

2016

# Engaging Today's Students: Current Topics 2.0

Kathi Lovelace

Jane D. Parent

Merrimack College, parentj@merrimack.edu

Follow this and additional works at: [http://scholarworks.merrimack.edu/mgt\\_facpub](http://scholarworks.merrimack.edu/mgt_facpub)



Part of the [Higher Education Commons](#)

---

## Repository Citation

Lovelace, K., & Parent, J. D. (2016). Engaging Today's Students: Current Topics 2.0. *Organization Behavior Teaching Conference*  
Available at: [http://scholarworks.merrimack.edu/mgt\\_facpub/45](http://scholarworks.merrimack.edu/mgt_facpub/45)

This Conference Proceeding is brought to you for free and open access by the Management at Merrimack ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Management Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of Merrimack ScholarWorks.

## Submission Template for the 2016 OBTC Teaching Conference for Management Educators

### 1) Title, Abstract & Keywords

*In your abstract, please include a brief session description (not to exceed 100 words), and three to four keywords. If your proposal is accepted, this description will be printed in the conference program.*

#### **Engaging Today's Students: Current Topics 2.0**

In this session we share a new version of a Current Topics assignment geared toward millennial students' preferences for structure and hands-on learning. Participants will try-out the assignment by reading a short article and answering the three assignment prompts: 1) What are the main points of the article? 2) What points are the most interesting and/or useful to you? 3) What course concepts are illustrated in the article? Connections to student learning outcomes are discussed as well as ways to adapt this assignment. Article citations, grading practices and student feedback are shared.

**Keywords:** Student Participation, Millennials, Current Topics, Concept Application

### 2) Format

- Activity or exercise
- Roundtable discussion (60 minute only)
- General discussion session

#### 2a) For activities and exercises only, is yours best suited for

- A traditional classroom
- An online class
- Either

#### 2b) For activities and exercises only, is yours best suited for

- Undergraduate students
- Graduate students
- Either

### 3) Time Requested:

- 30 Minutes
- 60 Minutes (*Roundtables must select 60 minutes*)
- 90 Minutes

#### 4) Planning Details:

*Each room contains a white board with markers, computer (PC) with DVD capability and computer projector. Does your session require any other equipment?*

No further equipment needed.

#### 5) Teaching Implications:

*What is the contribution of your session to management pedagogy/andragogy? Specifically, please include your learning objectives, and describe what management and/or teaching topics are relevant to your session, and why. Also, include theoretical, disciplinary, or theoretical foundations that will help reviewers understand how your ideas fit within the broader field of management.*

#### **Learning Objectives:**

The learning objectives of this session are to share an easy to use assignment that is geared towards:

- 1) Increasing student engagement and participation in class discussions, and
- 2) Increasing student awareness and understanding of current topics that are relevant to Organizational Behavior (OB).

The assignment also helps students:

- 3) Develop a practice of reading articles relevant to management/OB.
- 4) Develop writing skills and a practice of writing that is useful for future writing assignments, such as business reports, LinkedIn essays, and/or short professional communications.

#### **Teaching Topics:**

The primary teaching topics include:

- 1) Encouraging and evaluating class participation.
- 2) Making assignments meaningful and relevant to course topics (Effective course design – e.g., Whetten, 2007).
- 3) Developing basic reading and writing skills.

#### **Theoretical Foundations:**

Encouraging and evaluating student participation in class discussions are topics that have received much attention in the management education literature (e.g., Dallimore, Hertenstein, & Platt, 2013; Dallimore et al., 2006; Mainkar, 2008; obtsl 2015 [OBTS listserv]). Dallimore and colleagues (2006; 2013) found that cold-calling on students actually resulted in more voluntary

participation over time and that, contrary to instructors' assumptions, students were not uncomfortable with this method for generating discussion. Mainkar (2008) designed a student peer-review system for evaluating class participation to address the limitations of positioning instructors as both supporter and evaluator. Indeed, designing instructional techniques for improving the quality and quantity of class participation and developing evaluation measures for class participation remain topics of interest. For example, recent OBTC sessions validate that we are still interested in the ways in which we can increase engagement through class participation (e.g., Krueger and Redd, 2015; Miller, 2015).

