

Individual “Meet the Teacher” Sessions in Large Sections

Joshua Colwell, March 2018

Overview

Students in large lecture sections frequently feel anonymous and invisible to the instructor. They may feel disconnected from the class and from the instructor due to the number of students sharing the class and the physical size of the classroom. With a large number of students in the class, students frequently feel that they cannot approach the instructor for help because the instructor must surely be overwhelmed by the number of students in the class.

This “Meet the Teacher” exercise is designed to accomplish the following goals:

- Force students to know where the instructor’s office is located.
- Emphasize to students that the instructor’s office hours are open for students to come by for help in the subject matter.
- Emphasize to students that the instructor has a personal interest in the success of the students.
- Identify and make a record of any unusual circumstances for the student.
- Give students an opportunity to raise issues requiring individual attention from the instructor near the start of the term.
- Instill in students a sense of belonging in the class.

During these meetings students frequently express their appreciation for the opportunity to meet with me. The instructor meets individually with every student in the class during the first 3 weeks of the term. The duration of the meetings must be brief with large-enrollment courses, but even a few minutes can make a significant impression on students. I have done this with up to 300 students using the parameters described below. This is about the maximum for me. To meet more students I would need to combine students into groups rather than meet them individually. I think there is significant added value in individual meetings, but that may not always be practical.

Technique

1. **Make “Meet the Teacher” a graded assignment.** Place this in a graded category such as homework, quiz, or clicker questions that is worth 5-15% of the total course grade. As one of many assignments in that category the “Meet the Teacher” assignment itself will not be worth much, but it is an easy boost to the grade that students will appreciate, and this motivates them to actually do it. Give 100% credit for completing it, 0% for not completing it.
2. **Identify and set aside time slots for your “Meet the Teacher” appointments.** My recommendation is 4 students per 15-minute block of time, or 16 students per hour. With 300 students and 4 meetings per 15 minutes, that is a total of about 19 hours of meetings. I distribute these over the first 3 weeks of the term on different days and times to allow students to find a time that works with their schedules. You can adjust

the number of students and length of meeting window from the 4-students-per-15-minute rate described here. I have tried 5 students in 15 minutes, and that did not work. There was too much overhead associated with simply getting students into and out of the office and taking down a minimum of information for that schedule to be maintained. The number of hours can be reduced by meeting with students in small groups for a slightly longer period of time. I generally replace most of my regular office hours with “Meet the Teacher” appointment slots during the first two weeks of the term. One hour of “Meet the Teacher” is manageable, but more than 75 minutes without a break can be quite taxing.

3. **Set up a scheduling system.** Setmore.com is one example of a free appointment scheduling system. I use this system to schedule “Meet Josh” appointments in a class of 300 students. Create an account on setmore.com. The site is geared towards business appointments but has an option for classes. Figure 1 shows the “Settings” page for an individual setmore.com account page which is accessed, after creating an account, by going to my.setmore.com.

The screenshot displays the 'Settings' page for a staff member named Joshua Colwell. The page is divided into several sections:

- Header:** A teal bar at the top contains the 'Settings' title and a phone number: +1-877-989-7413.
- Left Sidebar:** A dark vertical bar with icons for Home, Calendar, Staff, Services, Payments, Classes, and Notifications.
- Main Content Area:**
 - ACCOUNT:** A section with a gear icon and the text 'ACCOUNT'.
 - Staff (1):** A section with a plus icon and a profile card for Joshua Colwell.
 - DETAILS:** A section with tabs for 'DETAILS', 'SERVICES', 'WORKING HOURS', and 'BR'.
 - Profile Card:** A circular profile picture, the name 'Joshua Colwell', and the text 'Staff Description'.
 - Contact Information:** A table with fields for Mobile, Email, and CC Emails To.
 - Staff Booking Page:** A link to the staff booking page: <https://meetjosh.setmore.com/resourcebook5cd9de774d729128>
 - Staff Login:** A toggle switch labeled 'OFF' and the text 'Requires email.'

Figure 1: Screenshot of the “Settings” page of my.setmore.com, the site for your personal setmore.com account page.

