Discussion Group Leaders' Guidelines

ANTH 495
DISCUSSION GROUP LEADERS' GUIDELINES

An itemized list of duties appears below, followed by detailed instructions. I realize that the instructions are rather lengthy, but since we don't meet on a regular basis as a group for me to discuss all these matters with you, it is very important that you read this thoroughly and refer back to it as needed. I will expect all of you to follow the directions I provide here. If you have any questions or concerns please let me know!

BRIEF LIST OF DUTIES

Meet once a week with 20 -25 students for a 50 minute period
Read (or at least skim so you are familiar!) 201 assignments
Facilitate discussion of exercises, readings, and topics related to the course
Assign completion points on students' written work
Record scores, keep records, and provide the T.A. with student scores on a weekly basis
Write a preliminary expectations paper
Keep a weekly journal of your discussion group experiences
Write a reflections paper at the end of the quarter
Attend some of the classes in rotation with other discussion group leaders and take notes
Post notes for other discussion group leaders
Monitor at some exams
Participate in "Meet the Anthropologists"
Notify the T.A. and me a.s.a.p. if you cannot make your own group due to family emergency, illness

PLEASE know that the T.A. and I are always available to help you with any questions, concerns, etc. throughout the quarter as you provide this very valuable opportunity for students to explore cultural anthropology in an interactive way through activities and discussions.

DETAILS OF DUTIES

For this three credit "course", your main responsibility is to facilitate a weekly discussion group that will often include exercises (that you lead during group meeting time), discussion of students' completed exercises and readings done in preparation for a given group, and various topics covered in Anth 201. Most weeks there will be a mix of doing an exercise in the group, discussing students' findings from the assignments they opt to do for points, and discussion of readings/topics of the week. Discussion groups begin the second week of class, skip Thanksgiving week, and end in Dead Week. In all, there are nine discussion group meetings.

Some of what follows will make more sense once you have looked at the Anth 201 Blackboard, to which you will also have access in order for you to know what course requirements and directions students read on their Anth 201 Blackboard.

It is my expectation that there will always be some students who will have prepared the exercise assignment for the week; others who will have opted to write responses to readings assigned for the week; and, at times, some students who will have chosen to do both for a given week. (These help students to earn points and must be brought to the discussion group. Students are expected to be able to informally discuss results from these during the discussion group. Please read over the directions for their discussion group related assignments very carefully. They are posted at the Anth 201 Blackboard site under Discussion Group Assignments).
At the end of each discussion group meeting you will collect all papers and paperwork associated with exercises and reading responses done by students and afterwards assign completion points. If any assignments are incomplete, place them with an explanation of the problem into the T.A.’s mailbox in AH 315e. She will see that they get back to the students via you or in some other way. Points and attendance points must be reported to the T.A. by Monday. Take all papers back to the following discussion group (with points indicated on the papers) and return them to the students. If students have any questions about points (e.g. if they did not receive full completion points, please refer them to the T.A.)

Given the importance of points students earn in the groups, it is important for you to submit point information to the T.A. on a weekly basis. You will receive further directions on that from Katie, the T.A. Tell students to keep all work passed back to them as well, since it is their record of their scores.

Reading response sheets may also be useful as a study aid.

In the past, I encouraged discussion group leaders to attend as many lectures as possible in order to know what was being covered. I have rethought that policy and now ask you to set up a rotating schedule among yourselves so that you can take notes to post for ALL the discussion group leaders. In addition, two of you should plan to come to class on each exam day to help pass out tests and to monitor. Those of you who may have a time conflict with certain class days might volunteer for the exam days. Hopefully, everyone will spend about the same amount of time in these capacities; I hope you can sort this out among yourselves fairly. Please use the Discussion Board area here to set up your rotating schedules. When you have settled on who will cover which days, I would like to have you email the schedule with names and dates to myself and to the T.A. (see contact info here under Faculty and T.A.) If you are not using WWU’s email address system that includes cc. wwu.edu, please post your email address (and phone number too if you don't mind) so that if one of you becomes ill and can't make it to your discussion group, you can find another group leader to cover for you that day.

When it is your turn to be in class, please post your notes on the Discussion Board for other discussion group leaders within a day of your attendance unless you come on a Friday in which case, you should have them posted by the following Monday. There are 11 weeks of class (Thanksgiving Week has only two days so perhaps whoever takes notes that week can also take the first week which is also short).

I will be gone the twice during the quarter to attend conferences but Katie, the T.A., will oversee classes and your groups will meet. I would like two or three of you to plan to be in class days that I am to be gone so that you can help with anything that might come up (more on that through announcements later).

