages anonymity and decreases engagement. The course also covers a broad range of material rather quickly, making it difficult for students to master the material. Because there are many students from many different majors and with various skill levels, it is challenging to provide a learning environment that meets all of their needs.

Course Grading Policy: There are three midterms, worth 50% of the grade; one cumulative final exam, worth 25% of the grade; and ten quizzes, worth 25% of the grade. Students can also earn points through extra credit opportunities.

Results

Successes

- ▶ **Increased Participation** Without question, i>clicker increases participation. Students stay more focused on the material and were better engaged in discussion, even during course periods when i>clickers were not being used.
- ▶ **Increased Exam Scores** i>clickers deliver practice test questions to help students become familiar with the testing style, and the first exam scores were noticeably higher than those of previous semesters.
- ▶ **Enjoyed Opinion and Experience Polls** Students especially enjoy the opinion and experience polls; this method is particularly well suited to the sociology classroom. Sensitive questions about religion, political views, attitudes about health care, poverty, and so on, can be posed and answered anonymously and students are extremely interested in hearing what their peers have to say on these issues.
- ▶ **Increased Course Understanding** There are increased practice opportunities with the i>clicker which translate to greater understanding and success on exams. In particular, use of the i>clicker helped students apply theoretical paradigms to real situations and problems. One unexpected result of the i>clicker was that students became more skilled at reading graphs and thinking about relative comparisons.

“ I will definitely use the i>clicker again in my course and plan to use it to advance our departmental assessment agenda.

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Conclusion

The i>clicker system advances the departmental assessment agenda. It is easy to add impromptu questions and to move between results and the slides. It is very helpful to have clear instructions on how to register the remotes online available for students in class, in addition to on the Blackboard site. The i>clicker website has some useful FIRST DAY OF CLASS MATERIALS that are particularly beneficial.

Usage Tips:

- Overuse of the clicker in a lecture can create boredom, so it should be used deliberately. Think about what the tool does well and use it for that purpose. Avoid using it as a gimmick — students see through that and tire of it quickly.
- Students may expect to use the i>clicker at each class session and will be disappointed if it is not used, especially if they made a special trip back to the dorm to retrieve it.
- Students are more likely to participate if they can earn points from i>clicker use.
- Remember to save the results each time the i>clicker is used.
- To help bring in the i>clicker equipment, a bag is set aside for the i>clicker, receiver, and drive
- Be creative, flexible, and open to failure. It is important to be confident and try various approaches until you find what works for you.