

A Small Story Speaks Louder:  
Insights from an Internal Evaluation of the Discussion Circle Project  
Na Young Choi, Valerie Meier and Jonathan Trace  
University of Hawai'i at Manoa

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## Executive Summary

### Introduction

This paper reports on a small-scale internal evaluation of the Discussion Circle (DC) project within the English Language Institute (ELI) Listening and Speaking level 80 class at the University of Hawaii at Manoa.

### Evaluation Questions

This report addresses the following evaluation questions:

- 1) Does the DC project meet the ELI academic discussion SLOs? What are students' perceptions about their acquisition of discussion skills?
- 2) How is the DC project implemented in online and face-to-face classes?
- 3) What aspects of the DC project's instructional design can be enhanced?
- 4) How do online and face-to-face students' perceptions of the DC project compare?

### Methods

In order to answer these questions, we employed a variety of methods aimed at collecting data from multiple directions about the DC project and its implementation.

Evaluation Instrument	Timeline	Uses
Needs Analysis Survey	Week 10	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. Specify student needs for academic discussion to identify constructs for the follow-up survey.</li> <li>B. Inform instructional design decisions in terms of the relevance of the DC project</li> </ol>
Teacher Interviews	Weeks 6-12	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. Collect data on teacher perceptions about the DC project including:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implementation, instructional design, assessment, and feedback</li> </ul> </li> </ol>
Follow-up Survey	Week 14	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. Identify student perceptions of the DC project, including successes and possible areas of improvement.</li> <li>B. Identify any gaps between students' perceptions of online and face-to-face implementation</li> </ol>
Document Analysis	Week 12-14	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. Gain knowledge of how the DC project is implemented and scaffolded by different teachers</li> </ol>
Classroom observations	Week 14	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. Gather data about actual teacher and student practices for the DC project</li> </ol>

## Findings & Recommendations

The following represents findings from the evaluation, along with recommendations as to what can be done in terms of short term and long-term continuation and improvement.

Findings	Recommendations
<p>Evaluation Question 1:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Ambiguous as to whether or not SLOs are met.</li> <li>2. Students perceive that learning is taking place.</li> <li>3. Teachers also reported that learning is taking place.</li> <li>4. Degree of improvement is difficult to determine.</li> <li>5. Overall the project is considered valuable in terms of use and enjoyment by both teachers and students</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. Devise standardized assessment tool:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rubric</li> <li>• Clear set of performance indicators</li> </ul> </li> <li>B. Actively help teachers be aware of the SLO-related guidelines and materials (i.e. Goals &amp; Objectives of ELI L/S, etc.)</li> </ol>
<p>Evaluation Question 2:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Teachers implement the project in a variety of ways at different times during the semester</li> <li>2. Still significant areas of overlap in terms of design and focus on SLOs and strategies</li> <li>3. Online: Similar implementation overall, however time constraints appear to be less of an issue</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. Any form of assessment instrument that is developed should account for the variability in individual teaching styles, and should be accordingly flexible.</li> </ol>
<p>Evaluation Question 3:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Students felt well prepared to lead/participate in the DC project.</li> <li>2. Students were generally satisfied with both peer and teacher feedback.</li> <li>3. Students were divided about the need for more time for the actual discussion phase of the project.</li> <li>4. Teachers felt that discussion time is too limited, preventing them from being able to effectively monitor and provide explicit feedback to each group.</li> <li>5. Online: Synchronous video chat for online classes had a large upside in terms of teacher feedback, but the technology had a steep learning curve making it difficult to implement.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. Devote more time to specific desired discussion strategy learning in class</li> <li>B. Extend the amount of time in class for the discussion stage of the DC project.</li> <li>C. Devise some form of standardized assessment tool.</li> <li>D. Online: Introduce new technology early in the semester in order to familiarize both students and teachers, and prepare against possible problems later in the semester.</li> <li>E. Online: Make students aware of technology-based needs early (i.e. a stable internet connection, a video camera, etc.).</li> </ol>
<p>Evaluation Question 4:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Due to technology problems and a small sample size, it is difficult to conclude anything in particular about the differences students perceive between the two contexts.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. Future ELI 80 teachers should try using synchronous video chatting technology again and then evaluate its effectiveness.</li> </ol>

## PROJECT OVERVIEW

This was an internally motivated evaluation project conducted by three graduate students/teachers in the English Language Institute (ELI) at the University of Hawaii at Manoa. The purpose of this evaluation was to contribute to ongoing curriculum development for the online ELI 80 Advanced Listening Comprehension class by focusing on the effectiveness of the online *Discussion Circle* (DC) project.

### **Intended Uses and Users**

In August 2011, we met and chose the ELI as the context for evaluation, primarily from a desire to find ways to benefit the program. To narrow down the evaluation focus, we brainstormed project topics and intended uses/users; as a result, we came up with a list of stakeholders to interview, including Kenton Harsh, director of the ELI; Priscilla Faucette, Curriculum Coordinator/Associate Director of the ELI; and Ying Hu, the Online Lead Teacher.

We then met with the individual stakeholders several times in order to identify the immediate needs that were salient from a program perspective and to encourage shared ownership of the evaluation project. As program insiders and stakeholders, we actively participated in these discussions to generate the evaluation agenda.

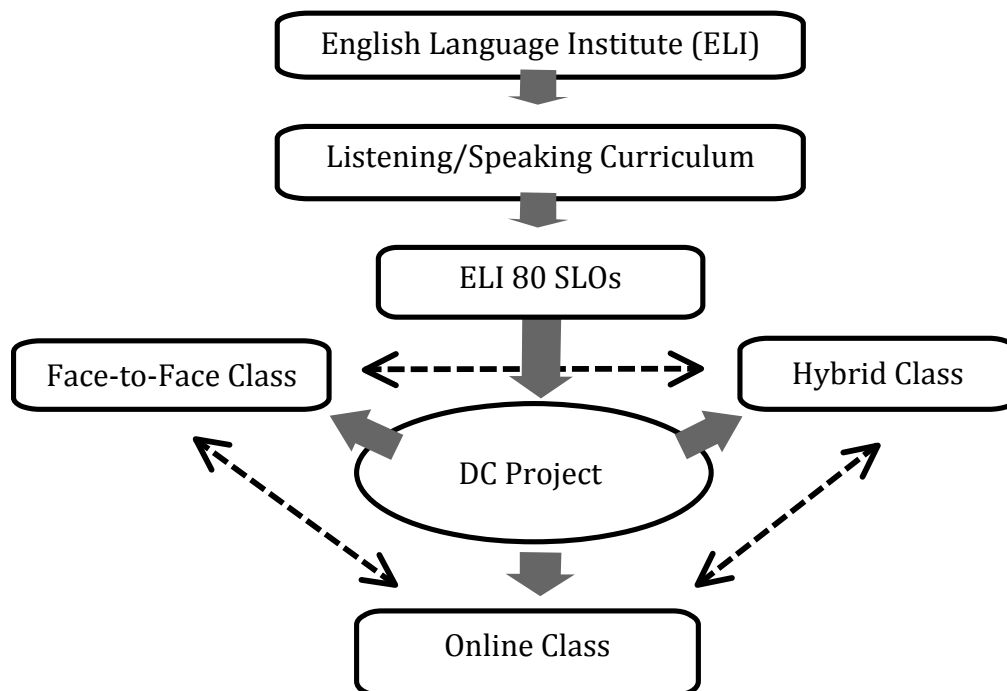
As a result of these meetings, two evaluation foci emerged: (a) Student Learning Outcome (SLO) attainment in different instructional settings (i.e., face-to-face, hybrid, and online classrooms), and (b) the effectiveness of instructional design within ELI online courses. Luckily, the ELI administrators were also very open to our suggestions. Focusing on *use* for the outcome of the evaluation project, we detected an immediate need in the Discussion Circle (DC) project in the online Listening/Speaking course. The DC project involves students leading an academic discussion on a topic of their choosing during the semester. Typically, students will

research an academic topic that contains some element of debate or discussion, create a short handout with background information on the topic and questions for discussion, and then facilitate discussion in a small group of their classmates. In the face-to-face and hybrid settings, students will act as discussion leaders one time during the semester, and as participants several times. However, in online settings, because of a lack of face-to-face interaction, the roles of the students and the operationalization of the DC project is necessarily different. Because the SLOs for ELI 80 align across all contexts (i.e., face-to-face, online, and hybrid), there appeared to be a need to look at the DC project in the online setting and determine to what extent the project was meeting the SLOs. One of the members of the evaluation team was teaching ELI 80 online for the first time and wanted to implement the DC project in a way that could best utilize the online classroom environment; this seemed a good opportunity to evaluate both the project and its instructional design.

