Your colleague leads a weekly discussion section for a large lecture class. The professor for the class asks TAs to (1) review material from each week's lecture, (2) answer any questions students may have, and (3) go over the weekly homework assignments. These assignments ask students to analyze specific issues or current events in light of material presented in the readings and lectures.

Your colleague tells you that each week she reserves part of the class time for students to ask questions about lectures and homework. Discussions seem lively and interesting, and students seem to enjoy the chance to talk about the material covered during the lecture. However, just before the mid-quarter exam, she asked students to write one-minute answers to the question, “How is the discussion section going for you so far?” – and she was somewhat surprised by the answers.

What lessons can you learn from these answers, and what do you think your colleague should she say to students the next time she sees them?

1.  I really like taking time to talk about our questions during the section meetings. These discussions really help me understand the lectures better. Thanks for your help.

2.  The lectures are really boring, and I don't think the professor knows anything about the real world where we have to use this stuff. Why does he spend all his time just going over theories?

3.  This class is going OK for me, but sometimes the homework is hard to understand.

4.  Explain the homework more clearly, please! If I don't know what's important, how can I study for the test?

5.  Everything is basically ok, but I wish we had more time to talk about our own questions.

6.  Can you speak more clearly? Sometimes it's very hard to understand what you say.

7.  I have never studied this subject before, so it takes me a long time to figure out what's going on. I think I'm learning a lot, but I don't like to talk in front of the other students.

8.  I think it's good to have discussions, but why do you let just a couple students do all the talking? I never have a chance to ask my questions.

9.  The textbook for this class is useless. Why did we have to buy it?
10. The section meetings are really helpful, but sometimes you talk so fast that I'm not sure what you say, and I can't keep up taking notes at all.

11. I appreciate what you're trying to do in this class, but if I say what I'm really thinking, people get all defensive don't want to hear it. It's easier to stay invisible and go with the flow.

12. It's hard for me to understand everybody else's questions, so I don't know how to take notes when you're giving them the answers. Can you spend more time emphasizing what's going to be on the test? I think you spend too much time answering all the students' questions.

13. The homework takes a long time to do and I learn a lot when I do it. But I don't always have time to finish it so I'm afraid to speak up in class.

14. I know you like this subject because you get so excited when you talk about it. But sometimes I can't keep up because the discussion goes so fast. I'd like to talk more in class but by the time I figure out what to say, you've already started the next topic.

15. It doesn't really matter what I think. That's been clear since the first day of class.

16. I really enjoy the discussion sections, and I like hearing about your experience with this subject, too. Thank you for making the class so interesting.

17. I like the way you make this class so lively and interesting. Sometimes the material in the book seems really basic, and I don't learn anything from the lectures at all. But section meetings are great.

18. When I hear what the other students in this class think, it scares me to think they'll soon be out in the world working in jobs where they might really affect people. I wish you would do more to challenge the lame ideas that they keep repeating.

19. I think there's a lot of material we haven't covered yet, but the mid-term is coming up really soon. What's going to be on the test? Can't you just give us the answers to the homework so we don't have to take such a long time to discuss it every week?

20. Thanks for the lively discussions. I really look forward to coming to class.