Furthermore, educators are noting the different learning styles of millennial students such that techniques that worked in the past are not as effective in the present (Markulis, Murff, & Strang, 2011; Tyler 2008). Two learning preferences related to the activity shared in this session include the reliance on structure and at the same time hands-on learning. This suggests that student desire clear directions and practice opportunities for success. Therefore, in this session, we share a revised current topics assignment that is targeted for millennial students with the purpose of increasing class participation and students' interest in OB topics. Based on Whetten's (2007) model of instructional design of linking learning activities with learning objectives and learning evaluations, the "Article Assignments" activity addresses the four student learning objectives listed above and is worth 10% of the student's participation grade. Next we present a brief explanation of why we developed the assignment, followed by a description of the assignment. Each of the assignment prompts (the three questions that students must answer) is then listed along with a rationale of what we are hoping to accomplish with each prompt. Appendix A includes quantitative and qualitative student feedback on the assignment. Appendix B includes the citations of the articles used during the Fall 2015 and Spring 2016 semester.

### **Background and Overview of Article Assignments Activity:**

The Article Assignments activity evolved from an older version of a Current Topics assignment (adapted from a 1990s OBTC session), where students bring in a current topics article and discuss this article at the beginning of class. Often the assignment included a short write-up that received a check, check plus or check minus type of grading that was included in the student's participation score. After a few years of using this assignment periodically, the assignment was updated to be termed "Website Discussions," where students would find an

interesting website and write up a one- to two-page paper on why it was relevant to course topics and interesting to them (still using the check system of grading). The primary purpose of these assignments was to generate discussion and to build a common topics class discussion experience that would continue throughout the semester (i.e., we would bring up these common examples later on during the term and see the connections to other topics).

However, a few years ago, the norm became that students would do the assignment, but half-heartedly, and only a few students would talk about their topic in the class discussion. Even after discussing their topics in small groups, the class discussion was sparse. Moreover, topics included whichever website Google produced first and frequently did not have any connection with students' interests or career goals, which was part of the assignment. Also, students would fail to turn in the assignment on time and then want to turn in the assignment late for credit. Needless to say, the days of generating class discussion and building community in the classroom from this assignment were over! Enter the improved assignment: Current Topics 2.0

In the new version of generating class participation through current topics discussions, the specific articles are assigned by the instructor, thus providing greater structure for the students. In addition, a total of 10% of student's class participation and contribution grade is based on this assignment (clearly linking learning activity to learning goals and assessment). Below is the excerpt of the instructions from the course syllabus. Verbal instructions are also provided that illustrate the type of content that could be used in each of the three prompts.

**Article Assignments:** There are six article assignments that are due throughout the semester. Each assignment is worth 2% of your participation grade and only your top five scores will be counted for a total of 10% of your grade. For each assignment you will read the assigned article and write a double-spaced, two-page maximum paper covering the following three prompts: 1) What are the main points of the article? 2) What points are the most interesting and/or useful to you? 3) What course concepts – from the class period that the assignment is due - are illustrated in the article? For prompt 3 look ahead at the lecture slides and textbook reading to apply relevant concepts (e.g., Assn. 1 = 1/19 material). To earn an A (9/10 or 10/10), you *must* contribute to the class discussion about the article *and* be present in class. *No late Article Assignments are accepted.* The purpose of the assignment is to stimulate class discussion and increase your interest in current Organizational Behavior issues. See Course Outline for schedule of Article Assignments.

Instructional goals for each of the three prompts include:

1) What are the main points of the article?

The first prompt is aimed at developing skills in summarizing the reading. Students are encouraged to get the big picture and use the article headings to help provide an overview of the article. In this prompt, the main points are from the author(s) perspective versus the student's opinion of the reading. Developing skills in providing an objective report of the reading are highlighted in this first prompt.

Some students write about the first couple sections of the paper and forget about the rest of the article. Likewise, some students go into too much detail and the use of the 2-page maximum length of the assignment is compromised. This prompt provides the student the opportunity to develop the skill of discerning what is important and/or what are the main points of the reading. It helps students hone their reading skills and requires the student to write a short (paragraph or two) overview of the article.

