

“If you build it...”: Creating Community in the Online Classroom

For many students, online courses provide the opportunity to watch or listen to a lecture from the comfort of their own couch during a time that fits their schedule. Such classes have had a democratizing effect on education. More and more online students are older individuals, have full-time jobs, handle child or elder care, or have disabilities that prevent them from entering the classroom. They want to receive a university education but have limited time. On the other hand, there are other students who simply want to disengage from the learning environment of a face-to-face classroom and sit passively and away from all human contact. When I set out to design an online section for my department’s Greek Civilization course, I wished to engage both of these groups of students. I wanted students to learn from each other- especially those with non-traditional backgrounds- while also learning from me. I also wanted the classroom to become a community space where students could work together on projects and discuss the material openly. In order to meet these goals, I modified two aspects of my typical Greek Civ course: the lectures and the assessment methods.

In this paper, I will discuss the many technological tools and pedagogical techniques I used to record lectures (including green-screens, interviews, and demonstrations), as well as the team-based activities that were a major part of the course (including group debates and discussions). I offer many tips for building an engaging classroom outside of the classroom that help students become active participants, rather than passive learners. These are sometimes little things like themed PowerPoint presentations or a consistent sign-off phrase. Other times, they require more thought on the part of the instructor and students, such as group debates where each student records a portion of their team’s debate, playing the role of an ancient Greek. Such methods and techniques can be modified and used in face-to-face classes or other courses

focused on ancient cultures and need not be limited to a course on Greek Civilization. As a result of these tools and techniques, I have found my teaching style in traditional classrooms evolve and improve, as well, and have no doubt that others will feel the same.