



The American Classroom/Culture

Freh Wuhib, PhD

Instructional Design and Access (IDA)

Aug. 2019



OVERVIEW OF THE SESSION

- Different types of classroom formats
- GTA's roles in American classrooms
- The American classroom culture



WHAT IS AN AMERICAN CLASSROOM LIKE?

The Different Formats



- Lectures usually serve diverse student majors.
e.g. Entry level Physics, Math, and English courses

Recitations/Discussions



- A supplement to lectures
- Smaller in size (< 30)
- Safer space to discuss & answer questions about assigned materials
- Prepare for exams/papers
- e.g. Mathematics, the Sciences (Chemistry, Physics, ...), Engineering, Psychology...



- An add-on to lectures
- Hands-on experience
- So-lo experiments
- Biology, Chemistry, Physics, Engineering, social science...
- Smaller group (<30)





- Providing help on a one-on-one basis
- Fine Arts...



Online classes



- **Most course materials are made available online on the learning management system, which is blackboard for WSU.**
- **Students interact with instructor and with each other using the online tools.**
- **In most cases, course assessment is also done online.**

THE INVERSION

- Do worksheets & Activities in class
- Watch / read lectures at home

The Traditional Classroom

Teacher's Role: Sage on the Stage



The Flipped Classroom

Teacher's Role: Guide on the Side



OTA's roles, responsibilities and expectations

What OTAs do

What do I do as a GTA?

- You will lead discussion sections and labs
- Mostly expected to do grading, and **attend lectures** and T
- Prepare for your section creating a **lesson plan**
- Be ready to take questions about all the **materials**
- Set rules and expectations for your classroom creating yo section **syllabus** (ask Prof.)





Best Approaches

- Make yourself available by assigning office Hours.
- Be very approachable.
- Use verbal signals when you speak and speak slowly so that students understand you.
- When you are preparing students for exams, give them study guides.



ASKING QUESTIONS IN THE CLASSROOM

Ask

- To start with a yes/no question
- Follow with questions that are direct, clear, and specific.
- Do not ask more than one question at once

Respond

- Wait for students to think and formulate responses;
- Do not interrupt students' answers;
- Show that you are interested in students' answers, whether right or wrong;
- Develop responses that keep students thinking.



Responding to Students' Questions in Classroom

- **Positive Feedback for a Correct Response, Comment, or Appropriate Question:**

Scenario 1:

- GTA is lecturing on balancing chemical reactions, and a student asks, "Can we change the subscript to get the equation to balance?"
- Although you know that it is a major misconception in balancing, you should address the question carefully.



Scenario 1: Option 1

- “Thanks for bringing that up. The question was, can we change the subscript to get the equation to balance?’ Does anyone think they know the answer?”
 - 'Thanks' validates student participation.
 - Restating the question for the class ensures that everyone can hear what was asked.
 - Passing the question on to the whole class encourages participation.



Scenario 1: Option 2

“Interesting question. The question was ‘can we change the subscript to get the equation to balance?’ In fact, changing the subscript instead of the coefficient changes the molecule as a whole. For example, ...

- Starting with a positive response validates student participation.
- Restates the question for the class so everyone can hear.
- Allows the GTA to move into a lecture-style format and present additional information.



Scenario 1: Option 3

- “Good question. The question was ‘can we change the subscript to get the equation to balance?’ I believe this question requires that all sections we've talked about be considered, but I am not sure. I will look into it and let you know by email. In the meantime, is there anyone else who knows?”
 - Positive response.
 - Restates the question for the class so everyone can hear.
 - Admits the GTA does not know the answer (honest response) and demonstrates accountability.
 - Passes the question on to the class for group participation.



Asking Question to Students in Classroom

Positive Feedback for an Incorrect Response, Comment, or Appropriate Question:

Scenario 2:

- In a Biology class the TA asks: "Who can tell me what distinguishes an animal cell from a plant cell?" A student responds, "Well, I don't think a plant cell has a cell wall" (an incorrect response).



Scenario 2: Option 1

- OK, let's take a step back first. Who remembers the characteristics of a plant cell from last week?"
 - Does not emphasize the student's mistake.
 - Serves as a way to review and consider recent material.



Scenario 2: Option 2

- No, that is not quite right. One of these cells has a wall while the other does not. Can you remember what distinguishes the two?"
 - Encouraging feedback that does not alienate the student.
 - Restates the student's response and clarifies what is incorrect.
 - Uses the incorrect response as a chance to compare two concepts and to review other material.

The American Classroom/culture

How is it different?

