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# A Study on the Use of Incentives as a Means to Increase Class Participation and Learning

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# A Study on the Use of Incentives as a Means to Increase Participation and Learning



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# Law and the Socratic Method



- [insert film clip from “The Paper Chase”]

# What Can Go Wrong in a Law Class?



- Unpreparedness
- Lack of interest in the material
- Unwillingness to get involved
- Having no “talkers” to prime the pump

...All of the above lead to silence

# Participation and the Literature



- Class participation has been studied
  - (Axelson & Flick, 2011, *Change*)
- Attempts to study increased participation have been studied
  - (O'Connor, 2013, *Education*)
  - (Beekes, 2006, *Active Learning in Higher Education*)
- Not much research on the role of incentive in increasing participation, instead of penalizing non-participation
- One professor gave away “meaningless bonus points”
  - (Guinee, 2012, *College Teaching*)

# The Need for Participation Improvement



- A sea of silence in Commercial Law II
- Baseline: 1.5 participations per student in 75-minute session
- Goal: Improve participation 100% over a 7-class time frame

# Restructuring the Pedagogy



- Announce the change & why it will be valuable
- Announce that there will be less rescuing in class
- Split the class into two groups for case law responsibility
- Use more flip-it techniques for pair-share groups
- Use the three-question-open method

# The Incentive for Improve Participation



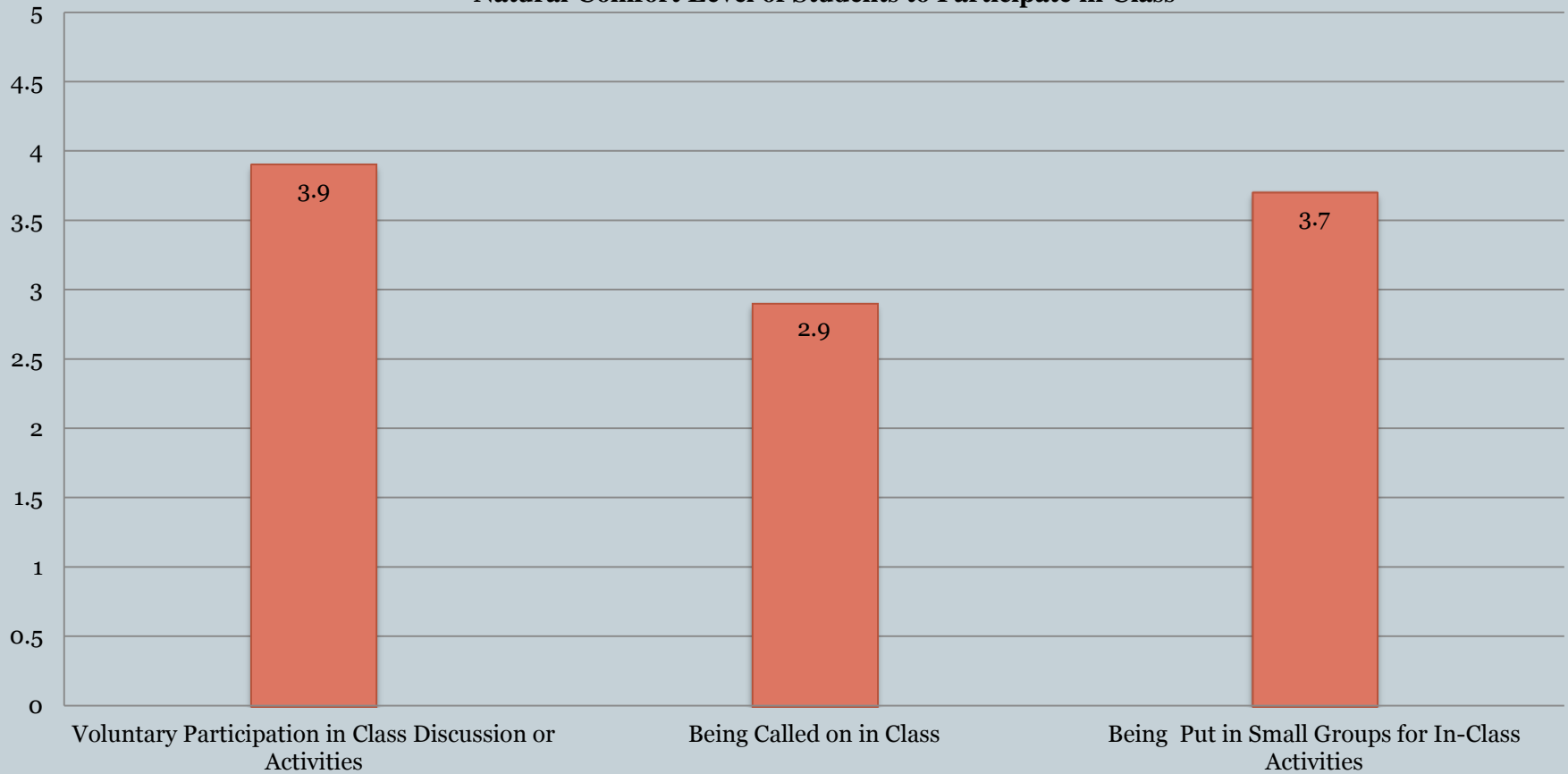
- 5% bonus on the next exam
- A pizza party
- Reminder: double the average participation rate over the next 7 classes



