**Principles of Discussion**

Prepare for discussions. Read assignments carefully. Notate texts. Be able to summarize the most important points and sub-points of assignments and readings. Make sure you can answer the basic questions: Who?, What?, When?, Where?, Why?, and How?. Identify questions you may have and issues which might be raised by the reading. Be able to summarize your reactions to the reading. Be prepared to explain and support your reactions.

Challenge ideas, not people. Disagree tactfully and respectfully. Be aware of your nonverbal behaviors.

Discussions mean give and take. Don’t interrupt others. Don’t monopolize the discussion. Avoid very long stories or explanations.

Stick to the subject. Make your remarks relevant. Don’t introduce new issues until the present topic has reached its natural end. If your remarks seem to introduce a new topic, but are connected to the present one, clarify the connection quickly. Make your comments as concrete and specific as possible. Be prepared to explain and support your comments.

Seek the best conclusions, rather than seeking to defeat your opponent. **Good discussion is a conversation, not a contact sport.** Most important issues are too complex to be reduced to two sides. Most important questions have more than one “right” answer.

Give encouragement and approval to others. Seek out differences of opinion. Encourage everyone to participate. Diversity enriches a conversation.

Listen to everyone’s ideas even if you disagree. Keep your focus on the class discussion. Private side conversations are distracting and often perceived as disrespectful.

Try to briefly restate the previous speaker’s point when responding to it. Restate what you think someone has said if it is not clear to you. Ask for definitions of terms which you do not clearly understand or which might be interpreted in a number of ways.

Seek information before you draw conclusions. Bring out ideas and facts supporting all sides, then try to put them together in a way that makes sense. Try to understand all sides of the issue and the ways in which they are connected.

Change your mind when the evidence warrants this. Try not to let previous ideas limit your freedom of thinking. However, make it clear that you have changed your mind and why. Avoid seeming to argue for argument’s sake.

At the end of the discussion, try to summarize the conclusions reached by the class.

Adapted from Deemer, D. “Structuring Controversy in the Classroom.” In S.F, Schomberg (ed.) *Teaching and Learning in University Classrooms*. Minneapolis: Office of Educational Programs, University of Minnesota, 1986 and Tiberius, R.G. *Small Group Teaching: A Trouble-Shooting Guide*. Toronto: Ontario Institute for Studies in Education Press, 1990.