2) What points are the most interesting and/or useful to you?

Here students are free to focus on what catches their attention. These may be points about a particular illustration in the article, points about how the article made them remember an experience or how a certain point resonated with their career aspirations. As part of the verbal instructions on this prompt, students are encouraged to elaborate on *why* certain points are interesting. In the class discussion, this is usually the prompt that generates the most discussion.

3) What course concepts – from the class period that the assignment is due - are illustrated in the article?

This is the key prompt in terms of grading the assignment. Because students are being asked to apply course concepts from the class period for which the assignment is due, they need to look ahead (prepare) by previewing/reviewing the topics for that given class period. Students can apply concepts from the assigned textbook chapters and/or the pre-posted lecture slides (PowerPoint slides). Early in the semester, the articles have more direct connections with class topics (e.g., topics are explicitly named in the article). However, articles later in the term may require a bit more effort from students to make the topic connections. This has not been a problem in the two semesters that this assignment has been used.

As students gain experience with this prompt, class discussion starts to focus more on the relevant course topics that are being illustrated versus what the student(s) found interesting.

Similarly, while the goal is to apply current class period topics, students start to see the connections to earlier topics and the discussions are enriched.

### **Timing of Article Assignment Activity (in class)**

The Article Assignment discussions typically start the class period. However, for some topics, the discussion happens later in the class period. Starting class with the discussion gets students engaged and active right away and helps connect students with the course material. Students are also interested in turning in their assignment at the beginning of class and it rewards students who are on-time to class and ready to get started. Students first form small groups to discuss the article. This is done by getting together with those who are sitting together versus moving around to form groups. After 5-7 minutes of small group discussion, we come together as a class to discuss the article. Discussion starts include: Tell me a bit about this article? What did you find interesting? And eventually, what course concepts did you see illustrated in the article? As students become more comfortable in the class, they start building on each other's comments.

### **Benefits and Drawbacks of the Assignment:**

By using this assignment, student participation has increased in our classes. Students are reminded that participation in the discussion is related to earning the "9s and 10s" (out of ten) as the goal of the assignment is to stimulate engagement and interest in OB concepts. (A grading rubric is posted for students to see how grades are determined.) Of note is that there is also a silent participation option in the general class participation section of the syllabus where students can email the instructor within 48 hours with a relevant insight or application, although this option is not explicitly connected to this assignment. The benefits are that this discussion requirement increases participation and engagement. The drawback is that there are still students who do not feel comfortable participating in the larger class discussions. For example, one student in particular was the strongest discussant in the small groups but never spoke up during the larger class discussions. Certainly the exception, but eventually I (first author) graded her papers as 9s as she consistently performed in the top 10 percent of the class.

Another benefit of the assignment is that only the top five papers out of six papers are counted in the grading (each Article Assignment paper/discussion is worth 2% - graded on a 0-

10 scale). This helps students to schedule their workload if they want to miss a write up and/or provides a drop on a paper that may have received a lower score. This grading aspect relates to the millennials' preference for "practices," where they can essentially "try-out" the assignment to see if they are on the right tract. Many students still read the article even if they didn't turn in the paper.

Student comments (see Appendix A) were positive in general. One student requested more direction on prompt #3 and another student commented on the poor quality of the article reproduction, but otherwise the assignment is well received in our classes.

## References

- Dallimore, E., Hertenstein, J., & Platt, M. 2013. Impact of Cold-Calling on Student Voluntary Participation. *Journal of Management Education*, 37(3): 305-341.
- Dallimore, E., Hertenstein, J., & Platt, M. 2006. Nonvoluntary Class Participation in Graduate Discussion Courses: Effects of Grading and Cold Calling. *Journal of Management Education* 30(2): 354-377.
- Krueger, D. and Redd, R. 2015. Class Engagement: Reaching your Millennial Students. *Proceedings of the 42nd Annual Organizational Behavior Teaching Conference*, University of LaVerne, LaVerne, CA.
- Mainkar, A. 2008. A Student-Empowered System for Measuring and Weighing Participation in Class Discussion. *Journal of Management Education*, 32(1): 23-37.
- Markulis, P., Murff, E., & Strang, D. 2011. Should college instructors change their teaching styles to meet the millennial student? *Developments in Business Simulation and Experiential Learning*, 38: 189-200.
- Miller, G. 2015. Participation – Let's ALL Participate. *Proceedings of the 42nd Annual Organizational Behavior Teaching Conference*, University of LaVerne, LaVerne, CA.
- OBTS listserv. 2015. *OBTS-Listserv*. Accessed from [obts-l@obts.org](mailto:obts-l@obts.org).
- Tyler, K. 2008. Generation gaps. *HR Magazine*, 53 (1): 69-72.
- Whetten, D.A. 2007. Principles of effective course design: What I wish I had known about learning-centered teaching 30 years ago. *Journal of Management Education*, 31(3): 339-357.

