

## **Debate as an Alternative In-Class Discussion Tool**

The basics of academic debate may be used to encourage active participation during in-class discussions. The following two exercises may be used as informal discussion frameworks for graded or non-graded classroom participation.

### **Exercise 1**

Select a debate resolution based on ideas from the day's assigned readings or other materials the class has all read/viewed. You may provide students with the resolution the class period prior to the debates, or you can wait to present the resolution until class begins.

Divide the class into 4 groups. Two groups will be in favor of, or affirm, the resolution and two groups will be against, or negate, the resolution.

Give the students at least 10-15 minutes to work within their groups to prepare two key arguments supporting their side of the resolution. During this time also instruct each group to elect two "spokespeople" who will present these arguments to the class in a short speech. One person will present the set-up, or constructive, speech the other will present the summary, or rebuttal, speech.

Reconvene the class and select one group from each side of the resolution to present the first debate. Use the following time limits (adjust according to class length):

affirmative constructive = 2 minutes

negative constructive = 2 minutes

Preparation Time = 4 minutes when the whole group discusses the refutation arguments to be presented by the second spokesperson

affirmative rebuttal = 2 minutes

negative rebuttal – 2 minutes

When the first debate is finished the remaining two groups will follow the same time limits and present the second debate.

### **Exercise 2**

This exercise is designed to be used at anytime during a classroom discussion. Its success hinges on the instructor's willingness to set aside a tight agenda in order to more closely explore an issue that has caught the students' attention.

When during a class discussion students become noticeably excited by the topic and clear "sides" to the issue are taking shape, stop class and declare it time for a "debate break". This break is designed to encourage equal participation in the dialogue as well as give some sort of structure to a discussion that could otherwise turn chaotic.

Begin by providing students with a resolution that encompasses the main issue of the topic at hand. Then, have students spend a few minutes free writing in their notes responses to the following prompts:

- 1) What are two reasons to support your position on this resolution?
- 2) What is one response the opposition might give to refute these reasons?

Next have the students place their desks in a circle, but divide the circle into two distinct halves. Those students supporting the resolution sit on one side of the circle, those opposing the resolution sit on the other side. Each student places a folded piece of paper upright on their desk.

Begin by having a student who supports the resolution present one of his/her reasons to the class. The student may speak no longer than 30 seconds. That student then removes his/her paper marker thus signifying he/she can no longer speak during the debate. Next, a student opposing the resolution refutes the previous statement in no more than 30 seconds. That student then removes his/her paper and may no longer speak. The process continues until all students have spoken. If your sides are uneven simply let some in the group with more people take a second turn.

If time allows, have students free write one more time in response to the following prompt:

- 1) Which argument supporting the resolution did you find the most convincing and why?
- 2) Which argument opposing the resolution did you find most convincing and why?

End the “debate break” with summarizing comments from your perspective as an instructor.