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When physics class is not what students expect it to be

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Many inspired and effective instructional reforms in physics have emerged from Physics Education Research. Some of these reforms stress instruction that results in classroom experiences that are different from traditional approaches in striking ways. For example, many reforms require students to talk to each other, manipulate objects, and work on problems during class. However, students bring their own expectations regarding how class is going to proceed, based on their previous experiences in other science courses. Because those expectations are often so different from what actually happens in reformed classes, we need to understand how they interact with students' performance and attitudes regarding the course. Doing so may help us understand why some instructors trying to implement instructional reform feel pushback from students, and why some reforms are more successful in some environments than others. In this talk, I will discuss preliminary and ongoing investigations of student expectations and provide concrete implications for framing courses taught in reformed styles.