

# Fostering Student Participation

Kelly McHugh

Gina Henderson

# 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

Low Risk

High Risk

*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