A New Type of Scavenger Hunt as an Ice-Breaker

Recently, I started using a new type of ice-breaker at the beginning of my first class. It is best for small classes such as my introductory science course which has about 20 students, but it can be modified for large classes.

This ice-breaker is essentially a different type of scavenger hunt. Prior to the first class, I look at my roster to see the major for each student. I then make up a 3-column table. The left-hand column is headed "Major" and lists all the students' majors; each major is listed as many times as there are students with this major. The middle column is headed "Classmate's Name." The right-hand column is headed "Classmate's Favorite Hobby/Activity." The cells in the middle and right-hand columns are empty.

I ask the students to get up and fill in the empty cells by talking with their classmates for about 15-20 minutes. The room soon is buzzing with conversation. The students like this activity because it gives them an opportunity to meet their classmates and learn something about them – sometimes with surprising results. For example, two students discovered that they both were ice figure skaters, and two African students discovered that they were from the same tribe in Nigeria.

The purpose of this ice-breaker is to let the students meet each other, because they will be placed in groups during the semester for lab work and other projects. The groups will change periodically, but the students have at least met each other during the initial ice-breaker.

For large classes, the table and process could be modified as follows. There still would be three columns, each with 20 rows of empty cells. The left had column would be titled "Name," the middle column "Major," and the right hand column "Classmate's Favorite Hobby/Activity." The students would get up, start talking with nearby classmates, and fill in as many rows as possible within the 15-20 minutes allowed.

Submitted by:
Ernest C. Linsay
Director, Faculty Development & Support
Wilmington University
http://www.wilmu.edu/