

LEADING GOOD CLASS DISCUSSION

Guided discussion **exposes students to a variety of diverse perspectives, helps them recognize and investigate their assumptions, improves listening and conversation skills, fosters connection to a topic, and affirms students as co-creators of knowledge.** As they participate in discussion, students situate new knowledge within the context of their current understandings, thus facilitating a more thorough understanding of the course material.

TIPS FOR PREPARING CLASS DISCUSSION

The following are some useful strategies for preparing effective discussions:

- 1** **Spend some time getting to know your students** and allow them to get to know each other. Use names as much as possible. Praise students for contributions. Great discussions are a product of respectful and trustworthy relationships. Your students will be much more comfortable contributing if they feel respected and valued.
- 2** When preparing to guide a discussion, **consider your objectives.** What do you want your students to gain from the discussion, and how can you best facilitate the process? Assign a preliminary reading or writing assignment to introduce students to the topic and help them formulate a perspective. Plan the preliminary assignment and the discussion to suit your desired outcomes. For example, if you intend to promote connection to a topic, plan ways to get students thinking about how the topic applies to their own lives.
- 3** **Come prepared with prompts to promote participation** and facilitate transition from one point to the next. Prepare students to engage in the discussion by emphasizing that through discussion, we test ideas and explore new perspectives, and that you intend for the classroom to be a safe learning environment. Have students brainstorm about what such an environment might look like. Once you establish this environment, students will trust it.
- 4** When you plan to have students work in groups, circulate the room, listening and even contributing an encouraging word. By **modeling responsible preparation and respectful discourse** you will create an atmosphere reflective of these values, thus enhancing the quality of your discussions.

FOSTERING ACTIVE PARTICIPATION IN GROUP DISCUSSION

- >** Have students bring in a question or reaction to an assigned reading, then let the class vote on ones to discuss.
- >** **Begin class discussion by quoting a contentious statement and allowing students to challenge or argue the merits of the statement.**
- >** Ask students to respond to a reading, documentary, or other preliminary assignment by writing a paragraph describing an experience they have had related to the content. Have students discuss the relationship between the concept and their experiences.
- >** **Create a “circle of voices” (Brookfield & Preskill, 2016), in which students form groups of five, and each person speaks for three minutes on the topic. Then, the discussion opens into a free-flow format; however, students are only able to expand upon ideas presented in the circle.**