Sample Icebreakers

GENERAL

**Wallet Search** – Students select an item from the wallet, purse, or bag that they feel represents them (a gym membership card, a frequent coffee card, a passport, a journal.) Each person then introduces his or herself (name, year, what s/he did this summer, general info) and explains the meaning behind the item. GSI can also participate.

**Basic Question Prompt** – Develop a question for each student to answer. Possible topics include: what I wish I did this summer, favorite ice cream flavor, favorite vacation destination, something that surprised me today, first/most recent concert attended, last book read, best movie this past year, favorite fast food joint.

**Name History** – Students introduce themselves and explain why they have their name or any funny story associated with their name.

**Paired Interview** – Students pair up and interview one another for five minutes, then come back and introduce the partner to the group.

**Unique and Common** – Similar to the paired interview, students pair up (or work in groups) and determine what they have in common, then come back and report to the group.

**Concentric Circles** – Students form two concentric circles so that each person from the outside circle is facing a partner from the inside circle. The group is given a question (what I wish I did this summer, something that surprised me today, if you could have lunch with any person who would it be?) and partners discuss the question for about a minute. Inside circle rotates one spot and partners discuss another question. Questions can also be designed to build on course content.

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1 Adapted in part from Lisa Fein and Tomomi Yamaguchi, CRLT Orientation Packet, Fall 2003, and Kristine Schutz, CRLT Orientation Packet, Fall 2010. University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.
Name Games – Creating a learning community where students know and feel comfortable with one another is important. Providing a structure for learning names puts students at ease and allows them to interact in a less formal setting. Although this is higher education, consider using name games you might have learned years ago!

CONTENT BASED

Shifting assumptions – Present a course-related topic that most students think they have some knowledge about (the five paragraph essay, the discipline of anthropology, the notion of a single American culture, supply and demand). Ask students to jot down ideas about the topic in pairs or groups. Discuss the responses as a group and, ideally, explain how the class will push beyond their basic assumptions about the course material.

True/False Quiz – Similar to shifting assumptions, prepare a short quiz on topics in the course. Questions don’t need to actually have a strict true or false answer – these will enable more enlivened discussion. Students can complete quiz in pairs, groups, or alone. Once they have completed it, discuss as a class.

Ideal section/lab – In small groups or pairs, students discuss how they define an ideal class. As a large group, discuss what they come up with.

Provocative question – Present students with a provocative question regarding course content on the board/overhead. Have students discuss it in small groups and then as a class. Relate the question back to course material/goals.

Course title brainstorm – Ask students to brainstorm about the course title in small groups and then together as a large group. Use the student-generated responses to develop a mind map of course content on the board.

Course Goals/Concerns – Ask students (in pairs or small groups) to come up with some of their goals for the course as well as particular anxieties or concerns. Discuss as a class and relate their responses to your own goals and plan for the course.

SUGGESTIONS

If the section is small enough, try to have each of the students repeat one another’s names (or do this yourself – it impresses them and helps you to remember who they are).

In all activities where students are in pairs or small groups, ask them to introduce themselves to one another.