The recent ‘#Fees Must Fall’ protest has evoked a wide range of emotions: from fear and anger to passion and hope. It is important to bring our class together again during the mini-semester by ensuring that every student is offered the opportunity to learn and improve in their learning. Classroom discussions is an excellent strategy for enhancing student motivation, fostering intellectual agility, and encouraging inclusive classroom participation. Classroom discussion creates opportunities for students to practice and sharpen a number of critical academic skills, which includes the ability to articulate and defend positions, consider different points of view, and enlist and evaluate evidence (Some sections adapted from Davis, 1993; Brookfield and Preskill, 1999).

**Benefits of Discussion**

1. It helps students explore a diversity of perspectives.
2. It increases students’ awareness of and tolerance for ambiguity or complexity.
3. It helps student recognize and investigate their assumptions.
4. It encourages attentive, respectful listening.
5. It develops new appreciation for continuing differences.
6. It increases intellectual agility.
7. It helps student become connected to a topic.
8. It shows respect for students’ voices and experiences.
9. It helps student learn the processes and habits of democratic discourse.
10. It affirms students as co-creators of knowledge.
11. It develops the capacity for clear communication of ideas and meaning.
12. It develops habits of collaborative learning.
13. It increases breadth and makes students more empathetic.
14. It helps students develop skills of synthesis and integration.
15. It leads to transformation.

(Brookfield, and Preskill 1999)

**Asking Good Questions**

Good questions are the key to a productive discussion. These include not only the questions you use to jump-start discussion but also the questions you use to probe for deeper analysis, ask for clarification or examples, explore implications, etc. But questions can also be used to stimulate the recall of prior knowledge, promote comprehension, and build critical-thinking skills.

It is therefore helpful to think about the various kinds of questions you might ask and the cognitive skills they require to answer (Tofade et al 2013).
Effective questions strategies

- Effective questions are meaningful and understandable to students.
- Depending on the level of comprehension of a topic, students may be able to handle questions of various levels of difficulty. Effective questions challenge students but are not too difficult.
- Students benefit from answering easier questions before difficult ones.
- Tofade et al (2013) provides a useful sample table of types of non-hierarchical questions (below) that can be used to facilitate discussion as a teaching tool lists question structures and how they determine the way the students can respond.

Some examples of ineffective questions:

- Too vague. Students are unsure of what is being asked and may refrain from attempting to answer.
- Too loaded. Students may guess at what you want them to say rather than tell you what they think.
- "Does everyone understand?" "Any other questions?" Most students will not reply and even if they do, their answer is only a report of their own assessment of their comprehension.
- Yes/No questions or other closed-ended questions can be useful for drawing on previous knowledge to get started on a new topic, but are dead ends for discussions and deeper engagement.

### Types of Non-hierarchical Questions Used as Teaching Tools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question Type</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Sample Question (Content Area: Analgesics and Pain Management)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Convergent</td>
<td>Closed, not offering many options; converges on a single or narrow list of “best” answers; encourages focused, succinct response.</td>
<td>What percentage of the population is a poor metabolizer, and therefore, unlikely to have an adequate analgesic response to codeine?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divergent</td>
<td>Open, having many responses; permits the exploration of diverse perspectives; encourages dialog</td>
<td>Codeine isn’t used as much today for analgesia as it once was. Why?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focal</td>
<td>Student must choose or justify a position.</td>
<td>Would you recommend the use of a fentanyl patch in a patient with a history of substance abuse? If so, why? If not, why not?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brainstorm</td>
<td>Questions that generate a list of ideas or viewpoints.</td>
<td>If you could create the ideal analgesic product, one that could be widely used in any population for various causes of pain, what features would it have?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shotgun</td>
<td>Questions containing several content areas with no particular link.</td>
<td>What are the potential risks of using NSAIDs? When was aspirin first synthesized? Methadone is available in what dosage forms? What patient-specific data should be obtained prior to initiating tramadol therapy? What is the best way to manage opioid-induced constipation?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funnel</td>
<td>Multiple questions starting broadly and gradually leading to more focused inquiry.</td>
<td>What federal laws and regulations apply to the sale of narcotic analgesics? What are the record keeping requirements for a pharmacy that stocks and dispenses narcotic analgesics? What are the potential benefits and risks of the narcotic prescription monitoring program requirement in our state? Can a pharmacist legally dispense an orally transmitted prescription order for methadone?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Abbreviations: NSAIDs = nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs.

### References