Having decided on the evaluation focus, we identified the primary intended users (PIUs)—current and future online ELI 80 instructors, lead instructors in Listening/Speaking curriculum and online curriculum, and the ELI administrative staff—as well as the primary uses, which were to enhance current/future online DC project instructional design and implementation.

The following diagram (Figure 1) shows a brief overview of different stakeholders involved in the DC project.

Figure 1



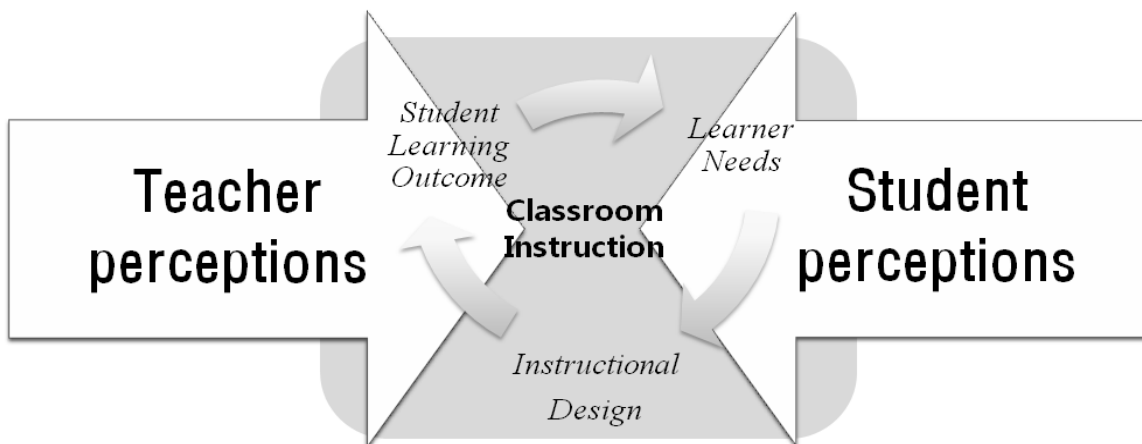
#### *ELI 80 DC Project Context*

Having identified the DC project as the specific evaluation context, we conducted another interview with PIUs in order to formulate evaluation questions that could generate the most useful and practical outcomes for the program. During this interview, the evaluators and PIUs engaged in active discussions in order to define what constitutes effective classroom instruction.

Below is a summary of the interview consensus, which is also captured in Figure 2.

- ✧ To identify the learner needs correctly
- ✧ To meet the learner needs in the instructional design of the class
- ✧ To produce the desired student learning outcomes
- ✧ To build common understandings/expectations of the above between teachers and students

Figure 2.



### *Effective Classroom Instruction*

Based on the discussion with PIUs, the evaluators generated the following evaluation questions (EQ). The focus of the EQs was a utilization-focused approach, so that the outcomes could be used to enhance current and future online ELI 80 Listening/Speaking classes.

EQ1. Does the DC Project meet the ELI 80 Academic Discussion SLOs? What are students' perceptions about their acquisition of discussion skills?

EQ2. How does the DC get implemented (online and face-to-face)?

EQ3. What specific aspect of instruction for the (online) DC project can be enhanced?

EQ4. What are students' perceptions of the DC project in online vs. face-to-face classes?

### **Methods**

In pursuing our answers to our evaluation questions we wanted to build up a rich, accurate, and comprehensive understanding of how the DC project is implemented, as well as teachers' and students' perceptions of the project. We made a deliberate decision to use both qualitative and quantitative research methods so that the strengths of one method would help



compensate for the weaknesses in another. For example, we decided to include a large number of Likert-scale items on both questionnaires in order to be able to summarize students' perceptions in relatively concise and uniform terms (that is, with numbers); this quantitative data also provided a standardized way of comparing the differences between groups of students (e.g. students enrolled in face-to-face and online sections of ELI 80). At the same time, we included a number of open-response items in order to elicit students' individual perceptions and expand the range of possible answers. Similarly, the document analysis and class observations were used in order to corroborate and exemplify the information from the teacher interviews.

**Needs analysis questionnaire.** We developed an initial questionnaire in order to gather information about students' perceptions of their needs in relation to academic discussion skills within both their EAP and content-area classes (evaluation question 1). This information was used to get a sense of what aspects of academic discussion and instructional design students valued so that (a) the teacher of the online section of ELI 80 could revise the guidelines and implementation of the DC Project during the Fall 2011 semester, and (b) the researchers could include relevant items on the follow-up questionnaire.

We created a preliminary draft based on two of the researchers' experience as former and current ELI 80 instructors and then revised the questionnaire multiple times based on feedback from current course instructors and two independent experts in evaluation and survey research.

The final version of this questionnaire (see Appendix A) included a short biographical data section, 24 four-point Likert-scale items, and five open-response items. The Likert-scale items were divided into five groups: one for importance and one for comfort level regarding the general types of discussion; one for importance and one for comfort level for discussion skills; and finally one section on discussion use within the EAP course. The Likert-scale items

employed a 4-point scale in which “1” represented a rating of not important/comfortable and “4” represented a rating of very important/comfortable. Open-response questions were concerned with students’ perceptions of difficulty and enjoyment of discussion in different academic contexts.

The needs analysis questionnaire was distributed in the middle of the Fall 2011 semester to all current students of ELI 80. A paper copy of the survey was administered in class to the students in the face-to-face classes, while students in the online and hybrid courses responded to an online survey administered through *SurveyMonkey*. A total of 37 students (out of a population of 59) participated in the first questionnaire, for a response rate of 63%; this figure included all seven members of the online class.

**Follow up questionnaire.** We developed a second survey in order to gather data about students’ perceptions of the effectiveness of the DC project after they had completed it. We used the information about what students were satisfied/less satisfied with to identify ways the DC Project could be enhanced (research question 3) and we compared the responses of students in face-to-face and online sections of ELI 80 in order to identify similarities and differences in their perceptions of the DC Project (research question 4).

This survey was developed alongside the needs analysis, though questions were focused on the DC project specifically rather than general discussion needs. We later revised it to reflect trends observed in responses to the first survey, as well as made changes based on feedback from the same two independent experts.

The final questionnaire (see Appendix B) included the same short biographical data section, 26 four-point Likert-scale items, and 10 open-response items. The Likert-scale items were again divided into multiple sections. The first section dealt with students’ overall

impressions of the DC project, followed by sections related to students' perceptions of skill development, project scaffolding, the time allotted for the project, and feedback. The Likert-scale items employed a 4-point scale in which "1" represented a rating of not useful/strongly disagree and "4" represented a rating of very useful/strongly agree. Open-response items matched these constructs so that students could go into greater detail about their perceptions.

