By Megan Sumeracki Cover image by RDNE Stock project from Pexels In my last blog, I covered a paper I published (1) about questions in class, covert retrieval, and cold calling. The conclusion from this paper, and the blog post covering it, is that inserting questions into a lecture, and encouraging students to covertly retrieve through cold calling, ought to improve learning from a lesson. If time does not permit writing out the answers (one form of overt retrieval), or doing so would disrupt the flow of a discussion, then students should still benefit from bringing the information to mind if they are encouraged to do so fully through cold calling. However, it is often quite difficult to get students to covertly retrieve, and some research shows metacognitive judgments—in this case how well students think they are learning the material—may be artificially inflated during covert retrieval. Overt retrieval probably should be used whenever possible. When I’ve talked to educators about this paper, and cold calling generally, there is concern that cold calling will harm the students or the atmosphere of the class. This is a valid concern, and one that I had when I was conceptualizing this project. Thankfully I found some data addressing the concern! In 2019, Elise Dallimore and colleagues (2) published a paper titled Leveling the Playing Field: How Cold Calling Affects Class Discussion Gender Equity. In their paper, they report an observational study from an undergraduate managerial accounting course. There were 16 sections of the course taught by seven different instructors, but all instructors taught from the same textbook and required curriculum. However, each instructor had their own natural style of teaching, and so there was variation in how often students were cold called across the sections of the course. These differences allowed the researchers to ask whether students’ attitudes toward participation in class discussions and observed levels of participation varied with the differences in cold calling across the sections of the course. They also examined whether the gender identity of the students was related to their attitudes and participation levels associated with cold calling. (Note this research was correlational and not a true experiment. This does mean there are some limitations, especially related to causality! More on this later.) Photo by RDNE Stock project from Pexels Students completed a survey at the beginning and end of the course about attitudes toward class participation, and recorded their gender identity. In addition, a research assistant who was unaware of the nature of the study observed two class sessions in which they recorded how often students volunteered to participate or were cold-called, and what appeared to be the gender identity of the student. (This is absolutely a limitation because we cannot know a person’s gender identity without asking them.) Photo by Katerina Holmes from Pexels