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STIMULATING LEARNING AND CREATING COURSE INVOLVEMENT THROUGH THE USE OF DEBATES

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A perennial concern of many who have faced students on an ongoing basis is to obtain their involvement, commitment, and enthusiasm. One approach that has been used to achieve this is through the use of debates. This was accomplished in an undergraduate organizational behaviour course by establishing a series of eight debates. Eight teams were formed, requiring each team to engage in two debates each. The debate topics were developed and timed to coincide with their coverage in the course outline. The debate topics are shown in Table 1.

Team Formation and Topic Assignments

The debate teams were allowed to self-select. The team members could have been assigned; however, it was felt that the teams would be able to function more quickly, effectively, and comfortably by permitting them to choose their other team members. The topics were assigned by a lottery. This is, numbers 1 through 8 were drawn by a representative from each team. The topics could have been assigned, or allowed to be self-selected. However, the minimize complaints and/or conflicts, the lottery procedure was used.

Debate and Class Format

The format for the debate was as follows: (1) Each team presented for 10 minutes; (2) a 5-minute planning period followed; (3) a 10-minute question/answer period between the two debating teams; (4) a summary of the learning points made by one of the debating teams was presented by representatives from two of the teams in the 'audience'; (5) a summary of the learning points made by the other debating team was presented by representatives from two of the other teams in the audience; (6) representatives from the remaining two teams reported on which did a better job and why; (7) the rest of the class discussed what the debating teams did that was particularly helpful, and then what they could have done to be more effective; (8) the professor then summarized the learning points presented and added those that should have been made, and discussed what they could have done more effectively.

This format was used in class times of 75 minutes; however, modification may readily be made for sessions of varying time periods. The effective use of debates is more demanding than a traditionally conducted class because the professor, in addition to being knowledgeable about the topics being debated, must constantly be attentive and prepared to comment on the content and on the presentation styles of the debating teams. This may require being alert during a presentation which is far less than stimulating, and being responsive to unexpected interpretations of material and/or topics. However, the payoff in terms of student involvement, interest, learning, and presentation skill development is worth it.

The following information was provided to the students regarding the grading of the debates.

Basis of Evaluation

During the term, you and your group will engage in two debates, each of which will be worth 10% of the final grade. You will be debating a specific, assigned topic. Your group will be graded on the following points: (1) on how clearly and strongly you debate your topic; (2) on how well you

support your position (by research studies and/or examples); (3) on how interestingly you present your position (in this regard, overhead slides and/or handouts may be helpful).

Each debater will be required to divide 100 points amongst his/her team members, excluding him/herself. This division will determine the individual grades each team member will receive. The average grade will be that assigned by the professor to the team. The greater the individual contribution, the more points that person should receive. If it is decided that each contribution was equal, then the 100 points should be split equally and everyone will receive the team grade.

TABLE 1

Debate #	Team #	Debate Topic
1	1	Interviewing is an effective method to use for hiring purposes.
	2	Interviewing is an ineffective method to use for hiring purposes.
2	3	A satisfied employee is a good employee.
	4	A good employee is not a satisfied employee.
3	5	Personality is the key to success.
	6	Personality is not the key to success.
4	7	Organizations must do more to manage stress.
	8	Individuals must do more to manage their stress.
5	2	Goal setting is the most effective motivator.
	3	Money is the most effective motivator.
6	4	A group is often more effective than individuals acting alone.
	5	Individuals acting alone are often more effective than a group.
7	6	Leaders are born, not made.
	7	Leaders are made, not born.
8	8	Organizational politics must be more effectively managed by an organization's senior management.
	1	Organizational politics cannot be effectively managed by an organization's senior management.