Guidelines for Facilitating Productive Group Dialogues

The following guidelines intend to facilitate productive group discussions, particularly around controversial or complex issues. Whether in the classroom, or as part of a program hosted by a student organization, it is helpful to structure discussions in a way that defines boundaries for the process and provides some degree of closure for the discussion.

Group discussions are an important time to explicitly review expectations for respecting a range of perspectives and experiences in the room.

When planning a group discussion, it is beneficial to consider the following:

Identifying a Clear Purpose

Starting a discussion with clearly articulated objectives can help to shape the nature of the discussion. Examples of a clear purpose for discussion include:

- Increasing awareness about the topic by providing information that is not generally addressed in information discussions
- Promoting critical thinking by helping participants understand complex issues
- Enhancing skills for dialogue that students can use in other venues

Establishing Ground Rules or Guidelines

Establishing ground rules at the outset of the discussion, or providing participants a pre-established set of ground rules that they can accept or modify, will help keep the discussion on track and promote civil discourse. Examples of ground rules include:

- Listen respectfully and without interrupting
- Listen actively to understand others' views
- Criticize ideas, not individuals
- Commit to learning, not debating
- Comment to share information, not to persuade
- Allow everyone who wants it the chance to speak
- Avoid assumptions about any member of the discussion
- Do not ask individuals to speak for their (perceived) social group

Please remember this is still a university-sanctioned event, and all participants are bound to the University Code of Conduct. Anyone in violation of the Code of Conduct or the established ground rules will be removed from the discussion.

This discussion is a safe space, where individuals should feel that they are valued and welcomed. The discussion should support academic discourse, and not be seen as an attack.

Resources

The following resources are provided should participants in the discussion need them

- *Student and Alumni Affairs* studentaffairs@apus.edu
  - o The Office of Student and Alumni Affairs provides oversight for the university's student organizations, and is a resource for questions related to membership/recruiting, chapter management/activities, and campus leadership/volunteerism.
- *University Chaplain* chaplain@apus.edu
  - o The Chaplain is a helpful resource who can offer information and connections for both civilian and military students who are struggling and are in need of emotional and spiritual support.
- *Title IX Information* TitleIX@apus.edu
  - o An individual who has questions or concerns regarding possible discrimination based on sex should contact the University's Title IX Coordinator at titleix@apus.edu.
- *University Conduct Officer* disputes@apus.edu
  - o American Public University System (the University) is dedicated to open communication and the exchange of ideas and/or concerns. Recognizing that, at times, a student may wish to voice a concern, the University has this procedure for addressing students' general grievances, provided in the Student Handbook. Students with concerns can reach out to disputes@apus.edu.
- *Crisis Text Line* Text HOME to 741741
  - o Crisis Text Line serves anyone, in any type of crisis, providing access to free, 24/7 support via a medium people already use and trust: text.