GENERATING CLASS DISCUSSION

This handout will help you generate class discussion. For more information, please visit KOLT in SCI Z40.

Before Discussion:

♦ Explain the purpose of discussion. Inform students of ground rules as well as expected and prohibited discussion styles (e.g. staying on topic; not telling personal stories).

♦ Try to organize classroom chairs into a circle. This may increase the comfort level of participants.

♦ Inform students before class what topics will be discussed and ask them to bring related questions to class. Provide students with a core list of discussion questions.

♦ Generate interest through warm-up exercises. For example, before discussion, you can give your students a pertinent question to discuss in pairs for 2-3 minutes. You may also give students a few minutes to take preparatory notes before beginning discussion.

♦ If you plan to grade participation, determine in advance how you will assess contributions. Inform students of evaluation criteria. Maintain consistency and fairness in grading.

During Discussion:

♦ Avoid yes or no questions. Instead, ask broad "how" or "why" questions.

♦ Try calling on individual students rather than addressing questions to the entire class. This prevents the most verbal students from dominating the discussion.

♦ Give students adequate time to respond. Give students a few minutes to take preparatory notes before beginning discussion.

♦ Maintain eye contact with students while they are responding.

♦ If no one answers a question, try phrasing it differently.

♦ Gently and tactfully correct wrong answers.

♦ Keep students alert by moving around the classroom and changing the intonation of your voice.

♦ Ask students to respond to comments made by others. If necessary, rephrase comments for the entire class.

♦ If *you* don't know the answer to a question, tell the student that you will look it up. Make sure you do!

♦ At the end of discussion, summarize the issues discussed and acknowledge all contributors individually.

Some Question Types

- *Definitional* (how do you define x?)

- *Contextual* (how was y influenced by the time period in which it occurred?)

- *Comparative* (can you compare x and y?)

- *Causal* (what is the cause of x?)

- *Evaluative* (how strong is the case for y?)

Resources for Further Reading

- University of California Berkeley. "Facilitating Discussions." http://gsi.berkeley.edu/resources/sections/introduction.html

- University of Toledo. "Fostering Effective Class Discussions." http://www.utoledo.edu/centers/ctl/teachingresources/Fostering_Effective_Classroom_Discussions.html

- University of Oregon. "What are some good ways to facilitate a discussion?" http://tep.uoregon.edu/resources/faqs/presenting/facilitatediscussion.html

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