The follow-up questionnaire was distributed in the final two weeks of the Fall 2011 semester; this was due to the fact that some sections of ELI 80 did not finish the DC project until this time. This led to some students responding to this questionnaire several weeks after they had completed the project, while others responded to it immediately after its completion. Despite this discrepancy, we believe that this had no immediate effect on the results. As before, face-to-face students responded to a paper version of the survey and online and hybrid responded to an online version of the survey. A total of 37 responses were collected; however three responses were deemed invalid because of problems with the consent forms. In the end, 34 students were included, resulting in a response rate of 58%; this figure included five members of the online class. One reason that might account for a slightly lower return rate was the timing of the second questionnaire, as students are the busiest at the end of the semester.

We analyzed both the needs analysis and the follow-up questionnaires by calculating basic descriptive statistics for the Likert-scale items, including the standard measures of central tendency (mean, mode, median) and dispersion (standard deviation, minimum, maximum, range) used to determine the frequency and distribution of responses. For the open-response items, we compiled all the responses for each item and then performed word counts in order to start to identify salient trends. Each evaluator also read the responses individually and categorized them into different themes; to ensure investigator triangulation we then met to collectively review the

themes we had individually identified and come to a consensus about the findings.

**Teacher interviews.** In order to collect information about teachers' perceptions of student achievement in relation to the academic discussion SLO's for ELI 80 (research question 1) and to better understand how the DC Project is implemented by individual teachers (research question 2) we conducted structured interviews with a total of five current and former ELI 80 instructors. We developed eight questions and then revised them based on feedback by an independent evaluation expert; as a result of informal discussions, we also added a final question after the initial interviews. The final set of questions centered on teachers' perceptions of the DC project's learning outcomes, especially in relation to the ELI 80 SLOs, as well as different aspects such as project implementation, instructional design, assessment, and feedback (see Appendix C).

Teacher interviews were conducted in person or via online chat with two of the current ELI 80 teachers and one former teacher. Responses were then transcribed and sent to the interviewees by email so that they could provide additional comments or thoughts. Two of the teachers were also on the evaluation team and they responded individually in writing to the interview questions. In order to analyze the data from teacher interviews we compiled responses to each item and first individually and then collectively identified and came to a consensus about common themes.

**Document analysis and class observations.** In order to gather additional information on how the DC Project is implemented (research question 2), we gathered teacher-designed documents (such as guidelines, schedules, and handouts on discussion strategies) and two of the researchers observed one ELI 80 face-to-face class period during the final week of the Fall 2011 semester (see Appendix D for observation protocol). The instructor of the online section of ELI

80 asked her students to submit video recording of their DC project sessions and she then shared her impressions of her students' performances with the other two researchers.

In order to understand the larger program and curriculum context in which the DC Project is situated, we also collected "official" ELI documents such as the statement of listening/speaking teaching philosophy, the listening/speaking curriculum separation chart, and the listening /speaking goals and objectives handout (see Appendix E for a section of the goals and objectives handout).

### **Limitations**

While we made every effort to ensure our evaluation was as complete and accurate as possible, like any project it is characterized by several limitations. One major factor that came up in almost every stage of the project was that of timing. We administered the needs analysis questionnaire in Week 10 of the semester, and as a result some students had already finished the DC project. Likewise, because some ELI 80 classes did not complete the DC project until the final weeks of the semester, the administration of the follow-up survey was also delayed, possibly causing a lower return rate, as well as less detailed responses to open-ended questions. The biggest limitation due to timing was that we had initially planned to conduct a focus group with the online students after they completed the DC project. However, because they did not finish this project until Week 14, no students replied to our call for participants during the hectic final weeks of the semester. As a result, we were not able to collect the kind of rich qualitative data that would have helped us better understand students' experience of the online DC project, which was our original focus. As the population of online students was quite small to begin with, the absence of this data prevented us from a deeper understanding of the online perspective.

In addition to the late timing of the DC project, the somewhat steep learning curve of the new video chat technology might have affected the online students' willingness to provide the evaluators with data. The poor quality of the videos also interfered with the ability of the online teacher to conduct nuanced observations of how her students performed during the online DC project.

Another limitation of the study was that we did not pilot either of the survey instruments, and so we cannot affirm the reliability or validity of either instrument. This was, in part, due to the lengthy process of developing the needs analysis questionnaire and the desire to get it out the door. However, we should have piloted our questionnaires with at least some students from ELI 70 (intermediate listening and speaking); perhaps then we would have realized that a number of the open-ended items in the follow-up questionnaire had the potential to be interpreted as simple yes/no questions.

Furthermore, we were unaware of the existence of several informative documents detailing not just the goals but also specific performance indicators for the DC project (see Appendix E). Although these documents were readily available in the ELI resource collection, we did not find them until very late in the evaluation, and so we weren't able to use this data as a resource during the development of either questionnaire.

Nevertheless, despite these limitations we were able to collect a wealth of information in order to answer our evaluation questions.

## **Findings**

**EQ1: Does the DC Project Meet the ELI 80 Academic Discussion SLOs? What are student perceptions about their acquisition of discussion skills?**

**Teacher responses.** Data collected from teacher interviews about the ELI DC project

SLOs suggests that most teachers have clear ideas about what the primary SLOs are for the project, specifically that students will be able to “autonomously lead academic discussions using academic English” and “demonstrate excellent use of advanced speaking strategies for participation in academic discussions with expert users of English.” However, all three current ELI 80 instructors and one former instructor responded that they are uncertain as to whether or not students actually meet these outcomes. Nevertheless, teachers have a sense that improvement occurs, and data across the needs analysis and follow-up survey indicate that students also perceive improvement in their speaking and listening skills, as well as strategy use within discussions (see Appendix ?).

**Discussion skills development.** Table 1 presents students’ perceptions of how useful the DC project is for developing specific skills; items were sorted by means from highest to lowest. While the DC project SLOs themselves do not indicate specific skills that students should accomplish or improve in the course of the project, information from the Goals and Objectives for Listening and Speaking (see Appendix E) do include a set of more specific performance indicators related to the discussion SLOs, which were then included on the survey instruments.

The relatively high means and modes of the items at the top of Table 1 suggest that students feel the DC project is quite useful in terms of developing their ability to express their opinions to a group (item 7) and respond to others’ ideas (item 8). Students’ answers to the open-ended questions reinforce this data. A number of students mentioned expressing opinions and responding to others’ ideas as something they learned from preparing for, participating in, and/or leading the DC project (items 28, 31, and 33). Typical of these responses are comments such as “I learned how to enter a conversation and tell my opinion/ideas about a topic” and “I learned there are many appropriate ways of responding to ideas.”

