Class participation is a fairly large component of your grade (10 percent: one letter grade) in ECO 230. The reason for this is that we will be using a modified “Socratic” learning method. Socrates was one of the ancient Greek philosopher-scholars (469-399 BC), who taught by asking questions. Socrates knew best “that he did not know”, and was fond of asking questions to understand the world around him. He engaged his students in dialogue, helping them to understand that they knew more than they thought they did -- they simply had to explore questions more deeply. Plato was his most famous student.

A good portion of your learning in this class will be accomplished through our use of the Socratic method. I will ask questions and you will provide answers. I will give you immediate feedback, typically rating your response on a zero-one-two scale. If your response is less than satisfactory, you may be given a chance to answer a later question. If you do not answer a later question, or if your response remains unsatisfactory, or if you are absent on a given day, you will receive zero credit for that response. If you are absent with “good cause”, you may fill out an Excused Absence Form (see my homepage) and turn it in to me the next class period so your absence will not count against you. If you are present and do not get asked a question on a given day, you will receive full participation credit for that day. Most of the answers naturally lead to further questions. That is how we will advance through the material.

I will ask questions of you in a modified random fashion, using the index cards you filled out on day one. I will shuffle the cards at the beginning of each class. If we go completely through the deck, I will re-shuffle the cards and begin again. Occasionally I will re-insert cards into the deck so that your name may surface sooner than you anticipate. It will be a modified Socratic method, in that I will supplement the question-and-answer learning method with some lecture material in a more traditional format.

To do well in this class, you will have to spend a certain amount of time outside of class reviewing old material and reading ahead for new material. On a typical day we will first go over any homework that I assigned the previous day. I will not collect or grade the homework -- your answers to my questions will constitute your homework grade. We will then review old material as necessary before proceeding on to new material. Mondays are typically more exhaustive review days. Much of the learning of new material will also proceed using the Socratic method.

I am confident you will enjoy the course more using this method of teaching and learning, and that you will learn the material much better than if we had engaged in the more traditional lecture mode of teaching. If you would like to read a fascinating article about an instructor using the Socratic method to teach third grade students the binary numeric system, go to the following Internet website:  

Let’s enjoy this together!