# CHECKLIST FOR EFFECTIVE DISCUSSION LEADING

** Be Prepared**

• Carefully consider your objectives for a discussion. What do you hope to accomplish? What topic(s) would you like discussed? What might be considered a tangent? Do students know enough about the topics to discuss them?

• Use discussion to help students link concepts to their own lives; to encourage students to evaluate, material critically; and to address topics that are open-ended, have no clear resolution, and/or can be effectively addressed through multiple approaches.

• Provide students opportunities to "warm up" through brief (1-4 minute) in-class writing exercises on the topic, 3-5 person mini-discussion, or a homework exercise the previous session that focuses students on the topic(s) to be covered.

** Facilitate, Don't Dominate**

• Provide clear guidelines for participation. Discuss them beforehand, stick to them, and enforce them during the discussion. Maintain an atmosphere of safety and respect. Use open-ended questions, ask students for clarification, examples, and definitions. Summarize student responses without taking a clear stand one way or another. Invite students to address one another and not always "go through" you. Pause, give students time to reflect on your summaries or others' comments. Stimulate and challenge, don't intimidate or threaten. Don't dwell on one student for too long; deal openly with conflicts, don't ignore them; listen to your students-attempt to learn from them.

• Control the "talkers," and call on the "non-talkers." But, if a "non-talker" isn't ready to contribute, don't persist.

• Consider taking notes of main points on a chalkboard or overhead, but, if you do, write everyone's ideas down.

• Toward the end of the discussion, review the main ideas, the thread of the discussion, and conclusions.

** Evaluate**

• Notice how many students participated in the discussion.

• Notice who did and who did not participate (look for gender and racial biases).

• Check the tone of the discussion-was it stimulating and respectful? Ask students about their reactions to the discussion session.