Case 17: How should the crew give out ten free seats?

Thirty people want ten free workshop seats, and the crew must choose a fair way to decide who gets them.

On your own Read What happened and underline the sentence that tells how many people want a seat. About 4 minutes.

Duda holds up a phone and points at a blank card on a bulletin board.

Your role: You're the one who writes down the rule before the crew picks the ten names. **New skill:** Set fair criteria before choosing.

What happened

The crew has ten free seats for a workshop, and thirty people want one. The crew opened a sign-up sheet on Monday at 9 a.m. Twenty-two names were on it before 10 a.m. By Wednesday, the sheet has thirty names.

The sheet says only "How seats will be chosen: to be announced." The crew has argued about the rule since dinner on Sunday. Gia is running the sign-up. She wants to give the seats to the first ten names, because that is simple and fast. Mateo suggests a lottery instead.

Anika, 16, is at rehearsal most days, and she checks her phone after rehearsal ends. Under first-come, she would see the message after the seats were gone. A third option on the crew's whiteboard would give seats to people who cannot afford the paid version of the workshop. That option would ask people for personal information.

Every method seats exactly ten people. The crew has to decide which ten, and then explain the rule to all thirty.

Your question: How should the crew choose who gets the ten seats, and how should they explain the choice to all thirty people?

Key terms

On your own Read each key term and its example, then write your first guess in the box. About 4 minutes.

Criteria Criteria are the standards or reasons a group uses to make a decision.

En español: criterios

In this case: The sheet says "How seats will be chosen: to be announced." Twenty-two names arrived before 10 a.m. Monday, before the crew stated any criteria.

Trade-off A trade-off is a choice where getting one benefit means accepting a cost or giving something up.

En español: compensación entre opciones

In this case: First-come is fast for Gia to run but favors whoever sees the message first. A lottery gives everyone the same chance but needs a sign-up window and a drawing.

Equity Equity is a way of sharing that adjusts for different needs so everyone gets a fair chance.

En español: equidad

In this case: Option C would give seats to people who cannot afford the paid version of the workshop. It would also ask applicants for personal information.

Who is involved

Gia

Running the sign-up

"First ten to reply get a seat. It's simple, I can post it tonight, and I have a shift at seven."

Anika

Checks her phone after rehearsal

"By the time I see the message, ten people will have answered. I don't even need a seat. I just want to know how you're picking."

Your first guess

Before you look at the evidence, how do you think the crew should choose who gets the ten seats?

My first guess is ___, because ___.

Notes

Reading passage

Choosing a rule before you see the names

On your own Read the passage. At each Stop and think box, pause and answer the question in your head or with a partner. About 5 minutes.

Words to know

- **Criteria**: Criteria are the standards or reasons a group uses to make a decision.
- **Trade-off**: A trade-off is a choice where getting one benefit means accepting a cost or giving something up.
- **Equity**: Equity is a way of sharing that adjusts for different needs so everyone gets a fair chance.
- **Consent**: Consent is permission a person gives for something specific, such as sharing a record with a named person.

The story: Thirty names, no rule

Ten free workshop seats should be good news. For the crew, it is a problem. The sign-up sheet opened Monday at 9 a.m., and 22 names arrived before 10. By Wednesday, 30 people have signed up, and the sheet still says the selection method is “to be announced.” The crew has argued since Sunday dinner.

Gia is running the sign-up, and her preference is practical. First ten to reply get a seat. It is simple, she can post it tonight and she has a shift at seven. Mateo proposes a lottery, and Gia counts its costs: a sign-up window and someone to run the drawing. The whiteboard lists a third choice, a needs-based rubric for people who cannot afford the paid workshop. It would require personal information and someone to judge it.

Anika, 16, is at rehearsal most days and checks her phone only afterward. Under first-come, she would find out after the seats were gone. Her request is precise. She does not need a seat. She wants the crew to say how it is picking, and not to pretend nobody loses out, because she would. When someone asks whether she wants the plan to revolve around her, she says no. Admit the cost, and then maybe they can fix that part.

