



Orchestrating More Effective Classroom Discussions

Today's multi-tasking students learn most effectively when their minds are more fully engaged in pursuing course learning outcomes. When strategically conducted, classroom discussions enable students to:

- Apply information delivered through instructor-directed methodologies such as lecture; video presentation, and guest speakers;
- Evaluate the validity of their previously held beliefs;
- Analyze the perspectives of their increasingly diverse classmates;
- Synthesize concepts learned in other courses or environments;
- Evaluate the evidence and logic of others against their own beliefs;
- Obtain feedback from the professor and peers that broaden/deepen their understanding;
- Gain motivation that drives further pursuit of knowledge.

As you have likely discovered, effective discussions don't just happen. When not strategically planned, discussions can easily drift into inappropriate areas and waste time, or can be dominated by one or two students thus stunting the fullest development of everyone. Effective discussions must be orchestrated by a sensitive listener who protects the ideas and dignity of students, and builds upon their existing knowledge to achieve higher-level learning. The following tips will prove useful in your efforts to achieve more worthwhile discussions in your course:

- At your first class meeting, use an icebreaker, name tents or tags, or related tools to promote students' learning names and backgrounds of their peers.
- Early in the term, conduct an easy problem solving activity with groups of 2 students. Over time, expand group size, to address more complex problems where broader perspectives are critical.
- Establish clear ground rules for discussions that foster validation of all opinions, civility, broad participation, and effective use of time.
- Monitor ground rules and achievement of discussion goals, intervening when appropriate with refocusing or clarifying questions.
- Expanding discussion to the entire group of students, encourage participation from opposite locations in the classroom, fostering a more dynamic and inclusive atmosphere.
- Avoid calling on those whose body language communicates they are clearly not engaged -- it will only foster hard feelings stifle their later participation. Instead simply make eye contact, or talk with individual students after class, to encourage broad involvement.
- Be very reluctant to directly criticize an "incorrect" student response, or to provide the "best" answer. Instead clarify in a non-threatening way, and perhaps ask if someone else "sees it another way."
- When discussion bogs down, clarify, summarize, and add additional support information before moving on.
- Close discussions positively by asking if someone would like "the final word" or by connecting the outcome of the discussion to course objectives.

Like so many teaching and learning activities, orchestrating discussions - live or online - is a balancing act between the costs of time and potential learning benefits. To ensure the greatest reward, always plan strategically, with your learning outcomes foremost in your mind.

Schedule of Upcoming Webinars: The following webinars are available for your participation. Your personal log in directions can be found in the e-mail with the subject line "AdjunctSuccess.net User Information" that you received in the last few months. If you deleted that e-mail, please e-mail lyons@adjunctsuccess.net for a duplicate copy. All times listed are Eastern. If you are unable to attend a webinar on a particular topic during real time, e-mail lyons@adjunctsuccess.net for access to an archived recording.

Sat., Jan. 28, 11:30 am	Managing Examinations Effectively
Tue., Jan. 31, 8:30 pm	Infusing Technology into Your Teaching
Thu., Feb. 2, 8:30 pm	Today's College and University Students
Sat., Feb. 4, 11:30 am	Implementing Active Learning Strategies in Your Teaching
Tue., Feb. 7, 8:30 pm	The Adjunct Professor: Formulating a Strategy for Success
Thu., Feb. 9, 8:30 pm	Implementing Active Learning Strategies in Your Teaching
Sat., Feb. 11, 11:30 am	Employing Alternative Assessment in Your Teaching
Mon., Feb. 13, 8:30 pm	Managing Your Teaching Life More Effectively
Thu., Feb. 16, 8:30 pm	Building Your Adjunct Teaching Career
Sat., Feb. 18, 11:30 am	Assessing the Effectiveness of Your Teaching
Tue., Feb. 21, 8:30 pm	Planning Your Teaching Strategically
Thu., Feb. 23, 8:30 pm	Teaching Online: The Basics
Sat., Feb. 25, 11:30 am	Infusing Technology into Your Teaching
Tue., Feb. 28, 8:30 pm	Teaching Online: The Basics

Note: On our WebEx landing page, you will see some webinars and meetings with prefixes SUS or NCSPD that are not available to AdjunctSuccess.net members.

Additional Resources for AdjunctSuccess.net members: Designed with the busy instructor in mind, a rich set of printable resources is posted at AdjunctSuccess.net. Among these are a model course syllabus and student profile form in the **Preparing to Teach** section and a checklist to guide your first class meeting and model icebreaker exercise in the **Launching Your Course** section. Also in this **Members Only** area is an alphabetized [by topic] compilation of over 100 Websites, each focused on a critical aspect of teaching and classroom management. The earlier that you explore and utilize these resources, the more time and stress you will save.

Heads Up: To avoid long distance charges, you must use a computer headset microphone and select the "use computer for audio" option when logging in to a webinar. If you misplace this eNewsletter, the most current issue is always posted at www.AdjunctSuccess.net. The webinar schedule is also posted at our WebEx page, accessible through the Members Login box.

Troubleshooting Technical Problems: As with any technology resource, glitches sometimes occur that affect AdjunctSuccess.net members. To troubleshoot problems, call the WebEx help desk, at 866.863.3908.

Also: Inside the "Members Login" box of the AdjunctSuccess.net home page appears a link to a set of frequently-asked questions [FAQs] to facilitate your use of our resources. Please submit your suggestions for improving your AdjunctSuccess.net experience to lyons@adjunctsuccess.net.