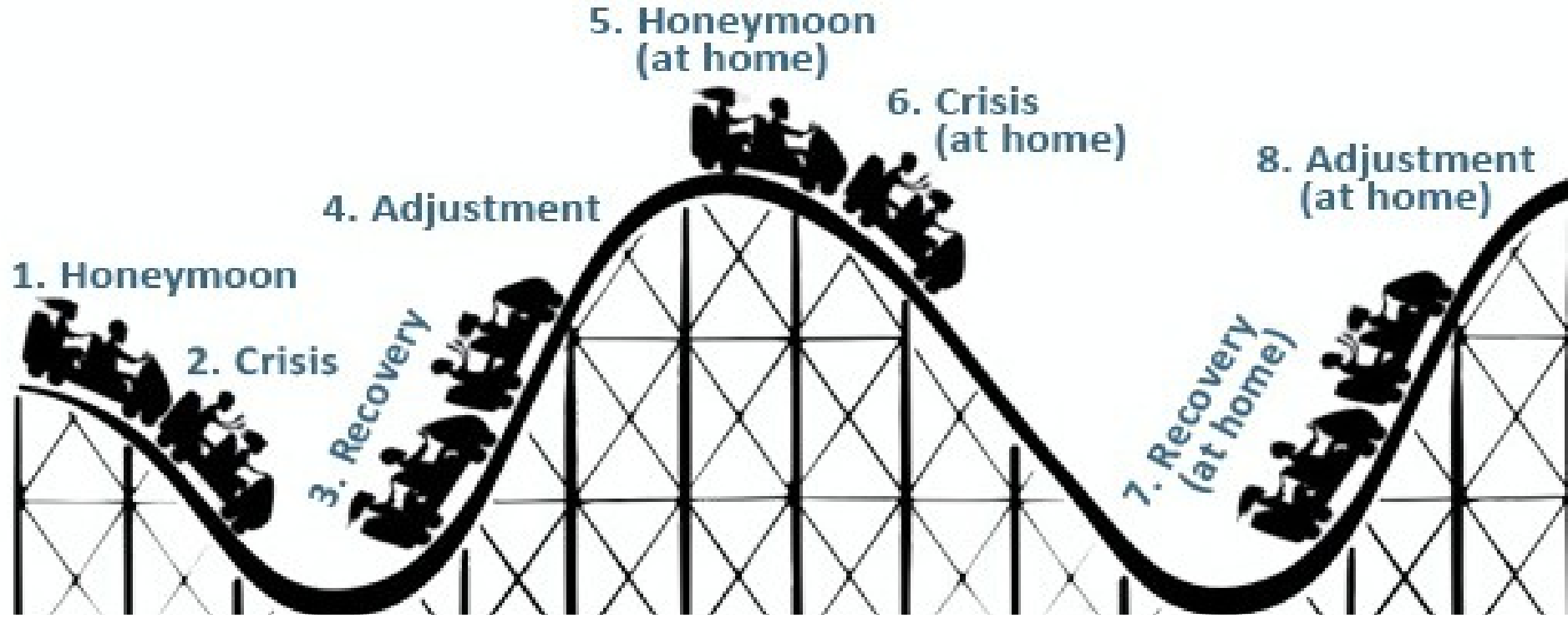
Transition: Understanding The American Classroom Within U.S. Culture



- U.S. education is more like a business serving customers. Students pay a lot of money for tuition, housing, meals, and other fees.
 - Students, as customers paying for a service, will be evaluating the service they are receiving for their money.
 - The American classroom is less formal than many other classroom cultures.
-
- That means: Do evaluations! (≠ “assessments”). Your students’ voice is key.

