# **Case 3/C Case Study**

Timeline

*Outline* March 1st

*Final First Draft* March 5th

*Due* March 7th

## Potential Problems

* Instructor Assumes that Students will be motivated as she was
* *Assume internal motivation*
* Interaction between motivation and difficulty / preparedness
* Sees the student’s lack of engagement as a character flaw with the student (laziness), inciting a vicious cycle of demotivation
* *Expert Blind Spot/ Knowledge Gap (In motivation of the material/ importance of the material)*
* *Value of the goal*
* Student-Development: Duality stage vs later stages

## Possible Solutions

* Methods to evaluate student motivations and interests
* Consistent Office Hours
* Survey, What they need and what they expect
* Going back to what motivates the teacher initially in the subject (TAs etc.)

**Outline**

Introduction

Problem Statement

Solutions

Conclusion

**Somdut Roy-initial writing (needed to start somewhere, feel free to correct obvious mistakes that stand out, or to add in things- with comments if possible, I have borrowed some points from the discussion as well, so add your thoughts about them and try to keep the flow going, and also improve my flow, if you feel the need :) )**

1. **Introduction: Case C: “ My Students Are Going to Love This — NOT”**

“This past semester, I finally got to teach a course that relates directly to my area of interest. I put in a lot of time and energy this summer preparing materials and was really excited going into the semester. I used a number of seminal readings in Continental Philosophy and assigned a research project based on primary documents from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. I thought that students would be excited by the topic and would appreciate reading some of the classic works. But it did not turn out the way I had hoped, and I was really disappointed by their work. With the exception of the two philosophy majors and the one student who “needed an A to get into graduate school,” they were not at all interested in the readings and hardly participated in the discussions. In addition, they were not particularly inspired or creative in choosing research topics. Overall, they made little progress across the semester. I guess when it comes right down to it, most students do not much care about philosophy. - Professor Margaret Hill ”

In this assignment, we focus on Case Study C, where Professor Hill got to teach a Philosophy course, which fell entirely in her knowledge domain. With that being the case, she was deeply passionate about the course and she devoted time and effort in an attempt to create sufficient, interesting and thought-provoking course material. However, the efforts did not match the desired results as there were only a few students who could meet the teacher’s expectations for class involvement, performance or overall progress. While the immediate response from the teacher’s end was that the students in general have a lack of enthusiasm or passion for the subject in general, we try to study the underlying issues that could have been addressed and then propose possible solutions in relation to those.

1. **Possible Underlying Issues and Proposed Solutions**

The issues that made it hard for Professor Hill to reach her teaching goals could be related to (a) motivation or (b) student development \*cite book\*. In this section, we address issues under each of those in separate subsections.

***2.1. Motivation***

To ensure a motivated classroom environment, one has to ensure the class is made aware of the value and expectancies of the class \*cite book\*. Out of all the students taking the course, only two were Philosophy majors. This would mean the vast majority of the class do not have their academic focus primarily on Philosophy and topics related to it. With this obvious gap in knowledge that stems from that, it becomes harder from the teacher to connect with her students and grow sufficient enthusiasm for the course. We suggest several ways that could have been solved in that scenario.

***2.1.1.*** *Knowledge Gap: Surveys, Consistent Office Hours & Concept Map Assignments*: Having an idea about where the students stand in relation to the course would give a clearer picture to the teacher about the task at hand. She could conduct a classwide survey at the very beginning of the semester to understand the relevant background, experience, and knowledge of the students. Based on that feedback, the teacher could devise the exercises and supplementary study materials at different stages of the course, to ensure the entirety of the class is at a level where they maintain the motivation for the course. The key aspect is to make sure that the material does not vastly overestimate the student’s previous experience.

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To understand the knowledge gap, she could also collaborate with her graduate TAs. She might have an expert blind spot and might not be consciously aware about all of the component skills and knowledge required to execute the complex tasks associated with the course\*. In this setting, graduate TAs can help the students from the perspective of a graduate student. They can decompose the knowledge in the class materials, so that the students can absorb the knowledge and follow the course. This could prevent the students from getting frustrated and motivate them.

\* Ambrose, S.A., et al., *How learning works: Seven research-based principles for smart teaching*. 2010: John Wiley & Sons.