Table 1

*Students' Perceptions of Usefulness of the DC in Relation to Specific Skills*

Item	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Mode	Median	Min	Max	<i>N</i>
How useful was the Discussion Circle project in helping you develop the following skills?							
7. Expressing an opinion to a group	<b>3.50</b>	0.65	<b>4.00</b>	4.00	2.00	4.00	34
8. Responding to the ideas of others	<b>3.42</b>	0.60	<b>4.00</b>	3.00	2.00	4.00	33
5. Participating in small group discussion	3.41	0.60	3.00	3.00	2.00	4.00	34
11. Improving overall speaking in English	3.32	0.72	3.00	3.00	1.00	4.00	34
6. Knowing how to enter a conversation	3.24	0.77	4.00	3.00	2.00	4.00	34
10. Improving overall listening in English	3.21	0.83	3.00	3.00	1.00	4.00	34
9. Giving clear explanations of ideas	3.15	0.73	3.00	3.00	1.00	4.00	34
12. Improving critical thinking skills	<b>3.00</b>	0.91	<b>3.00</b>	3.00	1.00	4.00	34

The DC project seems to have been least useful in contributing to critical thinking skills (item 12), which appears at the bottom of the list. This item also has a relatively large standard deviation, which suggests that students have mixed perceptions about its usefulness. In terms of the open-ended questions, only one student explicitly mentioned critical thinking as something she developed through the DC project. A number of students did note that in preparing for the DC project they learned more about the topic and how to formulate useful discussion questions, but it is unclear whether they perceived these activities as entailing critical thinking. (The teachers, however, specifically identified preparing discussion questions as one obvious site for critical thinking.)

Additionally, in their responses to the open-ended questions students mentioned learning skills not included in Table 1. A number of students felt that the DC project helped them to develop discussion leadership skills such as structuring the activity, eliciting participation, and managing time. Furthermore, several students stated preparing for their DC heightened their awareness of how to adapt a topic for a particular audience. These skills, along with illustrative quotations, are summarized in Table 2.



Table 2  
*Additional Skills Mentioned in Open-Ended Responses*

Skill	Sample response
Leadership	
Structuring activity	“How to start and what I should do as leader.”
Eliciting participation	“Managing circle member ideas and sometimes forcing people to talk.”
Time management	“I learned how to organize my presentation in order to manage my time and the members of the discussion.”
Other	
Adapting topic	“It must be simple and depend upon the audiences.”

This data, when looked at alongside data obtained from the needs analysis, seems to indicate that at some level students perceived improvement in academic discussion skills which they feel are important but may not be entirely comfortable executing. Table 3 displays descriptive results from two sets of Likert-scale items dealing with students’ perceptions of importance and comfort level in terms of discussion skills within content-area classes. Overall, while students find all of the skills important, with all means above 3.00, they rate their comfort level as lower, with no mean score higher than 2.91. Of particular interest are responses concerning expressing and responding to ideas in discussion. In terms of importance, expressing opinions (item 14), giving explanations (item 17), and responding to ideas (item 15) showed the highest means of 3.84, 3.78, and 3.76 respectively. All students felt that these skills were either important or very important for discussion. However, responses to these same items in terms of comfort level were lower overall, and more distributed across a range of responses. Responding to ideas (item 21), expressing opinions (item 20), and giving explanations (item 23) had means of 2.91, 2.85, and 2.73 respectively, and standard deviations ranging from 0.77 to 0.89.

Table 3

*Students' Perceptions of Specific Academic Discussion Skills*

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Mode	Median	Max	Min	<i>N</i>
In general, how <b>important</b> are the following in academic discussions in English?							
14. Expressing an opinion to a group	<b>3.84</b>	<b>0.37</b>	4.00	4.00	4.00	3.00	37
17. Giving clear explanations of my ideas	<b>3.78</b>	<b>0.41</b>	4.00	4.00	4.00	3.00	37
15. Responding to the ideas of others in a group	<b>3.76</b>	<b>0.43</b>	4.00	4.00	4.00	3.00	37
13. Knowing how to enter into a conversation	3.41	0.79	4.00	4.00	4.00	1.00	37
16. Asking follow-up questions of others	3.41	0.63	4.00	3.00	4.00	2.00	37
18. Taking notes in a group discussion	<b>3.00</b>	0.84	3.00	3.00	4.00	1.00	37
In general, how <b>comfortable</b> are you doing the following in academic discussions in English?							
21. Responding to the ideas of others in a group	<b>2.91</b>	<b>0.77</b>	3.00	3.00	4.00	1.00	37
20. Expressing an opinion to a group	<b>2.85</b>	<b>0.89</b>	3.00	3.00	4.00	1.00	37
23. Giving clear explanations of my ideas	<b>2.73</b>	<b>0.83</b>	3.00	3.00	4.00	1.00	37
19. Knowing how to enter into a conversation	2.68	0.66	3.00	3.00	4.00	1.00	37
22. Asking follow-up questions of others	2.62	0.71	3.00	3.00	4.00	1.00	37
24. Taking notes in a group discussion	<b>2.49</b>	0.83	3.00	3.00	4.00	1.00	37

This was also consistent with data obtained from the open-response items. In one question pertaining to what students found difficult about discussion (item 30), several students ( $n=12$ ) talked about opinions or expressing themselves as the biggest challenge for them in discussion. For example, one student stated that, "I cannot express my ideas clearly; sometimes I cannot understand group members' words," while another said, "sometimes people may not

understand what I am talking about when I try to express my ideas”. This is interesting when compared to another question about whether or not students found ELI discussion enjoyable (item 32). Several responses ( $n=11$ ) incorporated enjoyment with the opportunity to express ideas and opinions. Some responses included, “Yes, good practice for speaking/explaining my ideas,” and “yes, to share ideas and practice my English (sic)”. Taken together, this appears to support the above descriptive findings, that students find these skills important, but difficult outside of the ELI.

While neither the needs analysis nor the follow-up survey data provide a measurable indication of whether or not the SLOs are being met, they do reaffirm this notion from teachers that improvement is happening on some level.

In terms of assessment, the data show that because individual teachers assess their students in a variety of ways, it is difficult to determine how these assessment methods match the SLOs of the project. Four teachers identify certain performance indicators—similar to those provided in the Goals and Objectives for ELI Listening and Speaking (see Appendix E)—and incorporate them into self-designed rubrics or feedback forms, but the choice of indicators seems to vary depending upon the teacher, as well as the degree of specificity within the indicators themselves. While two teachers look to identify explicit leadership skills (e.g., asking follow-up questions or keeping everyone on topic), two other teachers use a more holistic assessment system that looks at leadership as a whole and determines achievement based on that. In another case, one teacher relied only upon peer feedback as a way to assess student performance. It appears that without some form of standardized or uniformly acknowledged assessment protocols that all teachers can agree upon, determining whether or not the SLOs are met for the DC project as a whole is unclear at this time.

Two other points are worth mentioning in relation to the data we gathered in order to answer the first evaluation question. One is the language used by students in the open-responses of the follow-up survey to report on what they learned and what was challenging for them. While some responses identified specific strategies or constructs of discussion, most of the language that was used was rather simplistic and general. In response to questions asking students to describe what they learned or found challenging about different aspects of the DC project, many answers were limited to ambiguous, short—sometimes even one word—replies. From Table 4, which contains a selection of these kinds of responses, there is a sense that students do not have a full grasp of a variety of discussion strategies.

Table 4

*Selected Responses from the Follow-Up Questionnaire Open-Response Items.*

Question:	
Did you learn anything in particular from leading a discussion circle?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“Conclude what members said.”</i></li> <li>• <i>“I learned how to control the topic.”</i></li> <li>• <i>“Leader should ask everyone for the opinion (sic).”</i></li> </ul>
Were there any particular challenges in leading your discussion circle?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“Yes. It is not easy for me to interrupt others.”</i></li> <li>• <i>“To achieve my aim.”</i></li> <li>• <i>“Speaking is challenging.”</i></li> </ul>
Did you learn anything in particular by participating in a discussion circle?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“English style discussion”</i></li> <li>• <i>“Yes, I learned how to say my ideas. Also sometime they are against people (sic).”</i></li> <li>• <i>“I learn that when I want to start my opinion how can start (sic).”</i></li> </ul>

The DC project is meant to be more than mere free discussion or the sharing of opinions; instead, it should promote the utilization of academic discussion strategies in the course of critical thinking. As one of the SLOs related to discussion says that students should be able to ‘demonstrate excellent use of advanced strategies for participation in academic discussions with expert uses of English,’ it makes sense that if students have indeed acquired these strategies, they should be able to talk about them with some competency. However, as instructors, it is our

impression that the simplicity of these responses signifies that students have not spent enough time engaging in discussion strategies and skills to really know them.

