



Learn to Discuss • Discuss to Learn



Wisconsin Center for Education Research  
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION | UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

# The Discussion Project

Academic Staff Institute

4.13.2022

# Introductions

Please share with your neighbor:

- Your name
- Pronouns, if you'd like
- Your department
- Something you love



# Other introduction ideas

- What is something people would be surprised to know about you?
- What is a new place (country, city) you'd like to visit?
- Where did you grow up and what is one thing your town / city is known for?



# Today's Session

- Overview of The Discussion Project
- Experience and debrief a couple of student talk and discussion activities



# What is the Discussion Project?

Free course for any UW-Madison instructor, or a fee-based course for individuals or institutions.

- In-person (3 full days)
- Online (seven 2-hour Zoom sessions)



Teaching Team



# What is the Discussion Project?

A mixed methods research study supported by

- Andrew W. Mellon Foundation
- Dean of the School of Education
  - Dean Diana Hess is the PI
- UW-Madison Provost and Chancellor



# Research Questions

1. How does The Discussion Project course and resources affect instructors' abilities to create and facilitate high-quality classroom discussion?



# Research Questions

2. How does The Discussion Project affect how students experience and learn from discussions in courses taught by instructors trained by The Discussion Project?





# Findings

- Welcoming classroom environment
- Preparation
- Small groups
- Structure
- Effective questions



# Findings

- Synchronous video conference discussion can be effective
- Asynchronous (written) discussion is challenging and has serious limitations



# Research Questions

3. What are the best mechanisms to both scale The Discussion Project and extend it to other institutions of higher education with demographically different students than UW-Madison (the institution in which it was developed)?



# Discussion Self-Report

Purpose: To reflect on and share your own discussion experiences, activate thinking, consider goals, try out a discussion activity, and to get to know each other!

## Index Card

Write answers to these questions:

Thinking of yourself as discussant...

- What are your discussion strengths?
- What is something you'd like to improve upon regarding discussion?



# Discussion Self-Report: Partner Share

1. Introduce yourself and share what you wrote about yourself -2 min
2. Your partner will provide paraphrase what you said -30 sec

*What I heard you say that you're good at is \_\_\_\_ and what you want to work on is \_\_\_\_."*

3. Switch roles and repeat the process



# Discussion Self-Report Debrief

- How did the paraphrase go? Did you find it easy or difficult?
- How was it different having been able to write your answer ahead of time versus having to answer on the spot?
- What does the room feel like now, compared to when we first started this morning?



# Discussion Self-Report

## Other ideas for a self-report:

1. When I think about taking chemistry I feel \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_. [comfort with the subject matter & skills]
2. Discussion in this class might help me learn \_\_\_\_\_ better.
3. How would you describe your experience of classroom discussion in your high school?



# Whole Group Discussion

Please write for 2 minutes on the following prompt:

*What might be reasons instructors limit discussion and how might we address those reasons?*

Research indicates that students benefit from classroom discussion in terms of engagement and learning of course content and skills. However, in many college classrooms, most of the speaking / talk is instructor talk and there's limited discussion.





# Norms

Presume positive intentions

Aim for shared participation

Engage respectfully



# Learn to Discuss

# Discuss to Learn



# Reach: Discussion Project

At UW-Madison -online & in-person

- 630 instructors
- 117 departments (of 162 departments at UW-Madison)
- All schools and colleges

Other institutions of higher education

- Erikson Institute
- Morgan State University -HBCU
- Northeastern Illinois University –HSI



# Discussion Project Curriculum & Instruction

Learn-by-doing

Participants...

- Witness modeling
- Experience and practice
- Debrief to reflect

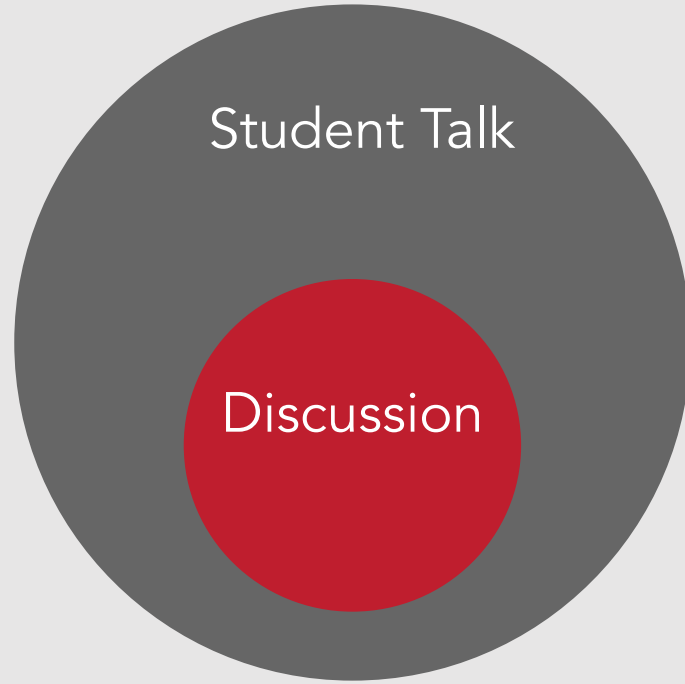


# Modules

1. Building Community
2. Defining Discussion



# Student Talk and Discussion



# The Discussion Project's Definition of Discussion

Discussion is focused inquiry through speaking & listening that is purposeful, broadly collaborative, and that leads to deeper understanding through analysis of different perspectives.