On Monday, October 2, I would like ALL of you to come to class (please be there 10 minutes early if possible) to participate in a “Meet the Anthropologists“ presentation in which you “impersonate” a famous anthropologist for 1-2 minutes by holding up a large xerox photo (I provide) and answering some questions that I, the “host” of the show ask you (you will know ahead of time what I am going to ask.) Afterwards, you get to introduce yourselves as yourselves and as the students’ discussion group leaders. I will provide you with more information on this "performance" the first week of the quarter so you know who you will be and you can dig up the most important facts about the anthropologist you are assigned. You will get the photo posters to hold in class as part of the presentation.

I will register you for the Blackboard Anth 201 class so that you know what the assigned readings are for the week, when tests are scheduled, etc. Access to the 201 Blackboard also gives you access to the weekly exercises/reading responses that students can select for point accumulation. Please read through the 201 Blackboard information as carefully as someone enrolled in the class (one who wants to excel, of course!)

It is ESSENTIAL that you read (or carefully skim) all the assigned reading associated with a given week BEFORE your discussion group meets. You may pick up a copy of the Miller text to use for the quarter from Viva in the main office. Please don't forget to return them at the end of the quarter since the publishers are tightening their desk copy policies. Unfortunately I don't have copies of the Ethnographic Essays book for you to borrow so you will need to buy that book (maybe used from Amazon or some other book source?). There will be one copy on reserve at Wilson Library. I encourage you to take your books to the group (and encourage students to bring theirs) so that people
can look up points, refer to statements, etc. This helps to model for students how to STUDY a piece of writing to extract main ideas, theoretical positions, etc.

**WHAT YOU WILL DO WITH YOUR GROUP**

You will meet with your discussion group (approximately 20-25 students) once a week during the regular class period of 3 to 3:50 on Wednesdays. Room assignments will be posted on an announcement soon. **Please! Always be prompt,** and if you know that you MUST miss a session, please notify the T.A. and me AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. Collect the students’ written work at the end of the session so that you can record students’ attendance and completion of assignments with the correct number of points. Before returning materials to them the following week, use ink to record points earned on the top (2 pts. for responses; 15 pts. for exercises, 6 pts. for questions--that's 2 pts. per question.) You are not grading the papers--as undergrads you aren't allowed to do that--but simply recording the scores of completed work. Impress upon students that you are just giving points for completion and that you aren't authorized to "grade." Also be clear with them that you are a discussion group leader and not a T.A. You CAN and SHOULD write encouraging remarks such as "Well done" and "Another interesting thing to think about is ----." If the responses are incomplete (e.g. different parts of an exercise not completed), please see that the T.A. gets them (either give them to her after class or place in her mailbox in AH 315e) with an explanatory note from you. She will score them and contact you so that you can pick them up. After recording points, see that students get their papers returned to them in the next group. Since there are inevitably students who miss groups, take all unreturned papers with you to every session to return. Keep careful records of points (the T.A. will give you a template for that). Although you will give the T.A. a record of points weekly, it is important to keep a record yourself for the duration of the quarter. Remind students to keep all their written work until the end of the quarter in case there are any mix-ups.

As indicated within the 201 Blackboard, students can earn more than the 2 points per session that attendance confers each week. Five times during the quarter, students have the opportunity to earn an additional 15 points in a session by completing an exercise that corresponds to a given discussion group session. There are a total of 8 exercises to choose from, but only five can be done for points. Each exercise is worth 15 points. If they complete five exercises, they can earn 75 points total. Please be clear with students that exercises intended for other weeks cannot substitute for exercise points for the correct week (on the 201 Blackboard there is an explanation of what to do if a student is ill the day of a group if he/she had already prepared the exercise).

Students can also earn points through discussion groups by completing five different sets of questions (out of the nine possibilities). Each questions set is worth 6 points (2 pts. per question). They must answer all three questions from any given week’s set of questions. If they do all five sets of questions, they can earn 30 points.

So: If they attend all the discussion groups (and get 20 pts --2 pts. a session and an extra 2 pts. for attending all), and do all five exercises and all five responses to questions they can earn a total of 125 points through discussion groups. For clarification on these point opportunities visit the 201 Blackboard and read the Course Information and Discussion Group Assignments sections.

Exercises begin the third week of the quarter since the first time that you meet with your group in Week Two you will be spending time with students doing some "ice-breaker." get-to-know-each-other work (details will be provided to you in Week One). Please note, however, that students can do question responses beginning the second week, your first meeting.

Beginning in Week Two, the T.A. and/or I will alert you to ideas and best practices in leading the upcoming week's 20-30 minute discussion based around the exercise for that week. We will communicate through the announcement section of this Blackboard and/or through email. Since I anticipate that there were always be a few students who prepare for and complete the paperwork for an exercise, those students will be central in the discussion, BUT other students should be drawn into the questioning, reflection on the outcomes, etc. of the exercise and we will try to give you pointers on how to best achieve that.
It's a good idea to review the exercises and questions that students can respond to for points so that you are prepared to lead a constructive discussion about points that can be made.

