



Structured Academic Controversy

What is it?

A highly structured, small group discussion that is designed to help students achieve three goals: 1) to gain a deeper understanding of an issue, 2) to find common ground, and 3) to make a decision based on evidence and logic.

Procedure:

1. Identify the controversy central to the discussion.
2. Create the best case for your position, just as a lawyer might
 - a. Organize and frame compelling and well-reasoned arguments.
 - b. Arguments should not be based on opinion and rhetoric, but on facts and data, as much as is possible.
3. Side A presents their argument to side B, while side B listens carefully and takes notes.
4. Side B then restates side A's arguments (to show understanding) and asks clarification questions.
5. Side A confirms and/or clarifies their arguments.
6. Repeat steps 3-6, but with side B presenting its case and side A engaged in active listening.
7. Both teams evaluate the other team's arguments.
 - a. Each team determines and shares what they believe to be the strongest and weakest arguments made by their counterpart
8. Synthesize and work toward consensus

Expectations

1. Participants do their best to understand and articulate the most compelling arguments in support of their team's position.
 - a. Within sources, search out supporting evidence.
 - b. Be able to articulate ideas in your own words.
2. Participants demonstrate active listening.
 - a. Give the opposing team your full attention when they are speaking.
 - b. Refrain from interrupting.
 - c. Put effort toward processing and understanding what is being said.
 - d. After listening to arguments, check for understanding by summarizing what you heard and asking for clarification.
3. Participants show respect for all individuals.
 - a. Be critical of the ideas and not the people.
 - b. Treat others as you would like to be treated.
 - c. Use respectful speech in reference to the controversy at hand.
4. Participants maintain an open mind about the controversy.
 - a. Try to understand both sides.
 - b. Hold off on making judgment until all argument have been presented.
 - c. Be willing to change your position in the issue when evidence and reason clearly indicates you should.



SAC Note-taking Guide

- 1) The specific controversy being examined is: "Should the UDHR protect LGBT Olympics attendees?"
- 2) What is the larger, perennial issue underlying this controversy?
- 3) In the chart below, record notes for your argument in the column on the left and record your opponent's arguments during the debate.

My Position:	Opponents' Position:
Key points to argue:	Key points argued and my reaction:



4) Was any common ground or consensus reached between the two teams? Explain.

5) What were the most contentious points discussed by the group, and/or the greatest obstacles to consensus building?

6) After listening to today's discussion, what is your opinion on this issue?