

WHAT WORKS:

Suggestions for Faculty and Fellows

Do something FUN outside of class:

The social aspects of the course are important, more important than we imagined at first. Host a pizza party, video night, other out-of-class interaction during the first three weeks of the semester. It helps break the ice and will contribute to the quality of the seminar discussion.

Explain your role to the students:

Students may wonder why the faculty and student fellows in this course don't give them the "right" answers. A common goal is for students to think for themselves and develop habits of questioning, considering issues from different points of view, and seeking evidence for conclusions. Because of the diverse readings in CLS 101/201, an individual faculty member cannot be an expert on all of the course material. Like the students, the faculty and fellows are learning.

Facilitate discussion:

Faculty and student fellows, as expert learners, should resist the temptation to lecture or respond to every student comment. The payoff for restraint will be better seminar discussions. Lectures, even short ones, are likely to shut down discussion. Instead:

- Ask questions.
- Clarify issues under discussion. If students are repeating the same two sides of an argument, summarize the two sides and ask if anyone has anything to add, and then move on.
- Point to the text and help students learn how to use texts as evidence for their conclusions: *Can we find a passage that supports that interpretation? Was there a passage in the text that made you come to this conclusion?*
- Read passages out loud. Follow up with questions.
- Ask students to explain key passages in their own words. Or ask them to choose the most important 'sound bite.'
- Practice "wait time!"
- Let your student fellow lead some of the discussions.
- Observe a different section; it can provide great insight into your own seminar.

Influence student participation:

- Explain your expectation that everyone participate in discussion.
- Monitor group discussion: *Are people interrupting? Are people able to finish their statements? Are people being attacked? Do they think they are being attacked? Are students used to thinking of opposing arguments? Do they think playing devil's advocate is an attack?*
- Ask the students to suggest improvements. Use short evaluations/instant feedback at the end of the hour to find out how people think the discussions are going. *What do you like about our discussions? What causes you to participate? What makes you not want to participate? How can we improve our seminar discussions?*
- Talk with students who dominate discussion. If there are students dominating the discussion, arguing too much, or letting the other students sit back and listen, you might talk with them outside of class. You could compliment them on their enthusiasm and reinforce the importance of everyone participating. It is good practice for students who dominate the discussion to spend a few class sessions just listening and only speaking to ask questions intended to help other students.
- Work with quiet/silent students outside of class. Ask what would help them participate more. Do they like to prepare before speaking? You might let them open the seminar more than once or give them a question in advance and agree that you will ask them that question next time. Do they have trouble "getting into" a fast moving discussion? They may welcome your calling on them from time to time. Do they feel that they will be attacked or made fun of if they speak? It is amazing how many students fear ridicule and view normal academic discourse as conflict. You may discover that interactions you did not even notice seem threatening to them. These issues can sometimes be addressed by the seminar as a whole as well as with individual students.
- Simple and effective: Break the class into two groups, fellow with one group, faculty with the other. Silent students will often speak in a smaller group.
- Save 5-10 minutes at the end of class and ask each person who has not participated to make a comment about the discussion. Students are allowed to pass, but some will have interesting insights that show they were engaged, even though silent.
- Faculty and student fellow should present a united front. Avoid a good cop/bad cop division between you two. Discuss your roles with each other so you each know what the other is expecting and so that students don't receive conflicting information.

The Minute Paper

Please answer each question in one or two sentences.

What was the most useful or meaningful thing you learned during this session?

What question(s) remains uppermost in your mind as we end this session?

Instant Feedback

What is going well for you in this class?

What problems (if any) are you having with this class?

Do you have any suggestions for improving the class?