Any given discussion session should have the first 10-15 minutes or so devoted to a discussion of the Ethnographic Essays readings done by everyone that week (and those who answered the questions might be delegated to be discussion group leaders for smaller clusters of four students in break out groups). Everyone is suppose to do the reading for the week, so hopefully you can get everyone to participate in discussion of how the Ethnographic Essays reading relates to other topics linked to the course week's overall topic. 15-20 minutes can be spent discussing what those students who do the exercise for the week found out and how it relates to the Ethnographic Essays, Miller's chapter(s), class lecture, etc. for the week. Occasionally, you will receive directions ahead of time for a quick activity to be done DURING the discussion group that will supplement discussion of the assigned exercise for the week. You will receive directions for these occasional in-group activities the week prior to a session.

Your facilitator's role for everything done in the discussion group will be to help students make connections to what they are learning in class, through readings, in other classes, and in their own lives.

Any remainder time in the 50 minute period can be devoted to questions students may have on other assigned readings, as well as concepts covered in class, and/or topics that are interesting to them and relevant to the week's topics. You have a little leeway in terms of timing on different components of the session--sometimes students get very caught up in a particular topic and we want to allow for that enthusiasm and interest to have air-time.

PREPARING FOR YOUR END OF QUARTER REFLECTIONS PAPER

In preparation for writing a reflections paper that is due by noon on the first day of Finals Week, you will 1) write a preliminary 1-2 page paper on your goals for being a discussion group leader, your strengths going into this role, your fears, etc. during the first week of the quarter and 2) keep a weekly journal once discussion groups are underway in which you make weekly entries as soon after your group meets as possible. Your journal entries might address: what went well, what surprised you about students' reactions, what you want to work on in your facilitation techniques in the future, etc.

For your end-of-the-quarter reflections paper, you are to draw on your preliminary thoughts paper and your journal notes to write about your experiences and realizations as a discussion group leader. On Monday, December 11 (no later than noon): turn in your preliminary paper, your journal, and a 3-5 page reflections essay that discusses such matters as: your original expectations and how those were or were not realized, what you learned about yourself as a facilitator and what you learned about the benefits (and maybe drawbacks as well?) of the discussion group experience for students and for yourself.

WHAT TO DO WITH STUDENT EXAM ANXIETY

The week before an exam, especially the first one, students often turn their thoughts to the exam. Personnel from the Tutorial and Academic Skills Center will give a study preparation session before the first test and the T.A. will also offer a review session. This information will be mentioned in class and is in the students' schedule. I will also show students sample multiple choice questions in class to help prepare them for the tests. Despite all of this, students may still direct some worry-questions about tests to you. If need be, take a few minutes to tell them that you don't get to see the exams ahead of time, but that you know (since I am telling you now and will be telling them in class) that I try to include questions from every facet of the course: readings, lectures, films, guest speakers, etc. About half the questions will come from readings and half from classroom information. Please remind them that there will be study guides posted on their Blackboard and a special review session on course content before every exam. Also direct them to the Tutorial and Academic Skills Center in Old Main for general help. They can see the T.A. or me during our office hours with any questions, concerns, etc. It's fine, especially before the first test, to be reassuring if the subject of the test comes up, but discussion about the exam and help available to them shouldn't take up more than a few minutes. Students have many outlets for exam support and are informed of those in class and on their Blackboard.
THE FIRST MEETING

The discussion group is an opportunity for students to delve into assigned readings and planned exercises in order to better understand ideas and concepts; to make connections between class, readings, and exercises; to hear what others' thoughts are about issues; to express ideas and feelings about what they are learning; and to raise questions about anthropological findings and approaches. Make it clear from the beginning that your role is to facilitate discussion and their role is to do most of the questioning and talking. Encourage them to talk to each other (not just you). That is why you want to use their names as much as possible and encourage them to use one another's names too. A skilled facilitator creates an atmosphere of support and "stands back" to let students learn by exploring ideas together. If you hear yourself talking quite frequently or going on at length for several minutes, something needs to be adjusted!

The first discussion group will be a time to establish a climate of inclusion. You can facilitate this by helping people to relax and get to know one another. The T.A. and I are going to give you some ideas on ice-breakers and ways to help all of you learn names.

Establish a climate of respect. Make it clear that there is room for differences of opinion, but no room for disrespectful behaviors. As group leader, you provide a structure (e.g."For the next ten minutes, let's talk about the readings..") and help to keep students on track ("That's really interesting, but let's return to the question that Pat asked"). Speaking of respect: if students voice complaints about the course, the instructor, the T.A., etc., tell them that you know I am interested in hearing any of their concerns and that they should see me, email me, or call me to discuss them. It is not your job to field complaints or negative statements, and it is much better to have students be direct with me about any concerns they have. Discussion group time is not designed as a time for complaining about tests, etc. Be diplomatic, but quickly direct them to me or the T.A. and then get them back on track of discussing the material.

