Pro-Con-Caveat Guide

Students receive via email, the course management system, or a webpage a blank electronic version of a pro-con-caveat grid. Their instructions are to list the arguments in favor of a certain decision and against the decision with caveats placed in a third column. Economics teachers, for instance, could (1) ask students to explore the pros, cons, and caveats of building a hospital in a certain neighborhood in their city or (2) after reading a case study of a two-career couple, have students list the pros (benefits) of their filing a joint income tax return and the cons (costs), plus any caveats they should take into consideration. Such assignments are often motivating for most students because they involve a real-life problem relevant to themselves.

In the example given below, students, as homework, complete their grids, listing the arguments, pro and con, for changing the current flat rate campus parking system to one that is pro-rated based on the salary level of the person purchasing the permit. In a third column, the students list any caveats (other considerations) that might impact the decision. It is helpful for teachers to give students guidelines about how many entries they expect and how the entries should be expressed (e.g., complete sentences, bullets, etc.). Here is an example of a completed Pro-Con-Caveat grid:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pro</th>
<th>Con</th>
<th>Caveats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This system would be much fairer because an administrative assistant and a faculty member parking in the same designated area, such as the parking garages, would not pay the same amount.</td>
<td>It would be very complex to administer because each designated parking area would have to have various levels of fees.</td>
<td>A feasibility study would be needed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often the people who are carrying the heaviest burdens end up parking the furthest away. This would give people in lower pay grades a better opportunity to afford closer parking.</td>
<td>Parking fees constitute a major source of revenue for the university, so efforts to reduce overall costs could negatively impact the budget.</td>
<td>The university would need to be able to prevent people from giving their parking passes to others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some faculty and administrators would resist any changes that might increase their parking fees.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Students bring to class two copies of their complete pro-con-caveat grid. They turn in one copy of their Pro-Con-Caveat grids for pass-fail credit (three points for notations in all three columns), thus making them easy for the teacher to mark and assign credit. Students then work in small groups (three to five students: four students in my cooperative classes) to create an in-depth grid with the best ideas of each student. Groups can be called on randomly to share their joint creation on a document camera.

Goals:
* To encourage students to reflect on issues prior to coming to class
* To ensure preparation prior to class
* To promote higher order thinking when the students in small groups make judgments about the most cogent pro and con arguments and the caveats that should be considered

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Looking for a good summer read: CITLA’s Book Club recommends *How Learning Works: 7 Research-Based Principles for Smart Teaching*, by Susan Ambrose et al. Join us in the Fall for a lively book discussion. [www.ccri.edu/citla](http://www.ccri.edu/citla)