Secondly, while not directly related to this question of SLOs, it should be noted that both teachers and students repeatedly made claims about the enjoyment and merit of discussion and the DC project. Data collected from the needs analysis survey on general discussion perceptions indicated that students generally found discussion important in their content-area classes. Table 5 shows the descriptive results of a set of Likert-scale items that dealt with students' rating of importance of different discussion types. Items 5-7 were all rated comparatively high, with mean scores ranging from 2.95 to 3.19 on a 4-point scale. Only online discussion was rated as being relatively unimportant, with a mean score of 1.97.

Table 5

*Students' Perceptions of Academic Discussion in Content-Area Courses*

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Mode	Median	Max	Min	<i>N</i>
In your <b>classes outside the ELI</b> , how <b>important</b> are the following activities?							
6. Participating in small group discussions	3.19	0.83	3.00	3.00	4.00	1.00	37
5. Leading small group discussions	3.03	0.94	3.00	3.00	4.00	1.00	37
7. Participating in whole class discussions	2.95	0.87	3.00	3.00	4.00	1.00	37
8. Oral online discussions (Skype, voice chat, etc.)	1.97	0.88	2.00	2.00	4.00	1.00	37

Data collected from the follow-up survey further showed that students saw the DC project itself as both enjoyable and useful for their learning about discussions. Open-responses were also consistently positive in terms of the students feeling that they learned from the experience, shown in Table 4, which indicates value for the project on its own. Teachers also

repeatedly remarked during interviews and informal discussions that their students found the DC project among the most popular in the class. Given this information, along with data that seems to show general improvement in relation to the SLOs, we feel that the project as a whole is worthwhile.

### **EQ2. How does the DC get implemented (online and face-to-face)?**

While most of instructors were well aware of the DC project SLOs, individual teachers go about accomplishing those SLOs in different ways. The data from the document analysis and teacher interviews suggest that individual instructors have developed their own styles of implementing the DC project in terms of materials, instructional design, and giving feedback. Some teachers required students to select reading material upon which to base their discussions; other teachers prepared listening materials for their students to adopt. In this latter case, the teacher distributed additional listening comprehension materials and students were only obligated to develop discussion questions.

Analysis of the course calendars showed when the DC project was implemented in the various sections of ELI 80. Most of the DCs began in the early semester, starting from Week 3 or 4, and many teachers reported that they did this to help students get to know one another and to reduce speech anxiety in the listening and speaking class by breaking the ice. Some teachers, however, waited to implement the project until the end of the semester and combined it with another course presentation project. In this case, students used the DC project to introduce their presentation topics, to collect useful ideas for their upcoming presentations, and/or to supply their groups with further information after they had given their presentations.

Interestingly, most online instructors have been employing a similar DC format to the

face-to-face instructors. This means that individual students in the online course have to organize the DC session outside of the classroom, either with friends or classmates, and carry out the project on their own. Afterwards, they are asked to submit an oral summary report of the discussion to their teacher via their online course. What this suggests is that the online listening/speaking class has not fully developed the DC in a way that is specific to the online environment, one in which online teachers and students could utilize and benefit from the opportunities an online classroom affords. Further collection and analysis of data would help provide a more specific picture of these opportunities.

Within this format, the online teachers varied in terms of instructional design and giving feedback. Some teachers restricted the DC sessions to the classroom level while others allowed participation by other students not registered for the course. One teacher required an entire DC session to be audio-recorded and another teacher only required an oral summary report. In the latter case, it was difficult for the teacher to provide feedback, as the teacher was not able to observe the students' performance by any means.

Another slight difference in online implementation dealt with the duration of the discussion activity. Since the online environment has fewer time limitations, one previous online teacher reported that they extended their discussion sessions to 30 minutes in length, as opposed to face-to-face discussions, which are typically no longer than 20 minutes long.

The investigation above seems to suggest that regardless of the teaching context the instructors have flexibility in designing and implementing the DC. It is difficult to say that one particular way is better than another, especially when we are not able to clearly measure SLO achievement. However, teacher responses to interview questions suggest that the online ELI 80 class could benefit from a new model of instructional design that fits better into an online format.

### EQ 3: What Aspects of the DC Project’s Instructional Design Can Be Enhanced?

Overall, the relatively high means in Table 6 indicate a general satisfaction with the way the DC project is currently implemented, and at the most basic level, students seem to find the DC project both useful (item 1) and enjoyable (item 2). Students rated the DC project as slightly more enjoyable ( $M=3.44$ ) than useful ( $M=3.31$ ), and the larger standard deviation and range for item 1 suggest that there was less consensus about how useful this project was. In fact, item 2 had the lowest standard deviation of any item in the survey, indicating that students were more in agreement about the DC project being enjoyable than anything else. Nevertheless, the data from the follow-up survey also indicate that there are specific aspects of the DC project that deserve to be reconsidered and perhaps revised.

Table 6

#### *Students’ Global Perceptions of the DC Project*

Item	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Mode	Median	Min	Max	<i>n</i>
To what extent do you agree with the following statements?							
2. I found the Discussion Circle enjoyable	3.44	0.55	3.00	3.00	2.00	4.00	34
3. I found the instructions for the Discussion Circle clear	3.35	0.68	3.00	3.00	1.00	4.00	34
1. I found the Discussion Circle useful	3.31	0.73	4.00	3.00	1.00	4.00	34
4. The class activities prepared me to lead a Discussion Circle	3.26	0.74	3.00	3.00	1.00	4.00	34
21. There is enough time in class spent preparing for the Discussion Circle	2.74	0.85	3.00	3.00	1.00	4.00	34
22. Leading a discussion once is enough	2.74	0.98	3.00	3.00	1.00	4.00	34

**Time.** Table 6 presents a more ambiguous picture when it comes to time-related aspects of the DC project. Although the modes and the medians show that many students agreed that they had sufficient preparation time (item 21) and opportunities to lead (item 22), the means themselves were relatively low (these were two of only five items with a mean below 3 on the entire survey). Furthermore, in response to an open-ended question on suggestions for improving



the DC project (item 35), students reported wanting more time in six of the 13 concrete suggestions. Yet the relatively large standard deviation—particularly for item 22, which had the largest standard deviation of any item in this survey—suggests that students might be split on whether there is enough time allotted to the DC project. The discussion circles themselves can take up several class periods, depending on how many students are enrolled in the class, and so it might not be feasible for students to lead the DC twice, even if this is something students clearly wanted. However, teachers might consider extending the duration of each DC session in order for their students to feel less rushed; they would be able to do this without having to make major changes in their course schedule.

**Preparation.** Overall, Table 6 indicates that students had positive perceptions of how well the class activities prepared them to lead a DC and the of clarity of the DC project instructions. However, Table 7 reveals that students also seemed to find certain activities, such as learning helpful phrases for discussion, learning about different discussion cultures, and learning about different discussion strategies much more useful than other activities, such as practicing note taking skills.

