

# A Co-Created Class Charter for Sensitive Discussions in a Large Lecture Setting

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# Structure for the talk

1. The background to the module and problem
2. How we implemented the solution
3. Reflections - how it went (based on our experience and student feedback)
4. Discussion/questions

# Background - rationale for new module

- New module: Computer Science, Ethics & Society, introduced in 2021
- Response to increasing number of technology scandals and negative impacts of computing on society
- Wanted it to be foundational - 1st year UG CS module,
- To have the greatest impact on studies and professional life
- We saw this as a public health service intervention: inoculating CS students before they go out into the workforce and have a chance cause harm

# Background - the students

- First co-taught the module in 2021-2022
- ~250 students
- Lectures were online, tutorials were in person
- ~12% of these students were female
- Other first year modules are all technical (e.g. programming, algorithms, and maths).
- Students did not want to be there (mostly)
- *“I would prefer doing something more related to a computer science”*
- *“In my opinion this module is not necessary and should be optional, although some content should be taught and is important these days, but I think it could have been just one lecture about the ethics and that would be enough”*

# Background - the challenge

- We wanted the lectures to be engaging
- We introduced polls and interactivity in the chat
- The chat was very lively, sometimes too much
- I struggled to monitor the chat and teach at the same time,
- Struggled to ensure that the conversation remained respect and inclusive
- It verged on inflammatory and inappropriate
- Lecture content touched very close to the bone for some students, dealing with issues around discrimination (e.g. racism, sexism, ableism), bias in algorithms, internet trolling, privacy, free speech, and censorship

# Background - moving to in-person lectures

- In 2022-3 lectures were in-person
- ~265 students
- Added challenge: to encourage interactive engagement and respectful discussion around difficult and contentious issues - in a large in-person setting
- We did not know how to do this
- Myself and Belen, who was co-teaching with me this year, approached LEaD and Miranda to discuss ways to do this.

# How did we come up with the solution?

1. Goal: Proactive boundary setting via class charters/codes of conduct
2. Goal: Disrupting spirals via designated students and moderation words
3. Goal: Student engagement by empowerment via student participation in boundary construction

# How we implemented it

- We introduced the charter in the first lecture, after the admin/housekeeping section
- Myself and Belen presented together and worked together in the first session to support this introduction



# Class charter - intro slide to students

In this module you may be asked to share your views and values, sometimes on sensitive and contentious issues. Conversations can get heated.

We recognise that we are a diverse group of people from different backgrounds, cultures, experiences and we may not share the same points of view or values.

We want to agree on a **charter** to ensure that the class discussion is civil and respectful and we can all learn together (like [City's Student charter](#), but for the class)

This is to set expectations and ground rules for how we talk and behave in class.

It is related, but different, to professional codes of conduct which we will discuss in the lecture on Ethics in Professional Practice (week 3 - TBC).

# Class charter - suggestions

1. Listen respectfully, without interrupting.
2. Allow everyone the chance to speak and be mindful of whose voices are being heard, and whose are not
3. Avoid assumptions about any member of the class or generalisations about social groups.
4. Engage in respectful discussion with others, even when we disagree
5. Maintain a professional attitude to attendance and engagement with the module

# **Class charter - Think-pair-share activity**

1. Spend 1 min thinking about what you would like to be in a class charter so that you can get the most out of this class. Do we need to change, delete or add anything from the suggestions?
2. Talk to the person sat next to you - 2 min
3. Decide together on one idea that one of you will share it in the Teams chat

# Students added their own suggestions

- “Don't make someone talk about an issue they'd rather not discuss, even if an argument is unresolved”
- “Don't be sexist or make sexist jokes.”

# Vote

- We took a vote on each statement in Polleverywhere



How are you feel about statement 1: Listen respectfully, without interrupting.



How are you feel about statement 2: Allow everyone the chance to speak and be mindful of whose voices are being heard, and whose are not



## At this point we had trouble

Someone wrote in the chat “Free Andrew Tate”, with 12 positive emojis (and 4 negative emojis).

- I will show the video of how we dealt with this at the end of the talk



# How we introduced the moderation word

We will now come up with a word that can be used if the discussion is at risk of compromising the charter

We will choose a strange, unrelated word (e.g. trampoline, tangerine, octopus)

Write suggestions in the chat (30 seconds) (be respectful etc)

Spend 30 seconds and give a thumbs up emoji on your favourite ones. The one with the most emojis will be chosen (subject to approval!)

← Reply

YU

U [redacted] 02/02 13:41  
my moderation word is tate

 9  1

← Reply

JU

[redacted] 02/02 13:42  
sugma

 2  2

← Reply

WU

[redacted] 02/02 13:42  
siuuu

 18

← Reply

     

SU

U [redacted] 02/02 13:42  
LegoBatman

 15

← Reply

RU

UG-N [redacted] 02/02 13:42  
Momo

# How we will use the moderation word

We will choose 4 designated students each class to flag with the moderation word if things get out of hand.

If the word gets used, we will pause the discussion and review (either in class, or later).

This is an experiment!! We are going to work together to figure these things out!

## After the first class

- We put the charter on Teams
- At the start of each lecture we reminded students of the class charter
- We also reminded them that the chat and lecture was being recorded.



## Class charter.pdf



### Class charter

1. Listen respectfully, without interrupting.
2. Allow everyone the chance to speak and be mindful of whose voices are being heard, and whose are not
3. Avoid assumptions about any member of the class or generalisations about social groups.
4. Engage in respectful discussion with others, even when we disagree
5. Maintain a professional attitude to attendance and engagement with the module
6. Don't make someone talk about an issue they'd rather not discuss, even if an argument is unresolved
7. Don't be sexist or make sexist jokes

**Moderation word = LegoBatman**

# How it went

- After the initial Andrew Tate comments, some students raised this in a meeting for women in CS at City
- Belen and I met with the Programme Director, and the Head of Academic Services in the School of SST
- There was a discussion about whether to bring those students in for disciplining
- We decided not to, wanting to let the charter do the work to keep these comments in check.
- It seemed to work, as we did not have further incidents

# Student feedback - from 9 students

- Feedback from survey at the end of the module
- It's not very big sample, therefore we don't know how representative it is!

Do you think it's important to have a class charter in a class on ethics and society?

Yes - 5 (“It is necessary for civil conversation”)

No - 2 (freedom of speech)

Maybe - 2 (“a good reminder”)



# Do you think the class charter was helpful

No - 2

Yes - 4

Maybe - 3

- Students felt it may have prevented problematic behaviours
- *“Made more people think about what they would say and how it would affect others before saying it”*
- *“I do not remember there being any violations of the class charter, and I believe that it may have discouraged such violations.”*
- *“it was definitely a reminder to stay respectful in general”*

# Was it helpful to have a moderation word?

Maybe - 4

Yes - 3

No - 1

- They liked that it was an unusual word, and the reassurance it gave
- *“Lets people stop a discussion if they feel like it's hurtful or not productive, it's also a funny word so it eases some tension when it's used”*
- *“I think it may have helped students communicate violations in a clear way, because the moderation word is unlikely to be used in any other context in an ethics class.”*

Video - Andrew Tate incidence

Q&A