

Enforcing expectations for sharp, concise comments

To facilitate an efficient discussion, Jane Mansbridge sets explicit expectations about student contributions

Featured faculty: Jane Mansbridge

Charles F. Adams Professor of Political Leadership and Democratic Values, Harvard Kennedy School of Government

Class: DPI 216: Democratic Theory (Spring 2016), 30 graduate students

JANE MANSBRIDGE, PROFESSOR: It's extremely important to me to have the class be efficient, I don't want to spend time letting people say things that aren't right, so I cut them off pretty quickly if they're going down the wrong road.

IGNACIO QUINTANA, HKS STUDENT: She sets the ground rules, so there's a bunch of guidelines that you read before you start the course. 'I expect that you make sharp, concise comments.' So she'll make you actually consider whether what you're going to say was just another add-on or it's something really critical.

[Classroom footage]

WEI LUO, HKS STUDENT: She's set an environment here whereby people know that they can contribute their views, but there is a certain time limit, right, we only have an hour and 15 minutes of discussion and she's very good about limiting the time.

IGNACIO: Unless you're in a conversation or a dialogue with someone that is fruitful for the rest of the class, she will cut you off.

[Classroom footage]

IGNACIO: She won't waffle on herself and she won't let a student waffle on and hijack the class. I think her main concern when these discussions happen is that we are learning and not just discussing for the sake of discussing. So I think her main concern is that we are progressing the thinking.