

# Sustainable Agriculture Seminar

## Presentation and Discussion Guidelines

### Assigning Articles for Presentation Topic

Once a debate resolution has been selected, the co-presenters must select and assign articles for the class to read. Articles must be chosen from reputable peer-reviewed scientific journals and must present evidence directly pertinent to the debate resolution. If possible, readings should be drawn from the *primary* scientific literature, the articles in which scientists first publish their research findings. Commentary articles published in reputable journals are sometimes useful to get the perspective of so-called experts on a particular topic, but generally we want to scrutinize the facts underlying the opinions of the experts rather than hearing their opinions alone.

The number of articles to assign will be based on a judgment call of the presenters. At least one article supporting each opposing side of the resolution would represent the minimum number to assign. The maximum number of articles to assign should be based on the following rule of thumb: seminar participants are expected to devote approximately three hours of study per week in preparation for our discussions. The assigned readings should try to adhere to this rule.

I would like to approve articles before they are assigned to the class. Articles should be submitted for approval at least **one week prior** to your presentation; the earlier the better. I will distribute articles in PDF format by Monday (at the latest) during the week of the presentation.

### Guidelines for Co-presenters

Each co-presenter will be given a maximum of 10 minutes to present arguments for or against the resolution, drawing upon evidence from their supporting research articles. After these opening arguments, each co-presenter will be allowed a two-minute rebuttal. Following the rebuttal period, the discussion will be opened to seminar participants.

After the opening arguments and rebuttal period, the role of co-presenters will shift to that of discussion leaders. A good approach for leading a discussion is to use a number of questions to help focus the group conversation. These questions should be drawn from the important, key elements of the respective articles, and be used to get the group thinking about the ideas posed by the authors. Another approach useful for encouraging discussion is to have participants state whether or not they are convinced by the evidence presented, and to identify strengths and weaknesses of the arguments.

An additional role of the discussion leaders is as group facilitators. A good facilitator encourages participation of *all* group members, and avoids having the discussion dominated by only a few individuals. A good way to encourage participation is to have some questions that are open-ended; in other words, questions that don't have a right or wrong answer. Keep in mind that the best discussions are those in which the entire group participates. Finally, do not be overly concerned if the discussion heads in a direction you had not intended. Obviously, if the group strays too far from the topic you should swiftly bring the discussion back on target, but bear in mind that oftentimes the most fertile discussions are those that proceed in a fashion you may not have foreseen.

### Guidelines for Discussion Participants

Your role as discussion participant is just that: to *participate* in the discussion. The first step in your participation is to *do* the reading. I know you are all busy people with huge demands on your time. I also know you would not be here if you lacked inner strength and the capacity to meet the demands asked of you. It is my job to help you discover and realize your inner strength. The key to keeping up with the reading is to make a plan for fitting it into your busy schedule.

It will be helpful to your discussion participation if you make notes on the readings. All students discover their favorite system of making notes, so just find a system that works for you. I find it easiest to simply scribble notes in the margins of the text. That way my notes and text are in the same place during the discussion.