## 6) Session Description and Plan:

*What will you actually do in this session? If appropriate, please include a timeline estimating the activities will you facilitate: how long will they take, and how will participants be involved? Please remember that reviewers will be evaluating how well the time request matches the activities you'd like to do, and the extent you can reasonably accomplish the session's goals. Reviewers will also be looking for how you are engaging the participants in the session.*

The 30 minutes will flow as follows:

### 0-06 minutes: **Introduction and Brief Overview of 30 minute session**

Why the new Current Topic 2.0

Introduce and provide overview of revised Current Topics 2.0

Outline three prompts:

- 1) What are the main points of the article?
- 2) What points are the most interesting and/or useful to you?
- 3) What course concepts – from the class period that the assignment is due - are illustrated in the article?

Ready session participants for activity and by forming teams of 2-4 people.

### 07-18 minutes: **Practice Article Assignment**

Provide participant with one of the short articles and ask them to read/skim and then answer/discuss the three prompts within their teams (focusing on prompts 2 and 3).

### 19-30 minutes: **Discuss Article Assignment** (What student learning objectives are targeted?, How can the assignment be adapted?, Suggestions for improvements)

Participants discuss how their teams approached the assignment. Discuss how participants could use this assignment in their classrooms. Relate to millennial student body but also other student populations.

## 7) Application to Conference theme:

How does your session fit with the overall OBTC theme of *United in Service*?

As educators, we unite in service to our ever changing student needs. Sometimes old teaching methods need updating. This exercise demonstrates an understanding of our students' ever-changing needs – particularly in terms of structure and hands-on interactive practice that is preferred by millennials. Two ideas from the call-for-paper include:

- Creating a climate where students unite and serve each other to fulfill a common goal.

- Appreciating the diversity in our classrooms and our world and leveraging it to create a unified front as we serve our communities.

This exercise bonds students through their perspectives and experiences related to the assigned articles. Students remember their classmates' input and this inclusive class climate leads to respect and collegiality. Because of the choice of articles, the classroom climate promotes open-mindedness and positive outlooks. These attributes stay with students after they leave the classroom and help students to approach community situations with a broader framework for problem solving.

#### 8) Unique Contribution to OBTC:

*Have you presented the work in this proposal before? If so, how will it be different? Is this proposal under current review somewhere else? If so, please explain. How will your proposal be different for the OBTC conference?*

No, this work has not be presented before.

## APPENDIX A: QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE STUDENT FEEDBACK

Below is the quantitative data for student feedback on the Article Assignments. Survey was unanimous and voluntary. The total number of students completing the survey was 40 (from two OB classes with a total of 47 total students) indicating an 85% participation rate.

Scale:

1                      2                      3                      4                      5  
 Very little      Little    A moderate amount    Much    Very much

In general:

1. How useful were the article assignments in helping you prepare for the class on that day?	4.00
2. How helpful were the article assignments in increasing your interest in management/organizational behavior topics?	4.03
3. How relevant were in the article assignments in helping you understand course material?	3.93
4. How much did the article assignment help with your reading and writing communication skills?	3.65

For the six article assignments, rate how interesting and/or relevant each article was to your learning of organizational behavior.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5  
 Very little      Little    A moderate amount    Much    Very much

