



# Teaching Concerns

Newsletter of the Teaching Resource Center for Faculty and Teaching Assistants

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## Encouraging Students' Participation in Discussions

by Marva A. Barnett, Director, TRC (French)

A telling comment came from a second-year student participating in a focus group commenting on my French course last May: "All my classes have a percent for participation, but you never have a clue, like whether that's a joke or not. But, early in the semester, [the teacher] gave us an indication of what our participation grade was, an idea of what to work on. So you knew that she was really paying attention. So we knew that it actually mattered."

She was referring to the form I use to let students know both what grade they have so far earned for their participation in discussions and what they need to do to improve that grade. (For information on how to grade participation, see "Grading Class Participation" by Martha Maznevski, Asst. Prof. of Commerce.). People work harder when they know that their work is noticed and when they learn how well they are doing. It takes just a few seconds per student to complete individual forms; I distribute these about a month into the course and then again, if necessary, a month later. Whenever students see their current grade and my suggestions, their participation improves perceptibly for the next several class meetings.

## Participation Feedback Form

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Your participation grade in class so far: \_\_\_\_\_

How can you improve this grade? Follow the suggestions checked below:

\_\_\_\_\_ Come to all the classes.

\_\_\_\_\_ Volunteer when you have a chance to.

\_\_\_\_\_ Show that you have well prepared the text or the lesson by offering good questions or good comments.

\_\_\_\_\_ Push yourself a bit by trying to say something more difficult, analytical, or imaginative than usual.

\_\_\_\_\_ Comment via e-mail in a more detailed and analytical way.

\_\_\_\_\_ Try to move the discussion forward by responding to your colleagues' ideas.