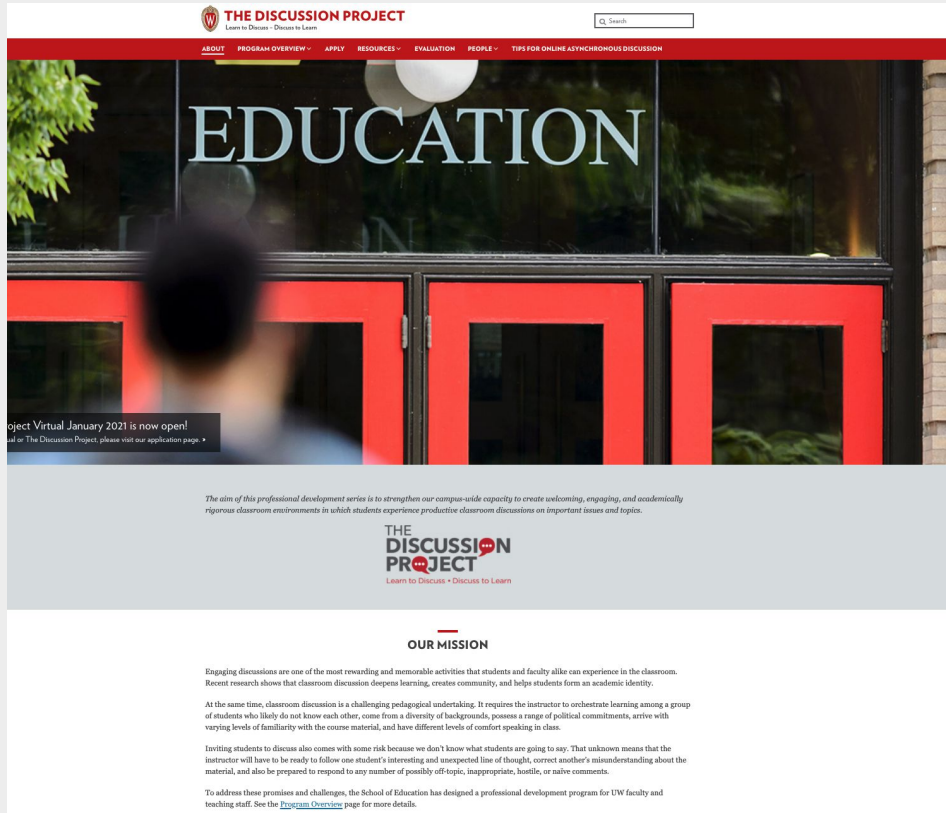
# Modules

1. Building Community
2. Defining Discussion
3. Facilitating Whole Class Interactions
4. Structuring Discussion & Crafting Questions
5. Planning & Assessing Discussion
6. Critiquing Discussion Plans
7. Maintaining Community





# Thank You!



The screenshot shows the homepage of the Discussion Project website. At the top, there is a navigation bar with the logo 'THE DISCUSSION PROJECT' and the tagline 'Learn to Discuss • Discuss to Learn'. Below the navigation bar is a large banner image of a building entrance with red doors and the word 'EDUCATION' in large white letters. A search bar is located in the top right corner. Below the banner, there is a section titled 'OUR MISSION' with a red horizontal line above it. The text in this section describes the goal of the program to create welcoming and academically rigorous classroom environments. At the bottom of the screenshot, there is a small red speech bubble icon.

THE DISCUSSION PROJECT  
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Search

ABOUT PROGRAM OVERVIEW APPLY RESOURCES EVALUATION PEOPLE TIPS FOR ONLINE ASYNCHRONOUS DISCUSSION

EDUCATION

Project Virtual January 2021 is now open!  
Visit the Discussion Project, please visit our application page.

The aim of this professional development series is to strengthen our campus-wide capacity to create welcoming, engaging, and academically rigorous classroom environments in which students experience productive classroom discussions on important issues and topics.

THE DISCUSSION PROJECT  
Learn to Discuss • Discuss to Learn

OUR MISSION

Engaging discussions are one of the most rewarding and memorable activities that students and faculty alike can experience in the classroom. Recent research shows that classroom discussion deepens learning, creates community, and helps students form an academic identity.

At the same time, classroom discussion is a challenging pedagogical undertaking. It requires the instructor to orchestrate learning among a group of students who likely do not know each other, come from a diversity of backgrounds, possess a range of political commitments, arrive with varying levels of familiarity with the course material, and have different levels of comfort speaking in class.

Inviting students to discuss also comes with some risk because we don't know what students are going to say. That unknown means that the instructor will have to be ready to follow one student's interesting and unsuspected line of thought, correct another's misunderstanding about the material, and also be prepared to respond to any number of possibly off-topic, inappropriate, hostile, or naive comments.

To address these promises and challenges, the School of Education has designed a professional development program for UW faculty and teaching staff. See the [Program Overview](#) page for more details.

discussion.education.wisc.edu

- Next in-person series are in August 2022 before term begins.
- Next online series in early fall 2022.