Gia’s honesty moves the conversation too. She admits she mostly wanted the task off her list. What would change her mind is evidence that the people the crew most wants in the room are the ones who would see the message last. She would rather ask them than guess.

Your role is to write down the rule before the crew picks the ten names.

Stop and think. Anika and Gia each admit something about their own position. How does that honesty change the decision?

Criteria first, then choice

Criteria are the standards or reasons a group uses to make a decision. The new skill is setting fair criteria before choosing and stating who each rule leaves out. It builds on Case 4, where you learned that a **trade-off** is a choice where getting one benefit means accepting a cost or giving something up. Here every option seats ten and excludes twenty, so the real decision is which cost the crew is willing to defend.

Each option distributes that cost differently. First-come rewards attention and availability, which disadvantages people with rehearsals, shifts or less phone time. A lottery gives equal odds but ignores need. A needs-based rubric pursues **equity**, a way of sharing that adjusts for different needs so everyone gets a fair chance. It also imposes an entry cost. Applicants must disclose personal information, and Case 6's concept of **consent**, permission a person gives for something specific, applies. The crew would need to ask for only what it needs, get clear consent and decide who sees the answers.

Timing is itself an ethical variable. The sheet shows most sign-ups arrived before any rule existed. Choosing a rule after seeing the names invites suspicion that the rule was picked to favor someone. A rule announced in advance can earn acceptance even from those who lose. That is why the crew's decision note should state the method, its main objection and one change that reduces the cost for people who miss out.

Anika offers a structure for comparing options, and it maps onto two classic ethical approaches. One asks which option helps the most people, a consequences question. The other asks whether the way of choosing is fair to everyone, a fairness question.

Stop and think. Which of Belmont's five principles does each whiteboard option rely on?

Lenses and real allocation debates

The Markkula Center's framework offers several lenses: consequences, rights, fairness, the common good, character and care. These lenses can reveal different concerns rather than producing an automatic score (Markkula Center for Applied Ethics, revised November 5, 2021). The Belmont Report, a foundational federal statement on research ethics, lists five widely accepted ways to share benefits and burdens: an equal share, individual need, individual effort, societal contribution and merit (Belmont Report, April 18, 1979).

Scarcity decisions happen at every scale. During the COVID-19 pandemic, a bioethicist explained how leaders chose who received vaccines first (NPR, December 20, 2020).

Lenses and real allocation debates, continued

Medical experts argued against first-come, first-served for scarce resources and proposed explicit criteria instead (Emanuel et al., New England Journal of Medicine, May 21, 2020). In New York City, families disagree over lotteries versus grades for high school admissions (Chalkbeat New York, August 9, 2023). In each debate, people agree that there is not enough to go around. They disagree about which rule should decide who gets a share, and that is the crew's question too.

Stop and think. Why does choosing a rule after seeing the names damage trust even if the rule is reasonable?

Sources

Real source | Markkula Center for Applied Ethics, Santa Clara University | November 5, 2021

A Framework for Ethical Decision Making

Real source | National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research; published by the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare | 1979

The Belmont Report

Real source | NPR | December 20, 2020

The Ethics Of Who Gets The COVID-19 Vaccine And When

Real source | New England Journal of Medicine (Emanuel et al.) | May 21, 2020

Fair Allocation of Scarce Medical Resources in the Time of Covid-19

Real source | Chalkbeat New York | August 9, 2023

Debate over NYC high school admissions heats up at parent meeting

Notes

Look at the evidence

On your own Read each document and write what it shows and what it leaves out. About 8 minutes.

Evidence A | Sign-up sheet

The workshop sign-up sheet

"Free workshop: 10 seats. Add your name to show interest. How seats will be chosen: to be announced." The sheet opened Monday at 9 a.m. By Wednesday it had thirty names. The first 22 names were added before 10 a.m. on Monday.

Look closely: When did most names arrive, and what rule was posted then?

What it shows

What it leaves out

Evidence B | Group-chat thread

The crew's thread, Sunday at 8:30 p.m.