Table 7

*Students' Perceptions of Usefulness of DC Preparation Activities*

Item	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Mode	Median	Min	Max	<i>n</i>
How useful were the following ELI 80 activities in <b>preparing</b> you for the Discussion Circle project?							
19. Learning helpful phrases for discussions	3.53	0.65	4.00	4.00	2.00	4.00	34
17. Learning about different academic cultures	3.41	0.70	4.00	4.00	2.00	4.00	32
20. Learning about different discussion strategies	3.34	0.73	4.00	3.50	2.00	4.00	32
14. Small group discussions	3.32	0.63	3.00	3.00	2.00	4.00	34
18. Group work/group presentations	3.16	0.79	3.00	3.00	1.00	4.00	32
13. Whole class discussion	3.03	0.77	3.00	3.00	2.00	4.00	32
15. Listening to academic lectures	2.97	0.77	3.00	3.00	2.00	4.00	32
16. Practicing note taking skills	2.71	0.96	2.00	3.00	1.00	4.00	34

Currently, only some of the ELI 80 teachers provide their students with handouts and other forms of instruction about helpful phrases, different discussion cultures, and/or discussion strategies. Given that students value these three items and that the focus of the DC project is on academic discussion strategies—not just free discussion—it would make sense for all teachers incorporate them into their classes.

**Feedback/assessment.** Table 8, which includes data from the Needs Analysis questionnaire, shows that students value on receiving feedback from the instructor; every student surveyed rated feedback from the instructor as either important or very important, and this item had a low standard deviation. Likewise, even though their responses were more distributed ( $SD=0.77$ ), students also valued receiving feedback from peers. Given that students place such a high premium on different forms of feedback, it is important that they are satisfied with this aspect of the DC project.

Table 8

*Student's Need for Discussion Opportunities in ELI 80*

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Mode	Median	Max	Min	<i>N</i>
In <b>your ELI 80 class</b> , how <b>important</b> is it to have opportunities for the following activities?							
25. Receiving feedback from the instructor about your academic discussion skills	<b>3.68</b>	<b>0.47</b>	4.00	4.00	4.00	3.00	37
27. Leading a discussion on a self-selected topic	3.32	0.66	3.00	3.00	4.00	2.00	37
28. Receiving peer feedback from other students about your academic discussion skills	<b>3.30</b>	<b>0.77</b>	4.00	3.00	4.00	1.00	37
29. Giving peer feedback to other students about their academic discussion skills	3.19	0.83	3.00	3.00	4.00	1.00	37
26. Leading a discussion on an assigned topic	3.14	0.70	3.00	3.00	4.00	1.00	37

Table 9, which includes data from the follow-up survey, indicates that students do indeed have positive perceptions about the feedback they receive from their peers ( $M=3.24$ ) and their teachers ( $M=3.32$ ) for the DC project. In addition, responses to the open ended questions in the follow-up survey suggest that in some respects students value peer and teacher feedback for the same general reasons: because it helps them to identify their weaknesses and thus “improve.”

Table 9

*Students’ Perceptions of Usefulness of Feedback*

Item	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Mode	Median	Min	Max	<i>n</i>
How useful was the feedback you received from the following?							
24. The teacher during discussion	3.32	0.76	4.00	3.00	1.00	4.00	34
25. The teacher after discussion	3.32	0.76	4.00	3.00	1.00	4.00	34
23. Peers/group members	3.24	0.74	4.00	3.00	2.00	4.00	33
26. Self-reflection activity	2.88	0.72	3.00	3.00	1.00	4.00	34

However, their responses also indicate that students do conceptualize peer and teacher feedback in slightly different ways. A number of these responses indicated that students appreciated their peers’ opinions because they provided an alternative perspective on their performance or were more “objective” than their own. Additionally, several students suggested that part of the usefulness of peer feedback stems from the fact that their classmates are their intended audience. On the other hand, students seem to value teacher feedback because it reflects subject matter expertise. In describing the utility of teacher feedback, several students used phrases such as “expert knowledge” and “professional feedback.” This suggests that peer and teacher feedback might serve distinct, and perhaps complementary, functions. For these reasons, teachers should consider giving students opportunities for both types of feedback.

Some students did feel as if they did not receive enough feedback from their peers and/or teacher, and a few students found the feedback they received to be of questionable value, but

these students were clearly in the minority. Interestingly, the teachers were less satisfied with their ability to give quality feedback. Every teacher who had taught ELI face-to-face ( $n=4$ ) mentioned the difficulty of monitoring four or five simultaneous discussion circles and giving detailed individualized feedback.

The discrepancy between these student and teacher perspectives might stem from the fact that students value feedback in general. In their responses to the open-ended items about what was useful about peer and teacher feedback, students rarely got more specific than stating that they appreciated being told about their “weakness,” “problems,” “negative points,” and “mistakes” so that they could “improve.” On the other hand, teachers want to be able to provide students with explicit feedback on specific discussion skills and to assess these skills in a way that allows them to measure students’ progress in relation to the SLOs. The logistical realities of this activity as it is conducted in the face-to-face classes make this challenging, but teachers might find this easier if they could rely on clearly articulated performance indicators incorporated into a set of rubrics that could be used for both teacher and peer feedback.

**Online.** Based on the results of the first questionnaire, which indicated that students highly valued opportunities for teacher feedback, the current teacher of ELI 80 online section decided to implement the DC project using a new synchronous online video chat program, *Oovoo*, which would allow students to record their discussions and submit them to the teacher for feedback. However, students encountered several difficulties while trying to use the program: poor Internet connections caused students to drop out of conversations or forced them to record in noisy common areas, while other students had problems recording their discussions. For now, we can conclude that future online ELI 80 teachers will need to take some basic precautions, such as ensuring that students have access to a stable Internet connection, and give students

ample opportunities to practice using the software before they undertake the actual DC project. In a future study we plan to analyze the two high-quality recordings of student discussions in order to make specific suggestions about other aspects of the online DC project implementation.

#### **RQ 4: How Do Online and Face-to-face Students' Perceptions of the DC Project Compare?**

Table 10 shows how face-to-face and online students rated selected items from the follow-up survey, including items that indicate they share similar impressions of the DC project as well as items that reveal differences in perceptions (for a comparison of the two groups on all items see Appendix F.) Although students in the face-to-face classes rated the DC project as slightly more useful and enjoyable than students in the online class, both groups of students had similar perceptions about these global aspects of the DC project. At the same time, there are more pronounced differences in terms of specific features of the DC project. If only the responses to the follow-up survey are considered, it would seem as if face-to-face students are notably more satisfied with certain aspects of the DC project, as evidenced by differences in means for items 10, 11, and 25. However, the teacher's observations of this activity indicate that the online students' lower ratings can be attributed to specific technical problems (discussed in the previous section) that could be avoided in subsequent implementations of the DC project.

According to the teacher, the resulting background noise seriously impeded group members' ability to understand one another in five of the seven discussions she was able to view. It not surprising, then, that students would not be as positive about the usefulness of the DC activity in terms of improving their overall listening ability in English. Furthermore, the poor quality of the videos also interfered with the teacher's ability to give detailed feedback, as did the fact that several groups were not able to actually record and submit their videos. Again, it is not surprising that students were less positive about the usefulness of the teacher's feedback after the

activity. It would be premature, then, to reach any solid conclusions based on the opinions of a small group of online students ( $n=5$ ) who unfortunately experienced some of the inevitable problems that accompany the introduction of a new technology.