Professor Hill has mentioned how most students did not make enough progress by the end of this course. That could have been addressed if she stressed on establishing a structure for the knowledge network of the course. A teacher, who is an expert in her field, will have a very complex network of knowledge. By that, we mean that being an expert in the field, a teacher is expected to have numerous high level connections between the different concepts in the discipline \*cite book\*. While the teacher would not be expecting the students to have a similar level of connection, the teacher could have a structure of the expected concept-network at the end of the course. Also at different stages of the course, the teacher could have exercises for the students, where she makes them draw concept-maps for the course as they progress and based on that make necessary trouble-shooting to fine-tune their knowledge organization.

***2.1.2.*** *Instill passion for the course by showing passion and enthusiasm*: Based on the provided passage, it is clear that Professor Hill herself is extremely passionate about her course materials. With most of the students having multiple other diverse subjects/courses to focus on beyond this particular course, it would be hard for them to relate to the subject matter in the way that the teacher had. The students would naturally have a practical short-term, “let me pass this” or “let me try to get an A” kind of focus. In order to make the students connect to the subject matter in a similar vein, she would be encouraged to share her stories in relation to the particular topics that boosted her love and enthusiasm for the subject matter in general. This could lead the students to engage more deeply into the course as they discover the value, that was initially overlooked \*cite book\*. In addition, citing case studies, that triggered her passion during her early learning phase, as studying examples would steer the less interested students to have new found vigor for the course materials and Philosophy in general.

***2.2. Student Development***

**Somdut Roy: some strategies I copy-pasted from the student development section of the book, that may be relevant. We could finetune 1-2 of them to fit the scenario here.**

***2.2.1 Incorporate Evidence into Performance and Grading Criteria***

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To encourage the students, who were not in philosophy major, to have a better understanding of the research project, she could provide rubrics to evaluate the project grade. From the rubric, they would prioritize their works and focus on the objective-directed practices, enabling the students to show better quality works in their projects\*. In addition to rubrics, she could create several continuous and frequent assignments that are not for evaluating but for monitoring students' learning. These assignments do not have to be graded. By assessing the assignments, she could just monitor students’ progress and correct their weaknesses immediately. Moreover, she could communicate with the students by providing feedback on the assignments. This continuous communication between the students and the instructor would be able to help the students not to be frustrated but to be more engaged in the class.

\* Wiggins, G. P., Wiggins, G., & McTighe, J. (2005). Understanding by design. Ascd.

**“Incorporate Evidence into Performance and Grading Criteria:**

If you want students to support their opinions with evidence, use rubrics and other tools to scaffold this practice. You can educate students to use the rubric by asking them to read each other’s work and circle the pieces of evidence to highlight them visually. Incorporating evidence in your grading scheme will also reduce “ grade grubbing ” based on the notion that personal opinions are subjective and cannot be graded fairly.

***2.2.2 Examine Your Assumptions About Students***

**Examine Your Assumptions About Students:**Because assumptions influence the way we interact with our students, which in turn impacts their learning, we need to uncover and at times question those assumptions. It is common for instructors to assume that students share our background and frames of reference (for example, historical or literary references). It is equally common to make assumptions about students ’ ability (for example, Asian students will do better in math), identity and viewpoint (for example, students share your sexual orientation or political affiliation), and attributions (for example, tentative language indicates intellectual weakness). These assumptions can result in behaviors that are unintentionally alienating and can affect climate and students ’ developing sense of identity.**”**

1. **Conclusion**

Group Case Study Report

By Somdut Roy, Jong Han Yoon, Chris DuPre

1. **Introduction**

In this case study, Professor Hill is teaching a class which relates directly to her field of study: Continental Philosophy. She is extremely excited for the class, and decides to model the class very similarly to the act of research in her field (namely the use of research projects using primary sources). She is then very disappointed by the lack of engagement and enthusiasm for the course. In the end, she seemingly concludes that most students just “do not care much about philosophy” [Ambrose 66].

One of the mistakes Professor Hill made in this class was seemingly assuming that if she was excited for the class, that her students (unless they simply do not like the subject) would automatically also be excited as well. She seems to be entirely relying on a wellspring of internal motivation from each member of the class, in the same way she would have as a student approaching the material. Any student which does not have such a burst of enthusiasm is seen as apathetic, lazy, or somehow just intrinsically uninterested in philosophy.

