“Flocking Experiment”

Classroom demonstration

GOV 319, Political Networks

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Lecture 8

Finding Networks

Christakis & Fowler, Ch. 2

Christakis & Fowler, Ch. 3

Begin class with a flocking experiment (but don’t tell students this is what the activity is called. No priming)

Use a clear and bounded space where students can mingle in an unobstructed way.

1. PERIOD 1 (CONTROL): Tell students to pretend they’re at a cocktail party. Move around. Have short conversations. Try not to talk to any one person for too long.
   1. Do this for 2-3 minutes
   2. Make observations. Did clusters form? One large component? Many components? Was there any pattern or organization to the pairings? Were most pairings in twos? Threes? More?
2. PERIOD 2 (Experimental condition): Same thing, but this time these rules.
   1. Hold out one arm and make yourself one arm’s length from any other human (no more, no less). Stay there for a minute. Close your eyes. Develop a sense of what it feels like to be this distance, exactly, from others.
   2. No talking
   3. When I say “go” stay in constant motion.
   4. Remain constant distance (one-arm’s length) from all other beings.
   5. Make observations. Within less than one minute a pattern emerges. Herding. Flocking. Regular movement. Might be interesting to do in a larger space or with more students (I’ve tried with 30 in a decent sized classroom and this works well)
3. LECTURE ON EMERGENCE
   1. Spontaneous creation of sophisticated behaviors and functions from large groups of simple elements
      1. No leaders. All are leaders. Complex systems have habits.
   2. Locally, appears to be chaos
   3. Patterns appear globally
   4. Self-organizing
      1. We see this in politics, policy, government -- (go on about this?)
      2. Feiock and Scholz