Table 10

*Face to Face and Online Students' Perceptions of the DC Project*

Survey item	Face-to-face		Online	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
To what extent do you agree with the following statements?				
1. I found the Discussion Circle useful	3.33	0.74	3.20	0.84
2. I found the Discussion Circle enjoyable	3.45	0.57	3.40	0.55
How useful was the Discussion Circle project in helping you develop the following skills?				
10. Improving overall listening in English	3.28	0.75	2.80	1.30
11. Improving overall speaking in English	3.38	0.62	3.00	1.22
To what extent do you agree with the following statements?				
22. Leading a discussion once is enough	2.66	1.01	3.20	0.84
How useful was the feedback you received from the following?				
25. The teacher after discussion	3.41	0.73	2.80	0.84

### Recommendations

Based upon the above findings, we are able to make the following recommendations in regards to the ELI 80 DC project. Our first recommendation is for the development of a standardized tool for assessment for the DC project. This is in response to findings that showed it was unclear whether students were meeting the ELI 80 academic discussion SLOs and the difficulties teachers face in assessing performance. This assessment tool would be based upon the collective input from teachers and possibly students, as well as information collected from guidelines and documents, which specify individual performance indicators for discussion. It could take the form of a rubric, or a listing of performance indicators that teachers could draw on in order to assess their students. However, because teachers implement the DC project in a

variety of ways, any such tool should also be designed to be flexible and accommodating of individual teaching styles. In addition, another way to support teachers in assessing the DC project would be to enhance awareness of established SLO-related guidelines and materials, possibly by having lead teachers make this information available during new teacher induction processes or during curriculum area meetings.

Our second recommendation is that teachers devote more time to preparing students for discussion and allow more time for the actual discussion phase of the project. Results from the follow-up questionnaire indicated students find particular discussion strategies useful, so it is important that teachers provide students with proper scaffolding for these strategies in the lead-up period to the project. At the same time, because both students and teachers feel there is not enough time for discussion, extending the amount of time in class for students to participate in Discussion Circles would be the most effective way of easing the time constraints. Students would have more time to practice and use strategies, while teachers would have more opportunities to observe and give explicit feedback. As more time for discussion might mean less time for other instruction or activities, it is important that teachers consider how much time is necessary for discussion and work to effectively integrate it into their curriculum.

The final recommendation is directly related to the use of technology in the online context. Due to the steep learning curve of the online synchronous video chat technology, it is important for teachers to introduce students to new forms of technology early in the course. This allows both teachers and students to get familiarized with the tools and prepared for possible problems. Students should be given ample opportunities to work with the technology and be informed about the necessary conditions and equipment they will need for class (e.g., a stable internet connection, a video camera, etc.) at the beginning of the semester.

We intend to disseminate the findings of this report to a larger audience, including the online lead teacher, listening and speaking teachers, and even other teachers in different curriculums areas within the ELI, so that they can use our findings and recommendations to inform the academic discussion activities within each curriculum area (e.g. reading circles and peer feedback sessions). In terms of online discussion, our findings about the possibilities and challenges of using synchronous video chatting technology would be useful for the other online ELI classes, since teachers of these courses are interested in finding new ways to increase peer interaction. Additionally, it would be worthwhile to continue to explore ways of assessing the DC project and revising the instructional design of the project, especially within future online classes.



## Appendix A Needs Analysis Questionnaire

### ELI 80 DC Project Needs Analysis

The purpose of this survey is to identify students' academic discussion skills needs as practiced within ELI 80 Advanced Listening Comprehension and applied to content courses within UH Manoa.

We value your opinions and appreciate your cooperation. All responses will be kept confidential.

**Directions:** This survey should take less than 15 minutes to complete. Please answer the following questions honestly; there is no wrong or right answer. Do not write your name on the questionnaire.

#### Section 1: Background Information

1. Gender:            Male            Female

2. Current major(s): \_\_\_\_\_ (if undecided please write "undecided")

3. Student classification (circle one): Undergraduate    Graduate    Exchange Student (1 / 2 Semesters)  
Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

4. Primary languages (s): \_\_\_\_\_

**Section 2:** Please answer the following questions by circling the number that best describes your opinion. Mark only **one choice** for each answer.

In your **classes outside the ELI**, how **important** are the following activities?

	Not Important			Very Important
5. Leading small group discussions	1	2	3	4
6. Participating in small group discussions	1	2	3	4
7. Participating in whole class discussions	1	2	3	4
8. Oral online discussions (Skype, voice chat, etc.)	1	2	3	4

In your **classes outside the ELI**, how **comfortable** are you doing the following activities?

	Not Comfortable			Very Comfortable
9. Leading small group discussions	1	2	3	4
10. Participating in small group discussions	1	2	3	4
11. Participating in whole class discussions	1	2	3	4
12. Oral online discussions (Skype, voice chat, etc.)	1	2	3	4

In general, how **important** are the following in academic discussions in English?

	Not Important			Very Important
13. Knowing how to enter into a conversation	1	2	3	4
14. Expressing an opinion to a group	1	2	3	4
15. Responding to the ideas of others in a group	1	2	3	4
16. Asking follow-up questions of others	1	2	3	4
17. Giving clear explanations of my ideas	1	2	3	4
18. Taking notes in a group discussion	1	2	3	4

In general, how **comfortable** are you doing the following in academic discussions in English?

	Not Comfortable			Very Comfortable
19. Knowing how to enter into a conversation	1	2	3	4
20. Expressing an opinion to a group	1	2	3	4
21. Responding to the ideas of others in a group	1	2	3	4
22. Asking follow-up questions of others	1	2	3	4
23. Giving clear explanations of my ideas	1	2	3	4
24. Taking notes in a group discussion	1	2	3	4

In **your ELI 80 class**, how **important** is it to have opportunities for the following activities?

	Not Important			Very Important
25. Receiving feedback from the instructor about your academic discussion skills	1	2	3	4
26. Leading a discussion on an assigned topic	1	2	3	4
27. Leading a discussion on a self-selected topic	1	2	3	4
28. Receiving peer feedback from other students about your academic discussion skills	1	2	3	4
29. Giving peer feedback to other students about their academic discussion skills	1	2	3	4



## Appendix B

### Follow-up Questionnaire

#### ELI 80 DC Project Follow Up Survey

The purpose of this survey is to gather students' impressions and reflections on the ELI 80 Discussion Circle Project. This survey is part of a larger evaluation of discussion use and design in ELI 80.

We value your opinions and appreciate your cooperation. All responses will be kept confidential.

**Directions:** This survey should take less than 15 minutes to complete. Please answer the following questions honestly; there is no right or wrong answer. Do not write your name on the questionnaire.

#### Section 1: Background Information

Please circle your gender:            Male            Female

Current major(s): \_\_\_\_\_ (if undecided please write "undecided")

Student classification (circle one): Undergraduate    Graduate    Exchange Student (1 / 2 Semesters)  
Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

Primary languages (s): \_\_\_\_\_

**Section 2:** Please answer the following questions by circling the number that best describes your opinion. Mark only **one choice** for each question.

To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

	Strongly Disagree			Strongly Agree
1. I found the Discussion Circle <u>useful</u>	1	2	3	4
2. I found the Discussion Circle <u>enjoyable</u>	1	2	3	4
3. I found the instructions for the Discussion Circle <u>clear</u>	1	2	3	4
4. The class activities prepared me to <u>lead</u> a Discussion Circle	1	2	3	4

How useful was the Discussion Circle project in helping you develop the following skills?

	Not Useful			Very Useful
5. Participating in small group discussion	1	2	3	4
6. Knowing how to enter a conversation	1	2	3	4
7. Expressing an opinion to a group	1	2	3	4
8. Responding to the ideas of others	1	2	3	4
9. Giving clear explanations of ideas	1	2	3	4
10. Improving overall listening in English	1	2	3	4
11. Improving overall speaking in English	1	2	3	4
12. Improving critical thinking skills (e.g., developing discussion questions, evaluating ideas, summarizing)	1	2	3	4

How useful were the following ELI 80 activities in preparing you for the Discussion Circle project?