You can offer information that would expand or illuminate a discussion, but please avoid creating a context in which students think they must look to you for the "right answer." When a student asks a question, wait for other students to respond and gently prompt them if they seem to be reluctant. "What do you think about that Dan?" Don't be too quick to fill in the silences with remarks of your own. Calling on a shy student to contribute a question in the session can facilitate involvement and interaction. "Lisa, what was the question you came up with for one of the articles?" Or, "What did the rest of you understand from the point Dr. Hammond made about x,y,z?.

HERE'S MORE INFORMATION ABOUT DISCUSSIONS:

Since all students will be responsible for the readings assigned (see course schedule on 201 Blackboard), they should all be able to talk about readings (not just the students who have written responses to readings). Get a dialogue going! Try having them ask each other questions; you might give them 3 minutes to compose some questions and then break into groups of 4 and later come back together and share a few of the most interesting questions/reactions. Ask students what they found interesting, disturbing, perplexing, etc. about the readings.

I suggest that you try a range of strategies to get discussions started. Once or twice you might utilize "quick writes" in which you ask students to take two minutes to write down something. For example, ask them to anonymously write down questions that some aspect of the course raises for them; read a few and get students to react and discuss. You cannot possibly incorporate everyone's written work into every session, but, if possible, think of ways that over the quarter you can draw on EVERYONE's contributions as much as possible. Some people are much quicker to volunteer than others. Quiet students often have very well thought out things to say.

A few other ideas you might draw upon. You can encourage students to discuss their thoughts from the questions posed in the photo captions of Miller's book and to go over any questions or confusions that have arisen from reading Miller's text or from class lecture. A good strategy is to have them bring class notes to the discussion group and see if there is consensus about what the main points were from a certain class period or topic.
Encourage students to make connections. What does this essay have to do with anything covered in Miller's book, in class, in your experiences? Sometimes students really need help in making connections to understand why an assignment or a reading is relevant to anything else. This is higher level thinking and you can help students learn how to do it. Also encourage critical thinking (critical as in "significant" and not necessarily negative).

CREATE AN OPTIMAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENT:

PLEASE ARRANGE YOUR GROUP IN A CIRCLE to promote eye contact among students as well as between yourself and them. Don't use the format of you at the front and them in desk lines. We are stuck with that in the lecture hall, but discussion groups are the time we can break out of that mold.

Learn students' names as quickly as you can and use them often. In the first few sessions, have them create and use name cards with first names printed in LARGE letters in colorful markers. If they place these on their desks, everyone can learn each other's name more easily.

Encourage students to bring up questions and don't be afraid to say you don't know the answer. The TA or I might be able to help you afterwards and you can relay the information on in the next discussion group.

Don't let one or only a few students monopolize all the "air time" and don't let students stray too far from a relevant subject. Always encourage student efforts even when remarks seem naive or hopelessly ethnocentric. Try to couch things in a positive light: "That's a common response, but another way to think about it is xxxx." Try to help students feel that there are no stupid or inappropriate questions. Foster an atmosphere in which students feel free to grapple with some of the tough issues that 201 topics raise. You are the facilitator. A smoothly run group reflects your ability to do the "backstage work".

The discussion group is a context for students to learn from one another and you. Impress upon them that it is a discussion format that will work most effectively for them if they participate. You may wish to break your whole group into smaller groups of 4-6 at times. This has the great advantage of letting more people speak more of the time. For shy students this is much less intimidating. You can "float" from one group to another when you do this and bring the small groups back together for final remarks or observations.

I will be giving students a chance to make evaluative, anonymous remarks about the discussion group mid-quarter. This is done to provide feedback when you can still use it. The T.A. and/or I will try to make a visit to your group once during the quarter too if I can (and/or send the T.A.) and will tell you when I plan to come. The visit is not meant to intimidate or make you nervous!!! It's a chance for me to see you and your group in action.

CONGRATULATIONS!
You have almost completed reading the instructions for how to be a 201 Discussion Group Leader. I want to end on a pedagogical note. The reason that discussion groups offer so much to students is that it gives them a chance to learn by talking and listening to others' ideas and opinions. Educators know that the more sensory "channels" engaged in learning, the more learning that takes place. By DOING exercises and then discussing them in ways that encourage critical thought and reflexive thinking, students are able to ENGAGE WITH anthropology. The small size and personable interactions helps to alleviate students' feelings of being "just another number" in a large lecture class.

Your role as a facilitator is extremely important. Being a skillful discussion group leader calls for careful preparation, on-the-spot skills, and thoughtful reflection of ways to improve IF you are doing it right. Thank you for committing to give your best efforts in undertaking the important work of leading a discussion group!