**Introduction:**

A need has been expressed in the class for a structure that will allow for focused discussion and efficient decision-making. The Periclean Class of 2016 expressed concern over individuals dominating class discussion, propagating an unequal distribution of power in the classroom dynamic. At times discussion can be circular, and there was no entity other then the class advisor to moderate discussion.

However, ultimately there will be a point where the class advisor (Professor Post) steps back from her position to allow the class to organize and function on its own. At that time the class will need to structure, motivate, and operate itself, otherwise it will face failure. The goal of this document and proposal is to ease the course of transition and formulate a process and provide a foundation for future decisions and discussions. The document is split into four sections, the Agenda, the Main Body, the Roles and Techniques, and the Consensus Committee Organization.

*Mission: to increase class efficiency and create a structure in which consensus can be formed*

**I. Agenda**

A. *Purpose:*

The agenda is meant to provide a focus for class discussion. It will allow for flexible conversation over topics the class feels is relevant and impertinent to future course of action. The agenda process will be composed of three parts: the Goal, the Order of Business, and the Transition.

1. Goal:

A goal shall be written on the whiteboard in the beginning of class. The class aims to complete such goal by the end of the class. The goal for each class will be determined by a combination of the class syllabus as well as previous class’s decisions. The goal will be in accordance with, and seek to achieve in some way, the mission statement. The goal will be streamlined and presented by the consensus committee.

2. Order of Business

The Order of Business will be placed underneath the Goal, it will be a detail specific

Extension of the goal, and will describe how the goal will be achieved, or what steps need to be taken for the class to be a success.

a. Note taker of the consensus committee writes upon the board; the agenda, the consensus decision agreed upon from the previous task.

b. The floor shall be open for concerns about the agenda, a quick discussion will be allowed to add, or change any of the points upon the board.

3. Transition

The Transition will allow for a smooth progression into the meeting details and discussion. It will provide a clear description of the tasks each member will be assigned with.

a. Role Determination:

i. Random shuffling: the people may decide to later switch roles if they obtained one they do not prefer or had several times in the past once they are in the groups that they were assigned

b. Miscellaneous: any other important points can be raised

**II. Main Body:**

The main body of the class will be separated into two sections, discussion and brainstorming, and reaching consensus. The consensus process and the discussion process are two distinct sections of meetings, as they require varying amounts of flexibility and discussion. By nature discussions must be freer flowing and open to allow the creative output of ideas while voting must be orderly to ensure efficient decision-making. Reaching consensus in a large group is extremely difficult, as each individual has varying expectations. Rather then swaying a vast majority of people with conflicting opinions and producing discord and argumentation, the large group will be split into a smaller one to reach agreement, and then the groups will unite to summarize their findings, finally a consensus document will be synthesized and presented to the class. This strategy listed below is one of many, and varying techniques will be required depending on the goal of the class and the situation. The structure provided below is meant to create a basic outline for increasing efficiency. If the class or organization deems voting unnecessary for the meeting and goal, or conversely, if discussion is not as highly prioritized, then sections can be minimized or eliminated. These procedures are not meant to be mandatory, rather they are in place as guidelines, and can be modified with ease. Knowing when to use various other strategies and techniques for promoting consensus is important, and while some will be covered in the Consensus Committee piece, this section is meant to provide basic parameters and foundations for such a process.

A. *Discussions and Brainstorming*

1. Small Group Structure

Each small group is composed of approximately five individuals. People work the most efficiently in small groups, which tend to increase participation and motivation. Increased motivation and participation increases dedication in turn. The roles are designed to prevent the concentration of power structures, and make sure the environment is healthy, and fosters constructive criticism and support.

i. Roles

The roles are determined in the beginning of class by random distribution of colored cards. The breakdown of roles is to delegate tasks and assure responsibility and accountability. Roles can be traded with other members in the groups.

-Facilitator:

*The purpose of the facilitator is to make sure discussion is successful through moderation. The facilitator accomplishes this by using passive strategies to assure conversation remains focused. The facilitator also utilizes techniques to organize the structure of the group. (see moderation techniques list).*

-Vibes Watcher:

*The vibes watcher acts to watch the emotional environment of the group. If a group member look as if they are frustrated, or if the facilitator is becoming too controlling then the vibes water will use specific techniques to make sure everyone is feeling their opinions are represented and the group is on the right track. The vibes watcher’s secondary goal is to resolve arguments. Also it the position checks the facilitator to maintain an even power balance.*

*-*Reporter and Representative

*The reporter acts as the spokesperson and representative of each group. When a presentation of discussion is necessary, or a vote for more time is required, then the representative acts as the sole voice of the group. The reporter synthesizes information and presents the consensus statement, notes from the note taker, and a summary of discussion to the large group when the class is reintegrated. While the reporter acts to represent the other members, in the case of a time vote or the large structure reorganization vote then the reporter can chose how to vote.*