Gia: first come is easiest to run, we just take the top ten.

Anika: I'm at rehearsal most days, I'd see it after it's full.

Mateo: lottery?

Gia: then we need a sign-up window and someone to run the drawing.

Look closely: Which cost does each person name? Which cost does nobody name?

What it shows

What it leaves out

Look at the evidence, continued

Evidence C | **Whiteboard**

Three options on the whiteboard

A. First come, first served: fast to run; favors whoever sees it first. B. Lottery after a three-day sign-up: equal chance for everyone; needs a sign-up window and a drawing. C. Needs-based rubric: prioritizes people who can't afford the paid version; needs personal information and someone to judge it.

Look closely: Underline the cost the crew wrote for each option.

What it shows

What it leaves out

What is still missing from the evidence?

Notes

Key idea: fair criteria

On your own Read the key idea and the code of ethics, then answer the question in the box. About 12 minutes.

Any way of giving out ten seats to thirty people leaves twenty people without one. A **trade-off** is a choice where getting one benefit means accepting a cost or giving something up. First-come is fast, but it favors people who see the message first. A lottery gives everyone the same chance, but it does not consider need. A needs-based rubric aims at equity by helping people who cannot afford the paid version, but applicants must share personal information. Each option has a cost, so the crew has to choose which cost to accept.

Criteria are the standards or reasons a group uses to make a decision. When the crew states its criteria early, everyone knows the rule before anyone is chosen. Even people who do not get a seat may accept the result if the rule was clear in advance. If the crew picks a rule after seeing the names, people may wonder whether it was chosen to favor someone.

The Markkula Center for Applied Ethics at Santa Clara University suggests looking at a decision through several ethical lenses. They include consequences, rights, fairness, the common good, character and care. The lenses can point toward different options, and they do not add up to one automatic score. A strong decision explains which concern matters most in this case, who carries the cost and what could reduce it.

Professional standards

Adapted from a real source

National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research; published by the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare

The Belmont Report: B. Basic Ethical Principles: 3. Justice

Summary: Summary, not a quotation: the report treats justice as fairness in distribution and lists five widely accepted ways to share benefits and burdens: an equal share, individual need, individual effort, societal contribution and merit.

In plain words: The Belmont Report, written for research with people, lists several fair ways to share limited benefits, such as equal shares or need.

Question: Which whiteboard option comes closest to “an equal share,” and which comes closest to “individual need”?

Professional standards, continued

Your answer

Option ___ is closest to an equal share and option ___ to individual need, but ___.

In the news

Real source | NPR | December 20, 2020

The Ethics Of Who Gets The COVID-19 Vaccine And When

A bioethicist explains how leaders chose who went first when there wasn't enough for everyone.

Real source | Scientific American | September 3, 2020

How to Decide Who Should Get a COVID-19 Vaccine First

Lays out competing criteria such as risk, fairness and benefit, the same lenses the crew uses.

Notes

Sort the evidence

On your own Follow each option to its effects and write who carries the cost in each box. About 8 minutes.

Follow each method to its consequences. Who carries the cost under each one, and what makes the chosen process legitimate to the twenty who lose?

First come, first served

The ten fastest responders get seats; people at rehearsal or work see the sign-up late

Who is affected

Lottery after a three-day sign-up

Each of the thirty has the same chance, and need is not considered

Who is affected

Needs-based rubric

Those with the greatest need are prioritized; applicants must share personal information

Who is affected

Whose perspective is missing?

Whose view is missing from these documents? What would you ask them?

The view that is missing is ___. I would ask ___.

Practice: choose a response

On your own Choose the note you would send, explain why and fix the two marked phrases. About 5 minutes.

Gia is drafting a note to the thirty people on the sign-up sheet. Which sentence could the crew defend?

- ☐ **A** "We picked the fairest method, so nobody loses out."
- ☐ **B** "We're holding a lottery so everyone has the same chance. A lottery doesn't favor people with the most need, so we're looking into a second session."
- ☐ **C** "Seats go to the first ten names on the sheet, because those people wanted it most."

