PHILADELPHIA, Pennsylvania (AP) — Late on a Friday afternoon, as other college students get an early start to their weekend, about 100 students gather in a ninth-floor classroom at Temple University to hear a young Marine officer discuss his time in Iraq.

Midway through his graphic tale of hunting and killing “terrorists,” students start to interrupt.

Wouldn’t some call them “freedom fighters”? Can the United States ever pull out of Iraq? Does the Marine support President Bush’s re-election?

Thus began the latest “teach-in” at the North Philadelphia campus, a weekly, no-credit session led by a Vietnam-era protester-turned-college history professor.

The sessions, which started three years ago as an offshoot to professor Ralph Young’s “Dissent in America” course, invite students to challenge views — including their own — on issues from war to feminism to photojournalism. Friday’s topic kept students going for more than three hours.

“Even if I have somewhat of a left-wing view myself, I don’t want to impose it. I just want them to look at the historical past, and basically make their own conclusions,” Young said.

The teach-ins came full circle with the visit Friday by 1st Lt. J. David Fleming, 29, who took Young’s “Dissent” course at a Penn State satellite campus in 1998 and sent occasional e-mails during two tours of Iraq.

“I had these images of what combat was going to be like,” said Fleming, who enlisted at 17. “I wanted to go kill somebody. I wanted to go to war, to answer the question for myself, ‘Hey, do I have what it takes?’"

Years later, after time out for college and retraining as a Marine officer, Fleming finally saw war firsthand. The view was not so romantic.
“It’s survival,” he said of his up-close battles with the enemy. “I’m doing everything in my power to survive and so is he.”

Several students challenged his use of the term “terrorist” for all manner of Iraqi foe. Terrorists kill civilians; Fleming was a legitimate military target, some argued.

“In my world, that’s semantics,” Fleming replied, unoffended.

A week earlier, a teach-in on the motive for Bush’s foreign policy inspired a lively discussion from the group, which included students from Japan, Turkey, Egypt and other countries, Young said.

For student Alison Macrina, Fleming’s talk didn’t change her opposition to the Iraq war, but did broaden her perspective.

“I liked him, and usually my experiences with (pro-war) people …. is not always so familiar or so friendly,” said Macrina, 20, a junior and liberal activist from Collingswood, New Jersey.

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