*-*Notes Taker/ Time Keeper:

*The notes taker records information in the discussion. Points that the group stresses should be more detailed, while other ideas can be in a bullet point format. The note taker also functions as a timekeeper and makes sure the group is on task. The timekeeper will also give a 15 minute mark, and 20 minute mark to make sure everyone is aware of the time. At the 23 minute mark, the time keeper will allow the group to move into the creation of a statement of consensus. All notes shall be sent to the secretary of the consensus committee.*

*-*Clause of Position Elasticity

*Usually the groups are composed of 5 individuals, the 5th individual may take on the responsibilities or obligations deemed proper and necessary by the group. This also allows for the revision and amendment of previously described positions by the group.*

ii. Process General

-The group outlines a goal to achieve during the meeting time, that goal will be clearly stated in the beginning by the facilitator

-Group members discuss the issue, trying not to interrupt each other; if group discussion becomes too passionate the facilitator will stack the discussion

-See facilitator guide for complete instructions, each other position will make sure they are following responsibilities outlined in the previous section.

-The small groups shall meet for approximately 25 minutes. At the end of the time the consensus committee will see if more time is needed. If only one group needs more time, then the class will meet for 3 more minutes. If two or more groups must need more time, then the small groups will meet for 5 more minutes. A vote will be taken at the end of each time until all groups do not need further time. The total amount of additional time shall not exceed 10 minutes.

-The small groups (through the voice of their representative) can always vote to overturn the cap of 10 minutes, as well as to raise other concerns.

-At the end of the time, the group will come up with a statement of consensus representing the results of their discussion.

B. *Voting and Reaching Consensus*

b. Large Group Structure:

It becomes more difficult to organize a large group of people simply because of the significant number of individuals that compose them. The inefficiency in communication between individuals is amplified on a larger scale. This inefficiency is exasperated when individuals are diverse, each with their own perspective on life and own expectations. This section will look to solve that dilemma though consensus. We have come to realize that small groups are the most efficient structure for discussion. While there will be difficulty in bringing the small groups back together, the large should mirror the smaller group. If the larger system mirrors the smaller system, then the system can be scaled to any situation or number of individuals. For instance, the smaller group structure can be utilized in a business meeting with only 20 individuals, and it can also be used with an entire convention of 100 people.

i. Regrouping

-The reporters will meet and his or her group members will be gathered around. The reporters will act as a representative of their group.

-Reporters will report in summary form that their group discussed and conclusions of that group.

-Group members will have the ability to speak, but only if they feel the representative does not cover a key. It is up to the discretion of the consensus committee to facilitate the conversation.

-The consensus committee will collect the notes and the findings of each group

-The meeting shall be ended once all reporters summarize their group’s ideas, and any additional ideas are raised.

-The goal of the discussion/meeting will be restated any progress will be stated to see if the goal has been accomplished.

-The class will be adjourned.

ii. Constructing Consensus

-The consensus committee will be charged with synthesizing the results of the class’s discussion in a document. All points will be covered.

-If any of the points are contradictory then the committee will outline the possibilities to bring back to the class to vote on it and decide the best course of action.

-The document shall be uploaded by the next consensus meeting time (but before the next organization meeting) for all members to see.

iii. Reaching Consensus

-The article that was drawn up by the consensus committee will be presented to the class as well as online before the class; the class or organization should look at the document beforehand.

-Any amendments should be proposed after the article has been presented to the class.

-The class will then decide whether the article represents consensus. Any objections to the article will be heard. Objections should not be with the entire process or idea (since the class or organization was the one who initially created the main principle) rather objections should be focused on a detail they believe is ineffective.

-The class will then vote on the article to determine if it accurately represents the class’s opinion, if three or more people disagree upon it, then it will be moved back into the amendment stage.

-The second time the class moves into the voting stage, consensus will be reached at a three-fourths majority. If that vote fails then the class can move back into a discussion on the consensus, or the article or proposition can be scrapped.

**III. Roles and Techniques:**

This section is designed to provide a comprehensive guide for each role and position. In the previous section the roles were briefly described, however this will provide more in depth techniques and suggestions for success. The section will focus predominantly on the facilitator and the vibes watcher position, as they are the positions with the most power in the group.

1. Facilitator

The facilitator’s position is to make sure the group follows the decision and consensus process. They aim to reach a balance between flexibility and structure. The facilitator has power in the group to redirect the conversation to remain on track to increase efficiency, however they should never use this power to influence group discussion. While they are allowed to contribute to the group discussion they should now assert their authority to get others to conform to their opinion. Their position is meant to be fair, honest, accepting. If there is no need within the discussion for facilitation (if the group is leading itself) then the facilitator has no job. Normally in small groups the group leads itself, however natural power positions can come into being, therefore the facilitator is designed to make sure that everyone has an equal say and is not manipulating the conversation into their favor.