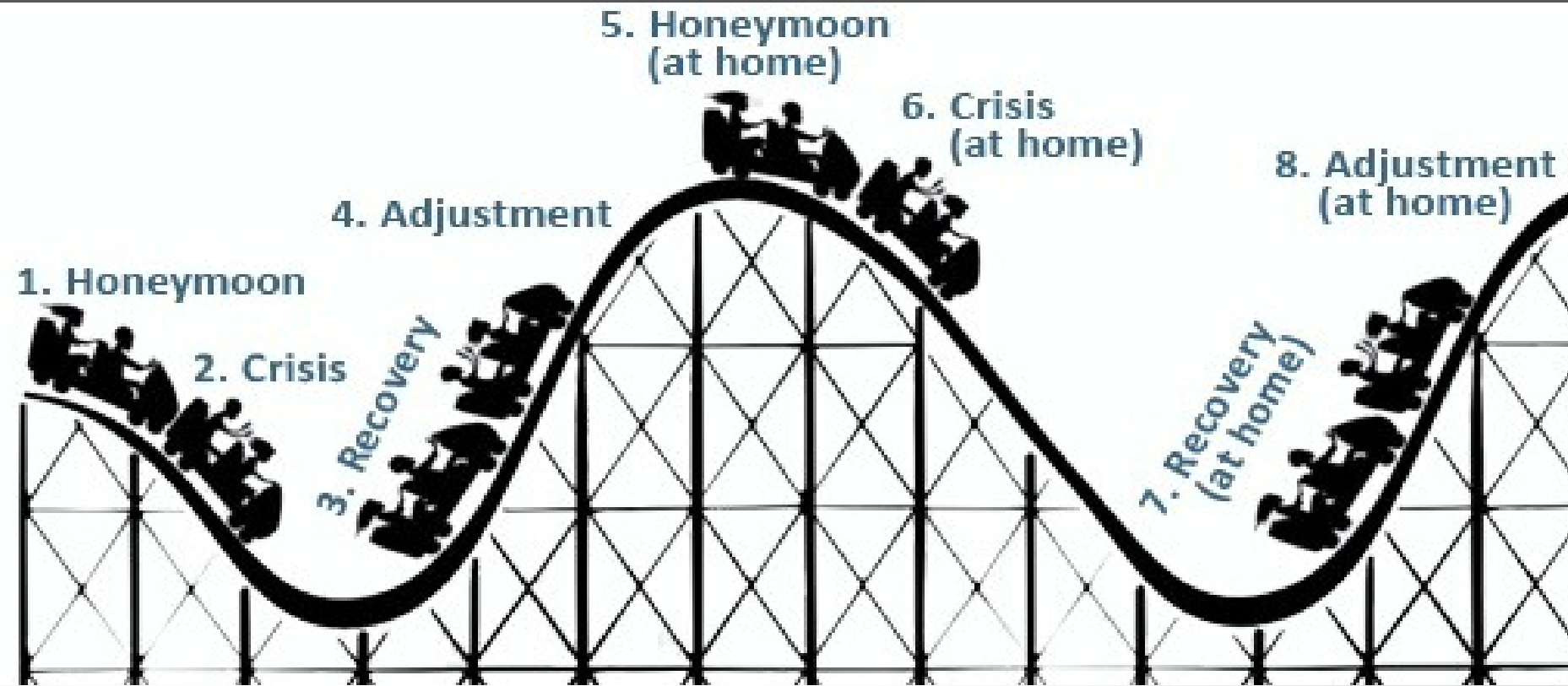


The “W” Curve



- 1. “Tourist phase”. Initial euphoria
 - 2. “Rejection phase”, elements of the new culture begin to intrude into your life. You might experience frustration, anger, or loneliness.
 - 3. “Adaptation phase”, you learn to adapt to and appreciate the local ways.
 - 4. “Local expert phase”, you feel at home and truly enjoy the country and culture.
- Biculturalism.**
- 5. Counter-culture shock when you go home.
 - 6. Re-adjustment.

Keep the Curve Up



To make the roller coaster ride as smooth as possible:

- Be flexible, keep an open-mind.
- Keep a sense of humor, and learn to laugh at yourself.



Relationships 101: Friendship

- American friendship type: “We'll do lunch.” Avoiding awkward situation at any cost.
- Once school starts, people tend to prioritize their work; they'll only have time for a handful of friends.
- Other secondary “friendships” are usually kept in case for networking.
- It would be better for you to meet people outside of your campus bubble!



Relationships 101: Professional Life

- Usually informal with hierarchy, **first-name basis**. You can use this or not in your classroom. Establish early on what you want to go by.
- Key word for student/GTA relationship: **amicable**. Remember you have the power to give grades.
- Avoid conflicts of interests and always stay professional. You represent the department you work for. You represent the school in general.



Relationships 101: Personal Life

- Public displays of affection, and personal space.
- Most American millennials you may encounter tend to see dating as casual and open-ended. Exclusivity is not required nor is it the norm.
- Yes means yes.
- No means no.



Finances 101

- If you plan on staying in the U.S. long-term and eventually buying a car or a house here, you'll need to start building credit.
- The Office for Student Money Management at Wichita State University will assist you with your needs on building good credit.



Be Aware of Cultural Differences

Key concept: ***Safe place*** in the classroom and on campus.

Diversity is about:

- Recognition of identity and of historical traumas
- Representation of self and multitude
- Redistribution of resources and opportunities





Always Remember: They Chose You

- *You* made it here for a reason!
- Although your jobs as GTAs is all about the students, *YOU* are here primarily to get your degree.
- Put your work first, but don't let your students down.
- Make the most of the resources available in campus well as the opportunities coming your way.
- Good luck!



For questions and comments, use the
“Ask the Instructor” forum on blackboard.



We're here for you!

ida@Wichita.edu



Reference Books

- Ross, C. and Dunphy, J. (2007). *Strategies for Teaching Assistant and International Teaching Assistant Development: Beyond Micro Teaching*. Jossey-Bass, San Fransisco.
- Sarkisan, E. (2006). *Teaching American Students: A guide for International Faculty and Teaching Assistants in Colleges and Universities*, 3rd ed. Derk Bob Center for Teaching and Learning, Massachusetts.