1. **Problem Statement**

Unfortunately, this is not how motivation works. While there are many theories on the origins and structures of motivation, we will confine our discussion to two central concepts at the core of a variety of frameworks: value and expectancies [Ambrose 69]. Value is the subjective importance of a goal. A student that does not see value in the subject simply won’t view the course as very valuable and worth effort. Expectancies involve the student’s expectations of success. If the student believes that no matter how hard they try they will still fail the course, then attempting at all will be seen as a waste of time and the student will not try. In order to motivate a student towards success, both of these levers must be used in a supportive classroom environment in order to ensure the students are motivated and active in the material [Ambrose 82]. Hill seems to rely entirely on internal/ intrinsic motivation as it is unclear what she does to even motivate the value of the material before assuming others will find value in it. While intrinsic motivation is a powerful force, it cannot be relied upon exclusively as it depends on several factors outside of the student’s control. Motivations behind the material must be explained and some external sources of motivation such as grades or feedback may be appropriate.

At best, relying solely on internal motivation is neutral and leaves the student’s to find the value in the material for themselves or simply stay demotivated. At worst, it creates a negative expectancy as the student feels the importance/value/intuition for the subject is intrinsic to one’s character and therefore is impossible to address once they realize they do not see it immediately.

In addition, it is unclear from the case study that the professor ever attempted to assess the student’s current level of development. The course seems to have relied on creative thinking as each student was asked to generate creative research reports using primary resources. The student’s may very well have expected that any project which passed the bare minimum requirements of the course would have been acceptable. This may not have come from a sense of apathy or even disinterest, but simply because they did not see the agency and creativity they were given.

Baxter Magolda developed the concept of the journey to self-authorship to understand this exact transition. Each individual must struggle to develop a sense of identity and purpose (both in one’s work and in their personal life). Everyone begins this journey by borrowing identities and frameworks from others. Magolda refers to this initial phase as “following formulas”. In an academic context we may recognize this as a student who does the bare minimum or stays within the confines of the class even when given freedom. Eventually, the individual may transition to “the crossroads” where they recognize the need for their own vision and can begin to take the steps necessary to achieve it. Magolda’s theory then has the individual transition from “the crossroads” to an internal formulation and creativity (“self-authorship”) and the grounding of those beliefs against the need for external validation (“internal foundation”). A student which has not yet reached their “crossroads” in the context of their identity as a student (or even as a student in a given discipline) cannot be expected to simply become creative and confident in their ability to generate novel research ideas [Boehman]. Blaming the students for not doing so without seemingly asking the students why they chose not to is simply unfair.

1. **Solutions**

What could Professor Hill do to encourage her students' work and development if she decided to run this class again? First things first, she must address the problem of motivation. Based on the provided passage, it is clear that Professor Hill herself is extremely passionate about her course materials. With most of the students having multiple other diverse subjects/courses to focus on beyond this particular course, it would be hard for them to relate to the subject matter in the way that the teacher had. The students would naturally have a practical short-term, “let me pass this” or “let me try to get an A” kind of focus. In order to make the students connect to the subject matter in a similar vein, she would be encouraged to share her stories in relation to the particular topics that boosted her love and enthusiasm for the subject matter in general. This could lead the students to engage more deeply into the course as they discover the value that was initially overlooked [Ambrose 85]. In addition, citing case studies, that triggered her passion during her early learning phase, as studying examples would steer the less interested students to have new found vigor for the course materials and Philosophy in general.

In addition, the instructor may consider taking steps to increase the self-efficacy of the students. This may involve determining where the students are currently weak and being open and honest about difficulties the student’s may experience that may not be immediately obvious to the professor via the expert blind spot [Ambrose 112-113]. Doing so will help student’s feel that any lack of preparation for the course is not an insurmountable wall, but simply another hurdle they can work with the professor to overcome. The professor may also consider throwing out outlandish and creative ideas for the students to consider, and actively encourage remixing and revamping these ideas. In this way, the professor would encourage each student to encounter their individual “cross-roads” and hopefully the professor will find that the students are deeply and creatively engaging in the work. Maybe, with enough encouragement and scaffolding, the professor will find many more active students and many less people who “do not much care about Philosophy” [Ambrose 66].

***References***

[1] Ambrose, Susan A. *How Learning Works: Seven Research-Based Principles for Smart Teaching*. Jossey-Bass, 2010.

[2] Boehman, Joe. “Who the Heel Am I? Self-Authorship Explained.” *Tar Heel Diversity*, 26 Sept. 2006, tarheeldiversity.blogspot.com/2006/09/who-heel-am-i-self-authorship.html.