Why I chose it

Improve a draft

A student's first draft

We should do first come first served because ❶ it's the most fair. Everyone has the same chance to sign up and if you really want it you'll sign up fast. It's simple and ❷ nobody can complain because they had the same opportunity as everyone else. Also it's way less work for us than reading thirty applications or doing some random drawing. The people who don't get in can just come to the next workshop whenever we have one. This is obviously the best way.

Rewrite each marked phrase so it says only what the evidence supports.

Rewrite phrase 1

Rewrite phrase 2

Grades 11—12

Your task

On your own Read the steps and fill in the planner boxes before you start your draft. About 12 minutes.

Compare the three methods in a memo to a student club, recommending one and specifying the published criteria.

Use: Case materials and the Markkula framework.

You'll make: Memo, 400—500 words

Time: 60 minutes

1. Reread Evidence A, B and C. Note one fact about each option.
2. Write the criteria the crew will publish before anyone is chosen.
3. Fill in the matrix: judge each option against your criteria.
4. Plan how option C would protect applicants' personal information.
5. Draft the recommendation and privacy sections on the Your draft page.
6. Finish the memo, 400 to 500 words in all, on lined paper or in the online workspace.
7. Check your memo with the questions on the Check your work page.

Prefer typing? Scan to open the online workspace.

Published criteria

Seats will be given out by ___. The rule is posted ___.

Your task, continued

First come: fit with the criteria

Lottery: fit with the criteria

Needs-based rubric: fit with the criteria

Privacy safeguard for option C

Applicants will be told ___.

Notes

Your draft

On your own Write your draft in the boxes, using your planner from the page before. About 30 minutes.

Recommendation section

Privacy and legitimacy section

Check your work

On your own Answer the Check your work questions, mark your level in each rubric row and write one change you made. About 8 minutes.

Does your memo compare all three methods fairly?	☐ Yes	☐ No
Does it state the criteria before recommending a method?	☐ Yes	☐ No
Does it address the privacy cost of a needs-based rubric?	☐ Yes	☐ No
Does it explain what makes the process legitimate to people who lose?	☐ Yes	☐ No

How your work is scored

Mark one box in each row.

Skill	Beginning	Developing	Proficient	Advanced
Evidence	☐ No reference to who is affected.	☐ Mentions people vaguely.	☐ Names specific people and effects from the case.	☐ Uses case facts to show who gains and who pays.
Reasoning	☐ Claims an option is obviously best.	☐ Gives one reason only.	☐ Uses a lens and names the strongest objection.	☐ Uses two lenses and proposes a revision tied to the objection.
Audience & purpose	☐ Ignores the twenty who miss out.	☐ Mentions them briefly.	☐ Explains the process to all applicants.	☐ Builds legitimacy by publishing criteria and a remedy.
Revision	☐ No change.	☐ Wording only.	☐ Adds a named cost and revision.	☐ Explains how the revision addresses the objection.

Check your work, continued

One change I made after feedback

I changed ___ because ___.

Notes

Questions to discuss

On your own Write a short answer to each question, then complete the sentence frames. About 10 minutes.

1 **Whose view would most challenge the option you prefer?**

2 **Anika says she does not need a seat. What is she asking the crew for?**

3 **Option C would help people who cannot afford the paid workshop. What would applicants give up to be chosen that way?**

4 **What would make the twenty people without seats accept the result as fair?**

My take

My claim: ___.

My take, continued

The best evidence is ___, because ___.

Someone who disagrees might say ___.

The limit of the evidence is ___.

I would change my mind if ___.

Notes

Talk about this case at home

Case 17: How should the crew give out ten free seats?

In this case, a group of friends has ten free workshop seats and thirty people who want one. Your student compared three ways to choose and wrote a note that explains the choice and who carries its cost.

Questions to talk about

1. When something is limited, like tickets or seats, what makes a way of choosing feel fair?
2. Why might it help to announce a rule before anyone signs up?
3. What is one kind way to tell people they were not picked?

Nobody needs to share personal stories or private information to talk about this case.

See the case online.