Fostering Student Participation

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Session Outline

• Discussion: Effective Teaching Strategies

• Presentation: Discussion Strategies

• Case Studies: Fostering Discussion
  – Group Work & Presentation

• Q & A
Why Encourage Participation?

- Encourages active learning
- Develops speaking & presentation skills
- Introduces variety into course
- Eases burden on instructor
Why Students Stay Quite

- Shyness
- Intimidated by instructor or classmates
- Lack of Comprehension
- Lack of Interest
- Fear of making a mistake
Levels of Class Activities

Beginning of semester ➔ Low Risk
Mid to end of semester ➔ Higher Risk
Example: low risk

Ask the class a leading question:

“When temperature of an air parcel rises, it’s capacity to hold water vapor _________”

Only three possibly answers...
Example: higher risk

Ask the class a less structured question:

“What factors lead to precipitation in the atmosphere?”

Challenges the student to think and process course material at a higher level.
Debates

- Structured opportunities to participate
- Critical exploration of lecture material
- Debates can be paired with written assignments
- Grading based on both substance of arguments and conduct
Students teach other students

If a student can explain a concept/material to one of his/her peers, they understand and retain!

Example exercise:

*Break lab into 3-4 groups. Give each group a transparency & markers and part of a topic/process. Students research and design a short presentation (2-3 mins) which they give to the rest of the class.*
Large Groups & Small Groups

- Small: Discussion Sections, Labs, Writing Intensive Classes, Upper-Level Courses
  - Open Discussion, Group Work, Individual Presentations, Structured Debates

- Large: Introductory Course
  - Split Up Class, Group Presentations, Open Debate
Scenario: Silent Students

• During the 1st Discussion Session, the TA is unable to stimulate participation

• TA is frustrated and considers lecturing or showing films instead
Scenario: Large Class

- TA is teaching a large survey course with many freshmen.
- TA wants to incorporate discussion, but worries that students will be uncomfortable speaking in front of such a large group.
Scenario: Dominant Student

- TA responsible for a Small Discussion Class
- One Student Dominates Discussion
- Other Students Visibly Uncomfortable and do not volunteer to participate
Scenario: Bored Non-Majors

• TA is teaching a very mixed class with some majors but a lot of non majors that are just fulfilling a group requirement

• Non majors show little to no interest in the course material and “just want to pass”

• TA is frustrated in trying to bridge the gap between disciplines
Scenario: Popular Professor, how does TA live up?

- Professor Smith’s lectures are energetic, interesting, and fun, making him a favorite amongst the freshman students.

- His TA worries how they are going to compare in discussion sessions?
Session Tactics We Used:

- Index cards = class involved from beginning
- Structured questions = write student’s input on board, invests them in the class discussion
- Group work = breaks up a lecture and gets students interacting with peers