# Initial Survey of Participation Inclination



**Natural Comfort Level of Students to Participate in Class**



# Implementation of Participation Project



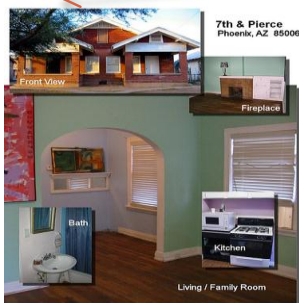
- How to keep track of the participation data?
- How to encourage participation in class?

# Techniques to Increase Engagement



- Flip-It Learning Activities
- Film Clips and Web links embedded on Blackboard.com
- Share-Pair Discussion Groups
- Encouragement Reminders

# From One Red Paperclip to a House



## One Red Paperclip

The paperclip below was owned by Canadian blogger Kyle McDonald, who traded it on Craigsist.org for a pen. After trading for almost a year, Kyle owned a house. After watching the "20/20" segment and looking through his trades below, discuss with your group members which of them would be covered by the UCC and Article 2 on Sales of Goods, and why or why not.



- 1) On July 14, 2005, he went to Vancouver and traded the paperclip for a fish-shaped pen.
- 2) He then traded the pen the same day for a hand-sculpted doorknob from Seattle, Washington, which he nicknamed "Knob-T".
- 3) On July 25, 2005, he traveled to Amherst, Massachusetts, with a friend to trade the Knob-T for a Coleman camp stove (with fuel).
- 4) On September 24, 2005, he went to San Clemente, California, and traded the camp stove for a Honda generator.
- 5) On November 16, 2005, he made a second (and successful) attempt (after having the generator confiscated by the New York City Fire Department) in Maspeth, Queens, to trade the generator for an "instant party": an empty keg, an IOU for filling the keg with the beer of the holder's choice, and a neon Budweiser sign.
- 6) On December 8, 2005, he traded the "instant party" to Quebec comedian and radio personality Michel Barrette for one Ski-doo snowmobile.
- 7) Within a week of that, he traded the snowmobile for a two-person trip to Yahk, British Columbia, in February 2006.
- 8) On or about January 7, 2006, he traded the second spot on the Yahk trip for a cube van.
- 9) On or about February 22, 2006, he traded the cube van for a recording contract with Metalworks in Mississauga, Ontario.
- 10) On or about April 11, 2006, he traded the recording contract to Jody Gnant for a year's rent in Phoenix, Arizona.
- 11) On or about April 26, 2006, he traded the one year's rent in Phoenix, Arizona, for one afternoon with Alice Cooper.
- 12) On or about May 26, 2006, he traded the one afternoon with Alice Cooper for a KISS motorized snow globe.
- 13) On or about June 2, 2006, he traded the KISS motorized snow globe to Corbin Bernsen for a role in the film *Donna on Demand*.
- 14) On or about July 5, 2006, he traded the movie role for a two-story farmhouse in Kipling, Saskatchewan.

# How Did Things Turn Out?



- Average participation rate was 4.3 per student per class
  - The goal was 3 per student per class
- The median participation rate was 4.25
- Lowest individual participation rate was 0.9 per class

# Second Round of Participation Research



- No incentive this time...
- Data collection for another 7 classes
- Also, less encouragement to keep track of participation
- The results: average participation rate of 2.3 per student per class
  - but still higher than the initial baseline
- 10% reduction in test grade from non-incentivized time frame

# How Incentivized Participation Impacted Learning



- When studying participation, the increased participation is the “end,” not the means to the end
  - (Nunn, 1996, *Journal of Higher Education*)
  - (Guinee, 2012, *College Teaching*)
  - (O’Connor, 2013, *Education*)
- Increased participation positively affected the course project
- Second survey: Students thought the incentive project had a positive effect on their learning
- Third survey: Students recommended that the project be used again



# Adjustments Made in Later Semesters



- Different participation goals
- Individuated, rather than collectivized, incentive
- Extended incentivized time frame