

# Active Learning in Lecture-Based Classes: "Discipleship Survivor" as a Case Study

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**Overview of Project:** The project included researching the pedagogy behind Prof. Ascough's "Discipleship Survivor" activity in RELS 214 (New Testament), and its effects on student learning. Each week, students were asked to nominate and vote disciples of Jesus to be removed from a toy boat. Being in both Religious Studies and Education, I was interested in knowing why this activity generated so much interest and enthusiasm, and how the activity fits in to active learning pedagogies. Four sources were used to gather data: recordings of in-class discussion, USATs, one-on-one interviews, and analysis of a Facebook messenger group that had taken place between 20 students (friends who took the class together). The outcome of the project was a co-written paper, which is currently under peer-review to be published.

## PAPER ABSTRACT

Despite educators acknowledging the pedagogical benefits of active learning principles and activities, large enrolment classes most often take place in fixed-seating lecture halls. This proves challenging to designing creative activities for student engagement; thus the problem is: **how can professors engage students in large lecture classes, particularly in those with fixed seating?** In this article, the authors describe one such activity used in an introductory course on the New Testament. "Discipleship Survivor," an exercise in which each week students voted on which of Jesus' twelve disciples would be cast out of a boat, proved to be particularly engaging and effective. From their follow-up study with students, the authors highlight principles that will allow other instructors to adopt and adapt their own material to make lecture-based courses more interactive and engaging.

**Why was Discipleship Survivor such a successful activity?  
How can professors engage students in large lecture classes?**



## DISCIPLESHIP SURVIVOR OVERVIEW

In Matt. 16:13-19, Jesus tells Peter that he will give Peter the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Does Peter really deserve the keys? Or should the other disciples get a chance?

Students must independently research the disciples and then nominate and "kick off" one disciple each week. At the end of the semester, one disciple stands!

## FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO THE EFFECTIVENESS

- Constructivist learning design - Instructor confidence - Instructor transparency - Student preparation - Student collaboration - Institutional and disciplinary context

## ASSESSING DISCIPLESHIP SURVIVOR

### Information from USATs and interviews:

On their USATs, 30 students made comments about DS, with 22 of them using the words "liked," "enjoyed," "loved," or "entertaining," and 87% of students who were interviewed used these words. On their USATs, many students responded "Discipleship Survivor!" or "The boat!" when asked what they liked about the course. When talking about DS, 6 of them directly used the words "interactive," "interesting," or "engaging." When interviewed, 73% of students used these words.

### Sample of Quotes from Interviews

"I loved how we were able to critically engage with the material in a way that was so interactive and fun"

"I wasn't originally in the class, but my friend was. After the first class, she told me about DS, so then I decided to take the class, and I'm glad that I did!"

"It was almost as if we were being rewarded for doing our own research...the class was controlling a part of what we learned rather than exclusively what the professor decides to deliver, which allowed us to pursue our interests"

"To be honest, doing research on DS was one of the only times that I have been thoroughly engaged in readings..."

JESUS' TWELVE DISCIPLES / APOSTLES

	Matthew 10:1-4	Mark 3:13-19a	Luke 6:12-16	John 1:35-51	Acts 1:13b, 26
1	Simon (Peter)	Simon (Peter)	Simon (Peter)	Simon (son of John; renamed Cephas, which means Peter)	Peter
2	James (son of Zebedee)	James (son of Zebedee)	James	James (son of Alphaeus)	James
3	John (brother of James)	John Boanerges (brother of James; "son of thunder)	John	"sons of Zebedee" (21:2)	John
4	Andrew (brother of Peter)	Andrew	Andrew (brother of Peter)	Andrew (brother of Peter)	Andrew
5	Philip	Philip	Philip	Philip	Philip
6	Bartholomew	Bartholomew	Bartholomew	Bartholomew	Bartholomew
7	Matthew (tax collector) (9:9)	Matthew	Matthew	Matthew	Matthew
8	Thomas	Levi (tax collector; 2:13)	Levi (tax collector; 5:27)	Thomas (the twin; 11:16; 21:2)	Thomas
9	James (son of Alphaeus)	James (son of Alphaeus)	James (son of Alphaeus)	James (son of Alphaeus)	James (son of Alphaeus)
10	James (son of Alphaeus)	James (son of Alphaeus)	James (son of Alphaeus)	James (son of Alphaeus)	James (son of Alphaeus)
11	Thaddeus	Thaddeus	Thaddeus	Thaddeus	Thaddeus
12	Simon (the Cananaean)	Simon (the Cananaean)	Simon (the zebedee)	Simon (the zebedee)	Simon (the zebedee)
13	John Iscariot	John Iscariot	John Iscariot	John Iscariot (6:70-71)	John Iscariot
14	Judas (son of James)	Judas (son of James)	Judas (son of James)	Judas (son of James)	Judas (son of James)
15				Nathanael (= Bartholomew?)	Nathanael (= Bartholomew?)
16				"beloved disciple"	"beloved disciple"
				Matthias (to replace Judas)	Matthias (to replace Judas)

**PAUL:** Cephas (Gal 1:18; 2:9); James the Lord's brother (Gal 1:19; 2:9); John (Gal 2:9); Peter (Gal 2:7)