Conversational Roles

Expressing one's point of view is not the only way to productively contribute to a class discussion. Selecting students randomly to fill the following roles may create more balance in the conversation and help students to reflect on the behaviors of other participants.

Theme proposer (introduce the topic or major questions for discussion)

Reflective analyst (record conversation's development, report every 20 minutes or so)

Scrounger (listen for and report helpful resources, suggestions, tips that emerge for dealing with a particular discussion issue)

Devil's Advocate (note when an uncritical consensus prevails and challenge it)

Detective (call out biases)

Textual Focuser (require participants to support their claims with text/evidence)

Theme Spotter (identify what has not been made explicit)

Umpire (ensure civility, following ground rules)

[Adapted from Stephen Brookfield and Stephen Preskill, *Discussion as a Way of Teaching: Tools and Techniques for Democratic Classrooms*, 2nd ed (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005).]