- a. The Settings page is reached by clicking on the gear icon in the far left toolbar. To the right of the main toolbar is a series of links that appear to be ghosted but which are, in fact, active.
- b. Click “Classes” to go to a page to manage classes. The first time you do this, this page will be blank.
- c. Click the button that says “+ Create New Class”. Enter the name of the class on the new page that opens. Enter a brief description along the lines of: “Meet your teacher, let him know of your concerns, and get first-hand advice on learning physics and succeeding in Physics 1.” For the duration and number of seats, enter 15 minutes and 4 seats. With these settings up to 4 students will be able to book an appointment in a given 15 minute appointment window. You will meet with each student individually during this time on a first-come first-served basis. This corresponds to about 4 minutes per student. Click “Save”.
- d. Click on “Settings” in the far left panel, and then “Staff” in the adjacent panel (Figure 1). Then click on “Working Hours” at the top.
- e. On the “Working Hours” page, turn on all the days of the week that you previously set aside (Step 2, above) for appointments. Make sure the time settings for these days also encompass the times for your appointments.
- f. Return to the “Classes” page by clicking on the “Classes” link on the near-left panel. Click the name of your class that you created in step c above. Then click the “+” next to “Sessions” on the class page. You will do this repeatedly to set up the individual blocks of time within which students can book appointments. This will open a window like that shown in Figure 2. Select the date and time for the appointment block and click “Save Changes”. Repeat this step to create all the appointment blocks. If, for example, you set aside 1:00 – 2:00 p.m. on particular date, you would create 4 15-minute blocks on that date, starting at 1:00, 1:15, 1:30, and 1:45 p.m.

PHY 2053

Create a new Session

Provider: Joshua Colwell

Date/Time: Thu, Mar 15 2018 | No Slot

Duration: 15 Mins

Repeat: PREMIUM

Slots: 4 Slots Available

Cost \$: 0 (optional)

Save Changes cancel

Figure 2: Pop-up window at my.setmore.com that allows you to set the day and time for each block of appointments with students.

- g. **This step is very important!** Now go back to the “Staff” page (link on the near-left toolbar) and click “Working Hours” at the top and turn **off** availability for all days. This step is necessary to prevent students from booking an appointment outside the times you have set aside for “Meet the Teacher”.
4. **Send detailed instructions to your students on how to book an appointment.** I post instructions on webcourses (see addendum below) and notify students through myUCF via e-mail about the assignment **before** the start of the term.
5. **What happens next?** Students will use the online booking system to set their appointments. Setmore will send you an automated e-mail with the e-mail address and day and time of each appointment. I create a separate mailbox in my mail client to store all these e-mails. Some students will inevitably forget their appointments. I do not penalize this and allow them to book another appointment. Some students will come on the wrong day. It is important to have the record from setmore of the actual scheduled appointment time to deal with these inevitable situations. Some students will ask to reschedule before the appointment time has arrived. They do not have the ability to cancel the appointment on setmore. You can do that to open up the appointment slot for another student.
6. **To cancel an appointment:** go to the list of Sessions you created in step 3f. Click on the session with the appointment to be canceled. You will see the names of the students scheduled for that session. Click on the name of the student whose appointment is being canceled and delete them from the session.

7. **Meeting students.** Students will show up outside your office. It is helpful to have a designated waiting area outside the office if possible. Invite students in one-by-one for individual meetings. Have a brief list of questions for students. Make a record of each meeting to note in the gradebook later and to make a note of any important information. I ask students the following questions and note the answers on a sheet of paper next to their names after a personal introduction. Other questions may be better-suited for your particular course or student population.
 - a. What is your major?
 - b. When do you expect to graduate?
 - c. What are your plans after UCF? For this question I am primarily looking for whether the student has plans for post-graduate studies.
 - d. Have you had physics before, and if so where (including high school)? If yes, how was that experience?
 - e. What is the highest level of math you have had?
 - f. Do you have any particular concerns or anxieties about math? A non-negligible fraction of students taking my class have severe difficulties with math, so I try to identify ways to assist those students with remedial work in math.
 - g. I then prompt the student to raise any questions or concerns she or he might have about the course. I make sure they are aware of the resources available, including my office hours, SARC (if offered for the class), SI (if offered for the class), and other departmental tutoring resources. I encourage them to post questions to webcourses and advise them on best practices for studying the material. If students have longer questions I inform them we'll have to schedule another time since there are only a few minutes per student during "Meet the Teacher".
8. **Dealing with make-ups.** Some students will not be able to make it to the regularly-scheduled "Meet the Teacher" appointments. I advise these students to drop in during regular office hours at some point, or even have a brief chat after class. The number of students in this category is usually small enough for this to be manageable.
9. **Record meetings in the gradebook.** Simply enter a 1 or 0 for completion of the assignment in the appropriate category in your gradebook. I also make in the gradebook if the student is graduating soon so that I can get in touch with students whose difficulties with the course might jeopardize graduation plans.

Summary and General Observations

Many students express their appreciation for having the opportunity to "Meet the Teacher". In my class of about 300 students I have seen a small increase in attendance in office hours, but still much less than I would have anticipated and less than I hoped for when I started "Meet Josh" appointments. A major impetus for me was that office hours were poorly attended, and some students expressed surprise that they were allowed to come see me for help. I have not experimented with meeting two or more students at once. This would enable meetings with more students in less total time. The drawbacks are a potential loss of perceived personal attention on the part of the student and students feeling inhibited about sharing concerns about the course in a group setting.