Some things the facilitator should do include but are not limited to: If there is no one taking initiative to begin the discussion in the beginning the facilitator should open up the conversation. If someone within the group gets the group off topic then the facilitator will make sure to bring the discussion back. If one person interrupts another, then the facilitator should point that out. If one half of the group wants to move into detail oriented specification and another half of the group wants to work with general topic based discussion, then the facilitator can comment on that and say the group may not be ready to discuss that yet, or they should take a vote. The facilitator should pose questions or statements about how the group feels and allow the group to agree or disagree. The facilitator has the right to call for a vote and such, however any disagreements or contradicting opinions must be discussed. Below is a list of strategies for successful facilitation.

i. Pose your statements as questions:

Questions are much less aggressive and are more passive. They allow the group to consider the point themselves and allow strategic thinking. Questions also prevent unnecessary tension.

*Example*: Rather then, “The group is split into two opposing opinions, we are moving on to another topic”, the question “Do we want to finish the brainstorming process or move on to voting?” would be a much better way of tackling the problem.

ii. Say what you see happening

Often people are not able to see how others view them, or see how the conversation is going from a outside prospective. It is difficult to notice when you are being counter productive, or if one person is manipulating the discussion. It is helpful to say what the facilitator sees. This allows a overall view and suggests and allows for synthesis and consensus of opinions. However make sure to say it in a non-aggressive way!!

*Example:* “I notice that the group is siding with this side, how does everyone feel about it?” or “There appears to be difficulty in following the consensus model, how can we remedy this?”

iii. Guide and Strategies

The role of the facilitator is to act as a guide. If people are speaking out of turn it may be efficient to propose taking a list of speakers (stacking the conversation.) Proposing a vote, and generally making sure people stay efficient and flexible are important

a. *Stack*- create a list of speakers if everyone is talking out of turn

b. *Step Forward Step Back*- when there is an uneven distribution in talking, talkative people step back, non talkative step forward, and then share their thoughts

c. *Go around-* everyone quickly states their thoughts on the subject, used if people want a general summary of everyone’s thoughts on the subject

d. *Partnering-* everyone partners up, helps explore points of view

e. *Moment of Reflection*- allows people to gather their thoughts on the matter, provides brainstorming so the ideas are more focused and refined.

f. *Brainstorm-* each person writes down ideas, or the group quickly spits out ideas

g. *Straw Polls-* allows a quick vote, used to feel out a particular area

e. *Feelings Check*- feelings are important too, a feelings check will prevent possible power tendencies which otherwise would not be apparent to the group.

2. Vibes Watcher

The vibes watcher is another very important position in the group. The vibes watcher is responsible for two things, gauging the emotional energy of the group as well as counteracting the power of the facilitator. The vibes watcher should constantly be monitoring the emotional environment. If someone looks as if they are feeling angry at a situation, or frustrated then the vibes watcher should double check. Important emotions and situations to look for include: racism, confusion, sadness, anger, hostility, or tension. Techniques are listed below.

i. Say what you see or notice:

Like the facilitator the vibes watcher is responsible to say if they notice

any negative emotions or situations within the group. They can propose a compromise, or ask for a solution.

ii. Statements should usually be posed in questions:

Again, as seen with the facilitator, questions generally are much better then statements, they are much more passive and promote critical thought.

iii. Specific names should not be mentioned, or pull them aside.

If you mention names then that person will feel like they are being threatened or called out. State it as a general trend you noticed. If the person says something out of line or acceptable that was already noted by a general statement you can pull them aside and talk with them.

Finally the vibes watcher has the responsibility of balancing the facilitator. They should be knowledgeable of the facilitator’s roles and responsibilities. They should make sure that the facilitator does not abuse their power and right by intentionally or maliciously directing the conversation. They act to hold the facilitator accountable for their actions, if they are doing a unsuccessful job they will be responsible with talking with the facilitator after for potential remedies or better alternative strategies.

3. Reporter

While all positions are important for consensus, the reporter is the last of the three main power positions. The reporter’s job is to take all of the information and things discussed in the small group and bring them back to the large group. The reporter will work with the note taker to summarize the conversation and report it to the rest of the class. They are accountable to their group members if they miss a critical point, and the group members have the ability to state it. Also they may have the responsibilities to help the consensus committee construct a consensus article, however that will be outlined and needs to be further detailed.

4. Notes Taker

The notes taker’s position is pretty self-descriptive, if understanding is not clear check the previous section’s description. They are in charge of the documentation and summary of discussion as well as the record of time. They will remind the group of time deadlines as well as work with the reporter to produce a summary of the discussion.

**IV Consensus Committee**

*The consensus committee needs to formally meet to begin to construct a outline for their positions. It would not represent them fairly if I simply dictated what I would like to see. The committee will meet once a week and be responsible for the upkeep of the consensus system.*