Various Activities to Facilitate Participation in Group Discussions

Tanya Kunberger
Florida Gulf Coast University, tkunberg@fgcu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/sotlcommons

Recommended Citation
Kunberger, Tanya, "Various Activities to Facilitate Participation in Group Discussions" (2016). SoTL Commons Conference. 11.
https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/sotlcommons/SoTL/2016/11

This presentation (open access) is brought to you for free and open access by the Conferences & Events at Digital Commons@Georgia Southern. It has been accepted for inclusion in SoTL Commons Conference by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons@Georgia Southern. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@georgiasouthern.edu.
Various Activities to Facilitate Participation in Group Discussions (MS#2071)

Dr. Tanya Kunberger, U.A. Whitaker College of Engineering, Florida Gulf Coast University

Abstract

Research has shown that group discussions benefit students' comprehension of material, critical thinking, and development of communication skills. However, ensuring both preparation and participation by all or even a majority of students can be challenging. This poster presents approaches taken in an upper level course at Florida Gulf Coast University (FGCU) to both increase the preparedness of students for class discussions and promote participation of more students in class discussions. These roundtable activities are bi-weekly occurrences and for class discussions and promote participation of more students in class discussions. These roundtable activities are bi-weekly occurrences and focus on both historical articles written by some of the most well-known researchers in the field to journal articles published within the last six months on transformative research or recent projects. Inclusion of both pre-class activities and the associated rubrics, as well as various in-class approaches will be included.

Project Overview

- General Course Information
  - Senior level course required of all Civil Engineering Students
  - Second course in the Geotechnical Engineering sequence
  - Meets once a week for 4.5 hours each time
  - Roundtable activities 10% of course grade
  - Eight roundtable assignments over the semester

- Roundtable Expectations
  - Students are expected to read articles prior to class attendance.
  - Individual accountability based on either written submission prior to class (3 of 8) or brief quiz at start of class (5 of 8)
  - Each quiz worth 20 points, each written submission worth 40 points (20 points extra credit built in)

- Roundtable Quiz Questions
  - What are 2 – 3 critical points of the article?
  - What are 2 important qualifications of the author (not included in the article/)?
  - How does the article relate to the course?
  - How does the article relate to other courses, broader engineering concerns, the real world, etc?

- In Topic Discussions, students divide themselves into groups of 5 – 7 individuals. Each group is given a unique topic for discussion, which is the basis for the entire class. The second part of the class has one person from each table present their question and a second summarizes the table discussion on the topic. The class then transitions to the next topic for discussion.

- In Jigsaw Discussions, students divide themselves into groups of 5 – 7 individuals. Each group is given a unique topic for discussion, which is the basis for the entire class. After each group presents their question, the speaker for that table then becomes the student for the next topic. This manner in which the class works through each discussion point.

- Large Group Discussions include the entire class for the first part of the discussion. The instructor facilitates by starting the discussion with a question, but then allows students to pose questions and shift the discussion in the direction they see fit if the discussion topics lie too far outside the desired topic area. In small group discussions, the instructor will intervene to redirect the conversation. Students are made aware that participation in the discussion is expected and that they should ask questions of those who have not participated later in the discussion period to ensure complete class participation.

Example Discussion Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Activity Type</th>
<th>Article Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Quiz &amp; Topic Discussion</td>
<td>Geotransta (Sub-discipline Specific Trade Magazine), May/June 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Written &amp; Table Discussion</td>
<td>Canadian Geotechnical Journal, Volume 1, No. 1, 1963</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Quiz &amp; Topic Discussion</td>
<td>Canadian Geotechnical Journal, Volume 141, Issue 6, 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Written &amp; Table Discussion</td>
<td>Civil Engineering (Discipline Specific Magazine), July/August 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Quiz &amp; Jigsaw Discussion</td>
<td>Geotectonic, Volume 65, Number 4, 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Written &amp; Large Group Discussion</td>
<td>Canadian Geotechnical Journal, Volume 34, No. 4, 1999</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Approach and Observations

- Topic Discussions
  - 1 – 2 times early in semester
  - Allows students to contribute in small groups of familiar individuals as a starting point for discussions.
  - Internal focus initially encourages a more in depth analysis and potential extension of ideas beyond initial topic.
  - Provides opportunities for students to contribute to larger group discussion by presenting group rather than individual thoughts.

- Table Discussions
  - 1 – 2 times early to mid semester
  - Allows for small discussions on multiple topics and the ability to transition between topics.
  - Encourages greater awareness of group discussions as each individual is ultimately responsible for reporting out on a section of the discussion.
  - Requires large group participation as individuals are responsible for presenting group thoughts on particular subject.

- Jigsaw Discussions
  - 1 – 2 times mid to late semester
  - Allows students to listen and gain additional perspectives in initial discussions.
  - Requires students to participate in secondary small group discussions while allowing for presentation of group rather than individual thoughts.
  - Introduces students to wider group of classmates in smaller group settings.

- Large Group
  - 1 – 2 times late semester
  - The ultimate goal of the course which is the ability for all students to engage in a larger group discussion.
  - Builds on previous experiences designed to make student more comfortable contributing in a larger group setting.
  - Topic direction heavily influenced by students with only minimal input from instructor.

- Employing a framework that scaffolds allows for students to gain confidence in expressing opinions in group discussions.
- Providing options that allow for contributions that may or may not be personal thoughts increases the likelihood that hesitant students will contribute (reduced fear of “wrong” or “unpopular” response).
- Providing multiple approaches to discussions also keeps the bi-weekly activity fresh and different.

Conclusion

- Incorporation of student-led group discussions to further increase the course focus on students over faculty.
- Solicitation of student questions in a more intentional manner to form the basis (or partial basis) of discussion activities.
- More formalized assessment of activities to determine significance of approach to classroom discussions.