

**Northern Illinois University**  
**Chain Debates – State Your Claims (Whether you agree or not)**

We suggest an in-class exercise to introduce argumentation. First, ask your students to stand and form a circle in the classroom. Explain to students that each student will be asked to provide “reasons” that either support or refute an idea. We suggest using somewhat controversial topics as part of the chain debate. For example, we recently used the following topics:

- i. The concentration of global wealth in a few individuals constrains global economic growth.

In a recent study, Oxfam reported that world’s 85 richest individuals control 50 % the world’s wealth. The Oxfam study is available at <http://www.oxfam.org/en/policy/working-for-the-few-economic-inequality>. However, an alternative view is provided by the American Enterprise Institute (among others) at <http://www.aei-ideas.org/2014/01/why-the-much-hyped-oxfam-study-on-global-income-inequality-is-misleading/>

- ii. The IRS should eliminate tax loopholes that allow U.S. corporations to avoid paying income taxes.

Recently, a U.S. Senate Subcommittee began investigating several high profile U.S. companies (e.g., Caterpillar, Apple, Microsoft) for improperly avoided U.S. taxes by moving profits outside the country. An article from the *St. Louis Post Dispatch* provides a summary of the situation at the following link [http://www.stltoday.com/business/local/caterpillar-said-to-be-focus-of-u-s-senate-panel/article\\_2f8592c6-fe90-5c4f-b53e-b13ea6926635.html](http://www.stltoday.com/business/local/caterpillar-said-to-be-focus-of-u-s-senate-panel/article_2f8592c6-fe90-5c4f-b53e-b13ea6926635.html)

- iii. Women should receive equal pay for equal work.

In his 2014 State of the Union Address, President Obama identified equal pay for women as a priority. According to the U.S. Department of Labor, women now earn 81 cents on the dollar compared to men <http://www.dol.gov/equalpay/>.

We suggest you conduct two chain debates. The first round, you go around the circle with each student contributing support for the topic. Two aspects of the chain debate create challenges: (1) students may have their idea taken by someone prior to their turn, and (2) students may not agree with the position they have to take. In the second round, each student should have to try to refute an argument made in the first round. Once an argument has been refuted in a specific way, it cannot be refuted in that same way by another student in the chain.