Group Polarization Demonstration
Shared with STP's "This is How I Teach" blog by David Myers.

Have everyone in the class complete this case example by checking one answer:

> Leslie is a writer who is said to have considerable creative talent but who so far has been earning a comfortable living by writing cheap Westerns. Recently, Leslie has come up with an idea for a potentially significant novel. If it could be written and accepted it might have considerable literary impact and be a big boost to Leslie's career. On the other hand, if Leslie is not able to work out the idea, or if the novel were to be a flop, considerable time and energy will have been invested without remuneration.
>
> Imagine that you are advising Leslie. Please check the lowest probability that you would consider acceptable for Leslie to attempt to write the novel.
>
> Leslie should attempt to write the novel if the chances that the novel will be a success are at least:
> __1 in 10
> __2 in 10
> __3 in 10
> __4 in 10
> __5 in 10
> __6 in 10
> __7 in 10
> __8 in 10
> __9 in 10
> __Place a check here if you think Leslie should attempt the novel only if it is certain (i.e., 10 in 10) that the novel will be a success.

Collect the sheets, form the class into groups of four, and give them a fresh copy of the same case example. Invite each group to discuss the case either until they reach a consensus, or till you call time after 3 or 4 minutes. At that point, have them mark how they what they would *now* advise.

If you average the prediscussion responses (perhaps before the next class) you will observe that the average student will tend to favor writing the novel, even if the chances are but 4 or so in 10. After discussion, this tendency will typically be strengthened, with the class average having shifted a tad, to something near 3 in 10. This illustrates a well-replicated phenomenon that inspired follow experiments on group polarization—the tendency of group discussion to enhance a group members' initial leanings.