Assn #1: <i>Come On, Get Happy</i> (Topic: Job Satisfaction)	4.18
Assn #2: <i>Learning from Failure</i> (Topic: Perception and Decision Making)	4.13
Assn #3: <i>A Common Language: Training Across Borders</i> (Topic: Communication and Collaboration)	3.82
Assn #4: <i>Authenticity Paradox</i> (Topic: Leadership)	4.00
Assn #5: <i>Making Pay Public</i> (Topic: Motivation)	4.15
Assn #6: <i>Navigating Change</i> (Topic: Change Management/Power and Influence)	4.23

**Fall 2015: Student Comments (not corrected for grammar):**

Comments: Please add any comments on back of page. (On survey)

- Liked the article assignments
- I really enjoyed the articles and learned a lot. It helped me prep myself with questions and comments for class.
- I liked how they were current and not too long.
- Good, just repetitive
- Some were more interesting and helpful than others. But in general I learned from all of them.
- Articles were interesting and material was used in real life experience, great articles and applying to the course.
- Explain how to do the third point of the article a little better, so that on the first paper people understand what they are suppose to do
- Found reading the articles interesting and beneficial
- I think assigning the article after you've covered the material increases understanding
- I really like the article assignments. It helped me understand the course concepts and there are a lot of great examples in the articles. Makes the course concepts much easier to understand.
- I enjoyed reading the articles and feel they were very helpful. They helped me apply our course concepts to real life situations.
- Super engaging! Got me interested in the class.
- All of the articles really helped me connect the topics we learned in class to the real world. The articles gave real world examples, and when I struggled on learning the topic in class they helped me better understand what we discussed.
- I feel like the article assignments are interesting. I just wish they were better quality (i.e., I couldn't read them well b/c of shadowing, etc...)

- I appreciate the article writing assignments, they help me improve my writing skills and I learn some things. However, I don't feel like they helped towards exams.
- Helps by showing real world examples and implications
- I like that it encouraged me to look at the slides prior to class. Business is now more comfortable with technology. It would be interesting to see an article focused on after technology being considered a norm.
- The discussion was more valuable than writing them.
- The analyzing of human nature in the workplace has given me a great dialogue for my psychological thriller screenplay. Thank you!

## APPENDIX B: CITATIONS FOR ARTICLE ASSIGNMENTS AND COURSE LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Assn#1: *Come On, Get Happy* (Topic: Job Satisfaction)

Woodward, N. (2014). *Come On, Get Happy*. *HR Magazine*, 59(10), 47-52.

Assn #2: *Learning from Failure* (Topic: Perception and Decision Making)

Edmonson, A. (2011). Strategies for Learning from Failure. *Harvard Business Review*, 89(4), 48-55.

Assn #3: *A Common Language: Training across Borders* (Topic: Communication and Collaboration)

Chebium, R. (2015). *A Common Language: Training across Borders*. *HR Magazine*, 60(1), 52-59.

Assn#4 Due: *Authenticity Paradox* (Topic: Leadership)

Ibarra, H. (2014). *Authenticity Paradox*. *Harvard Business Review*, 93(1/2), 53-59.

Assn #5: *Making Pay Public* (Topic: Motivation)

Lytle, T. (2014). *Making Pay Public*. *HR Magazine*, 59(9), 25-30.

Assn #6: *Navigating Change* (Topic: Change Management/Power and Influence)

Bisoux, T. (2015). *Navigating Change*, *BizEd*, 14(1), 20-24.

### Student learning objectives for the OB Course:

Four general learning objectives are to:

1. Understand and apply concepts of organizational behavior;
2. Improve your ability to apply theoretical concepts to practical contexts;
3. Develop skills in critical thinking and decision making reflective of evidence-based management, and
4. Improve your skills in analyzing unstructured problems.

In addition, five specific learning objectives are to:

1. Accurately assess your own values, attitudes, perceptions, learning styles, leadership/team practices and behaviors and understand how these personal attributes affect your success.
2. Develop an awareness of the personal and social impacts of leadership/managerial behavior.
3. Appreciate and understand issues related to a diverse global environment in areas such as communication, conflict management, motivation, and power and influence.
4. Become more skillful in working with people as an ethical leader, colleague, and associate.
5. Develop verbal and written communication skills that promote professionalism within the work environment.