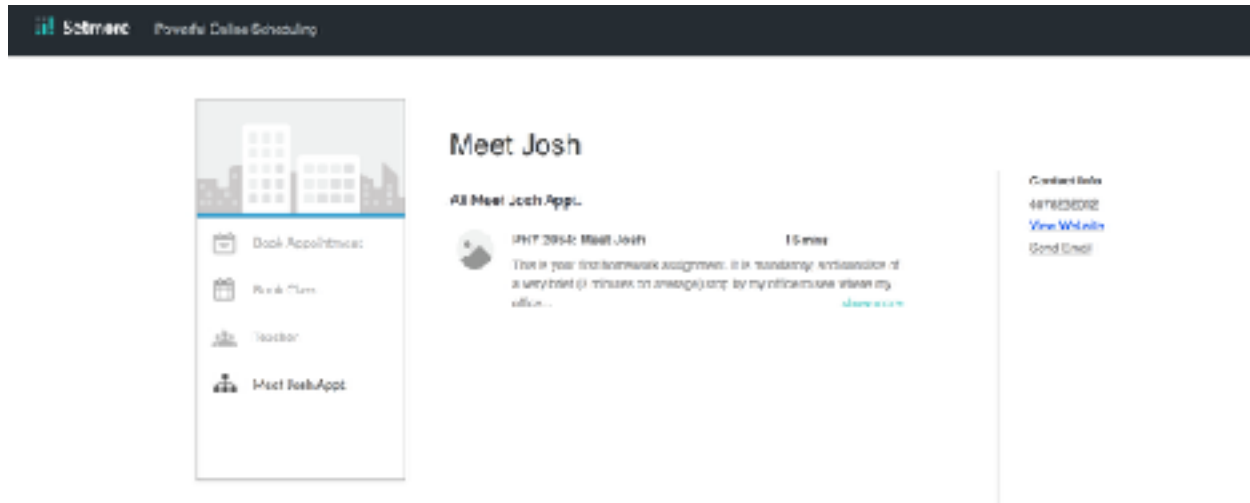
Sample instructions to send to students.

To book your “Meet Josh” appointment, follow these steps:

Go to:

<http://meetjosh.setmore.com/class>

That should take you to a page that looks like this:

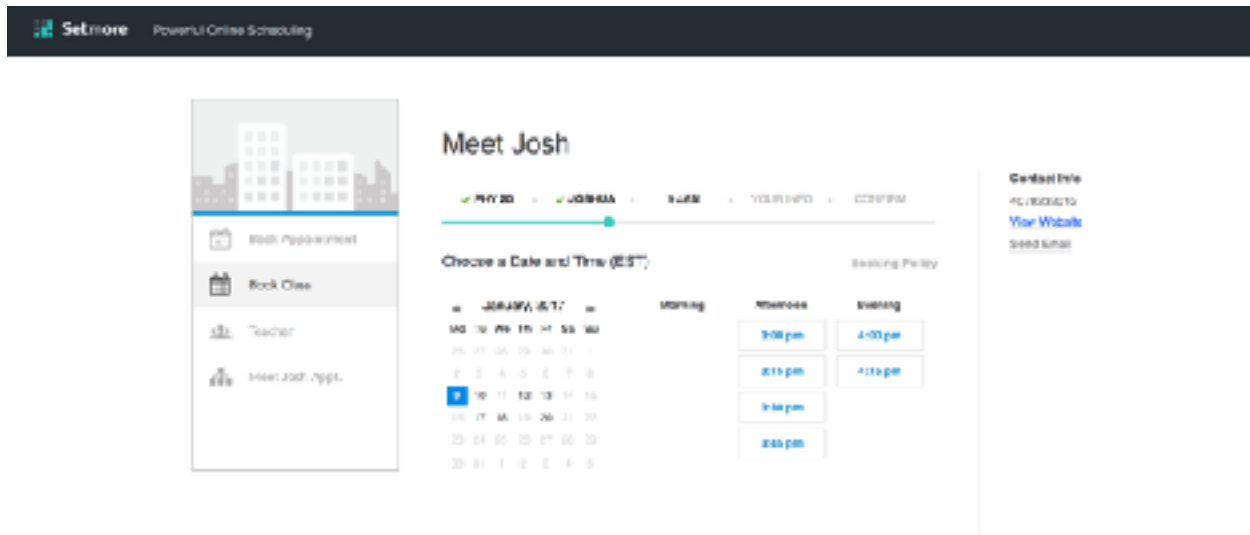


Click on “PHY 2053 Meet Josh”.

This will then list instructors. There is only one: me.

Click on “Joshua Colwell”

That will take you to a calendar page that looks like this:



Select the a time from the boldfaced dates. Enter your name and e-mail address and click “Continue”. If there are no dates that you can attend, please send me an e-mail. I will add more appointment times as needed.