

Week 3 Report

What Other Groups Did & Group Dynamics

I am happy to report that we continue to see good dynamics in groups this week, with most facilitators rating their groups' discussions as 'good' or 'excellent'. Each group has begun to develop its own character as students strengthen bonds and get to know each other on a more personal level. Groups began their sessions with a variety of different activities: some began with the Trigger Words activity, in which students were able to share words that they found sparked an emotional reaction, or affected them strongly; others used icebreakers focused on highlighting and appreciating the students' varied cultural backgrounds to get things started.

As students have begun actively engaging one another and collectively digging into topics they have identified as important to them, groups saw a wide variety of discussion topics this week, including the role of third party intervention in national conflicts / crises, the rights of women and minorities in different countries, terrorism, and defining "democracy". Some discussions took a more personal turn, with students moving from politically-focused discussions to more personal reflections on stereotypes and prejudices, what is considered 'taboo' in different cultures, and perspectives on the veil / hijab. Students continue to grow more comfortable with each other and are playing a greater role in leading their group's discussions and taking ownership of the conversation, leading to richer and more meaningful dialogue. In the coming weeks, facilitators will work with students on connecting the political to the personal and digging deeper into the topics discussed.

Attendance & Technology Update

We continue to see lower levels of attendance in this 3rd week of the program than we have in past semesters, with approximately a fourth of students absent from their sessions. While this is in part due to spring break holidays at some of our partner institutions, we've also seen a number of students absent from universities that are currently not on break. **As such, it would be great if you can remind your students that their attendance and participation in the full two-hour group sessions are crucial to the group's ability to have meaningful discussions.**

While most technical issues were resolved in-session, a number of students faced some level of technical difficulty, largely due to mic issues. We are working with the individual students and with technical coordinators at your respective universities to address these concerns before students' next sessions.

Next Week

Next week, students are likely to discuss the role of religion in their personal lives and their societies, based on the assigned readings. As there are a wide range of topics related to religion, groups will focus on the ones that students find most interesting and facilitators will continue to promote greater student leadership in the discussions.

Note: As facilitators move towards enabling students to have greater ownership of the group process and making them responsible for leading the direction of the conversation, I'd like to ask you to encourage your students to think about what topics are most important to them, and take an active role in raising these issues in their respective groups.