

Ensure Students Are Learning: Faculty Descriptions of Innovative Teaching Practices

Team Debate Project Prepares Students for Research Paper

Innovative Teaching Practice Description:

A small group debate activity gives students the opportunity to gain experience in conducting research, citing sources, presenting findings, and arguing a topic before having to write their individual research papers. The instructor sees the debate activity as a bridge to the outcome of a research paper.

Depending on the size of the class, the instructor selects about four topics and lists them on a signup sheet so that students can form the debate teams and ultimately select their research paper topic. Examples of topics include the following:

- Should college athletes be paid?
- Should more educational dollars be spent on technology?
- Should energy drinks be restricted by age?

Based on their research, students create a thesis statement with two reasons and a position statement in support of and against the topic. Upon completion of the thesis statement, the professor assigns each group to argue for or against their selected topic. Students must use the library database to find articles in support of their position and must create a debate document based on their research. The instructor refers to this document interchangeably as a research paper outline since it also can begin to serve that purpose.

During each debate, students in the audience record their observations of both sides of the argument in a simple two-column template that the instructor provides. This counts as a quiz grade. The structure of the debate includes a 2-minute presentation by each team followed by a 30-second rebuttal. Students in the audience come prepared with questions but can formulate questions on the spot as well. After each debate, the class votes on which side wins the debate, and the winning team members receive three extra points on their research paper.

When all debates have concluded, students complete an evaluation of their team that only the instructor sees. In the evaluation, students report on the perceived percentage of participation associated with each team member. The instructor takes this into consideration for each person's grade on the project.