	Not Useful		Very Useful		Not Applicable
13. Whole class discussions	1	2	3	4	NA
14. Small group discussions	1	2	3	4	NA
15. Listening to academic lectures	1	2	3	4	NA
16. Practicing note taking skills	1	2	3	4	NA
17. Learning about different academic cultures	1	2	3	4	NA
18. Group work / group presentations	1	2	3	4	NA
19. Learning helpful phrases for discussions	1	2	3	4	NA
20. Learning about different discussion strategies	1	2	3	4	NA

To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

	Strongly Disagree		Strongly Agree	
21. There is enough time <u>in class</u> spent preparing for the Discussion Circle (e.g. learning about different discussion strategies)	1	2	3	4
22. Leading a discussion once is enough.	1	2	3	4

How useful was the feedback you received from the following?

	Not Useful			Very Useful
23. Peers / group members	1	2	3	4
24. The teacher <b>during</b> discussion	1	2	3	4
25. The teacher <b>after</b> discussion	1	2	3	4
26. Self-reflection activity	1	2	3	4

**Section 3:** Please answer the following questions in your own words. Do not worry about spelling or grammar, but try to be as clear as possible in your answers.

27. Was the feedback from your peers useful? Why or why not?
28. Was the feedback from your teacher useful? Why or why not?
29. Did you learn anything in particular from **preparing for** your Discussion Circle?
30. Were there any particular challenges in **preparing for** your Discussion Circle?
31. Did you learn anything in particular from **leading** a discussion circle?
32. Were there any particular challenges in **leading** your discussion circle?
33. Did you learn anything in particular by **participating** in a discussion circles?
34. Were there any particular challenges in **participating** in discussion circles?
35. What improvements do you think could be made to the Discussion Circle project?
36. Do you have any additional comments about the Discussion Circle project you would like to share?

**Thank you very much for your time and assistance with this study!**

## Appendix C

### Teacher Interview Questions

In order to evaluate the effectiveness of the Discussion Circle project, we're interested in finding out how you implement this project, as well as your perspective on the role of academic discussion skills in the ELI 80 curriculum.

1. Ideally, what are the learning outcomes of the DC project? How does this project fit in with the ELI 80 SLO's?
2. When do you implement the DC project in your class? Why?
3. How do you introduce and scaffold this project?
4. What kind of feedback do you give student during the different stages of the DC project?
5. How do you assess your students for the DC project?
6. What are the most important things a teacher can do (e.g. in terms of design, scaffolding, or implementation) in order to help students improve their academic discussion skills through the DC project?
7. Do you have any additional comments or reflections about the DC project you want to share? (e.g. challenges, room to improve, things that work, etc.)
8. Overall, how much time do you devote to the teaching of discussion and discussion strategies? What other major assignments and resources do you use to teach discussion?
9. Do you feel your students met the SLOs for discussion by the end of the DC project?

## Appendix D

### Page 1 of Observation Protocol

Date:

Observer:

#students:

#groups:

<b>Time</b>	<b>Teacher</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• introducing DC</li> <li>• giving instructions</li> <li>• monitoring DC</li> <li>• giving feedback</li> </ul>	<b>DC group leader</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• introducing DC</li> <li>• managing discussion (e.g. turns, equal participation)</li> <li>• eliciting responses</li> <li>• asking for elaboration, clarification</li> <li>• building on group members' responses</li> <li>• time on-task</li> </ul>	<b>DC group members</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• volunteering responses v. answering questions</li> <li>• asking for elaboration, clarification</li> <li>• building on other members' ideas</li> <li>• time on-task</li> </ul>
1:30			
1:35			
1:40			



## Appendix E

### Goals and Objectives

ELI 80 Goals and Objectives  
 —ELI Listening & Speaking—  
 (Updated on November 20, 2003)

#### **5. Students will improve skills as an effective discussion leader in a student-directed way.**

(NOTE: The term “discussion” here is not limited to small-group discussions, but can be also applied to pair work and whole-class discussions.)

- Students will select a topic (or topics) of discussion (or debate).
- Students will learn to prepare for discussions as a leader. (Students are expected to find sources for collecting information on their own.)
- Students will learn to have control over discussion (e.g., initiating topics, changing or returning to subjects, holding the floor).
- Students will learn to encourage passive members to participate in discussions.
- Students will learn to keep a discussion going.
- Students will learn to keep a discussion on track.
- Students will learn to deal with different opinions among group members.
- Students will learn phrases commonly used when leading discussions.
- Students will learn to wrap up discussions.
- Students will learn to summarize and report the discussion to the whole class.

#### **6. Students will improve skills as an active participant in discussions.**

(NOTE: The term “discussion” here is not limited to small-group discussions, but can be also applied to pair work and whole-class discussions.)

- Students will learn to prepare for discussions as regular participants.
- Students will learn to comprehend and critically respond to other participants’ opinions.
- Students will learn to actively express their opinions orally.
- Students will learn to cooperate with discussion leaders to keep the discussion on track.
- Students will learn phrases commonly used in discussions.
- Students will learn to effectively ask questions in small groups as well as in class (clarification requests as well as referential questions).
- Students will improve pragmatic aspects of discussion skills (i.e., politely responding to other participants).

## Appendix F

### Comparison of Face-to-face and Online Students' Perceptions

Survey item	Face to face		Online	
	Mean	<i>SD</i>	Mean	<i>SD</i>
To what extent do you agree with the following statements?				
1. I found the Discussion Circle useful	3.33	0.74	3.20	0.84
2. I found the Discussion Circle enjoyable	3.45	0.57	3.40	0.55
3. I found the instructions for the Discussion Circle clear	3.38	0.68	3.20	0.84
4. The class activities prepared me to lead a Discussion Circle	3.24	0.79	3.40	0.55
How useful was the Discussion Circle project in helping you develop the following skills?				
5. Participating in small group discussion	3.45	0.57	3.20	0.84
6. Knowing how to enter a conversation	3.24	0.74	3.20	1.10
7. Expressing an opinion to a group	3.52	0.63	3.40	0.89
8. Responding to the ideas of others	3.45	0.57	3.25	0.96
9. Giving clear explanations of ideas	3.17	0.76	3.00	0.71
10. Improving overall listening in English	3.28	0.75	2.80	1.30
11. Improving overall speaking in English	3.38	0.62	3.00	1.22
12. Improving critical thinking skills	3.00	0.89	3.00	1.22
How useful were the following ELI 80 activities in <u>preparing</u> you for the Discussion Circle project?				
13. Whole class discussion	3.07	0.78	2.80	0.84
14. Small group discussions	3.38	0.62	3.00	0.71
15. Listening to academic lectures	2.96	0.81	3.00	0.71
16. Practicing note taking skills	2.69	1.00	2.80	0.84
17. Learning about different academic cultures	3.44	0.70	3.20	0.84
18. Group work/group presentations	3.19	0.79	3.00	1.00
19. Learning helpful phrases for discussions	3.55	0.63	3.40	0.89
20. Learning about different discussion strategies	3.37	0.74	3.20	0.84
To what extent do you agree with the following statements?				
21. There is enough time in class spent preparing for the Discussion Circle (e.g., learning about different discussion strategies)	2.72	0.88	2.80	0.84
22. Leading a discussion once is enough	2.66	1.01	3.20	0.84
How useful was the feedback you received from the following?				
23. Peers/group members	3.21	0.74	3.40	0.89
24. The teacher during discussion	3.34	0.77	3.20	0.84
25. The teacher after discussion	3.41	0.73	2.80	0.84
26. Self-reflection activity	2.83	0.71	3.20	0.84