This document is a companion to the webinar, **Teaching with Quercus: Managing Online Discussions of Difficult Topics** (February 17, 2021), offered by the Centre for Teaching Support & Innovation. Session materials, including a complete reference list, are available at <uoft.me/ctsi-videos>.

## Plan and organize the discussion

**Instructions:** Answer the following questions to help you plan and organize the discussion of a controversial, difficult, sensitive, or challenging subject matter.

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| 1. **Identify your topic**

What is the discussion topic? What makes it controversial, difficult, sensitive, or challenging?  |  |

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| 1. **Discuss *for* learning**

What is the purpose of the discussion? What do I want students to learn from the discussion? How is the topic/discussion connected to the learning outcomes? |  |

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| 1. **Complete pre-reflection**

Does the discussion topic interact with my social identity? If so, how would that impact my engagement with the discussion?What preconceptions/values am I bringing to the discussion? Will these values be shared by my students? Can I consider a framing of this topic/conversation? |  |

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| 1. **Set the tone**

What are the ground rules I will implement for my course? What do I hope to include in my course’s community agreement? |  |

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| 1. **Determine the discussion question/outcome**

What discussion question or prompt will I pose to students? If not planning to organize the discussion with a question, what are the intended outcomes of the discussion? |  |

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| 1. **Ensure student preparedness**

What material(s) will I provide to students in advance to form the basis of discussion? How will I ensure that students are prepared to participate? |  |

## Facilitate the asynchronous or synchronous discussion

**Instructions:** Answer the following questions to help you facilitate the discussion of a controversial, difficult, sensitive, or challenging subject matter.

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| 1. **Consider modality**

Will the discussion be taking place asynchronously or synchronously? Or, a combination of modalities? |  |

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| 1. **Determine a facilitation strategy**

What strategy/ies will I use to facilitate the discussion? Sample strategies include: * **Asynchronous**: Collaborative Wiki, Citational Practice, Peer-to-Peer Learning
* **Synchronous**: Roundtable, Think-Pair/Group-Share, Virtual Post-it Note

Why did I select this/these strategy/ies? |  |

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| 1. **Determine educational technology tools**

What educational technology tools will I use to support the discussion?  |  |

## Address unplanned challenges

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| 1. **Prepare to respond: Plan for scenarios**

In the left column, brainstorm possible scenarios that might arise during the discussion. In the right column, consider how I might address these scenarios in my course.  |
| **Scenario** | **Ways I might address this** |
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## Debrief the discussion

**Instructions:** Answer the following questions to help you and your students debrief the discussion of a controversial, difficult, sensitive, or challenging subject matter.

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| 1. **Facilitate student debrief**

What will I do to help students reflect on and consolidate what they’ve learned during the discussion? |  |

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| 1. **Debrief as facilitator**

As soon as possible after facilitating the discussion, respond to the questions below to debrief how the conversation proceeded. |
| **Debriefing question** | **My reflection** |
| In one sentence, summarize the happenings of the discussion. |  |
| What went particularly well? |  |
| What did not go according to plan? How did I respond? |  |
| How did (will) I obtain feedback from students on their learning experience from the discussion? |  |
| What will I do differently for the next discussion? |  |
| Other notes/questions? |  |

## Selected References

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