Design Template: Seminar

FORMAT: Seminar

Seminars may be conducted on Zoom or other web conferencing platforms. Faculty may elect to break a weekly three-hour session into shorter meetings to help maintain focus and energy.

- Request that the 3-hour time block be split into two 80-minute meetings in a MW or TTh meeting pattern. The new meeting time can be requested by the undergraduate program administrator, but will require approval from the Office of the Registrar. *(Note that requests will only be approved if they do not pose course conflicts for 90% of the currently enrolled students (e.g., no more than 2 students in a 25-person seminar).*
  - If a larger seminar (more than 12 students) is divided into two 80-minute meetings each week, the instructor may choose to meet with the entire group for the first 50 minutes, then divide the group into smaller sections for focused work in the remaining 30 minutes of class time.
- Alternatively, faculty might choose to maintain the existing 3-hour seminar meeting pattern, but divide the meeting time within the existing block so as to vary the instructional format and facilitate more interaction with the faculty member.
  - For instance, the seminar could be divided informally into two groups, with the instructor alternating between the two, spending half of the class time with each group.
  - During the meeting time without the instructor, students could work on interactive small-group or partner work, with the entire class convening prior to the end of the session to share updates/engage in a wrap-up with the instructor.
- The 3-hour seminar may also be shortened to two hours of meeting each week, with the addition of a “practicum” component to comprise the third hour.
  - The practicum is an appropriate way to reflect a range of interactive, hands-on learning formats that students would complete on their own time, in small groups that could be organized by time zone, area of interest or focus, special project, etc. Faculty are encouraged to consult with McGraw on how to conceptualize this option.
  - The one-hour “practicum” would be added with a “TBA” meeting pattern. Students would be expected to maintain this one hour of meeting time outside of the seminar, perhaps reporting back each week or keeping a log or journal about their group work. Students could be assigned to work in pairs or in small groups, connecting on Zoom, Google hangout, Facetime, etc.
  - As a general rule, no more than one-third of a course’s formal meeting time should be devoted to a practicum (e.g., a maximum of one hour in a course with three hours of meeting time).

For students unable to attend:

- Record the meeting, and remind students that the video may not be distributed or shared
- Provide alternative modes of participation, such as asking students to post and comment on discussion boards

ESSENTIAL CONSIDERATIONS
Identify course goals and objectives. Start by thinking about your essential course goals. Focusing on the most important elements of what you want your students to learn and learn how to do will help concentrate your efforts and make clear decisions about how to adapt your course.

Design your curriculum in modules. Rather than a single arc across the semester, segment your course into modules, allowing for change and adaptation at points during the semester.

Plan instruction for interaction and allow students to exercise creativity. Engagement and interaction with you and with fellow students will foster community and motivation. Include opportunities for peer review of work, small group discussions, group projects, debates, student-developed screencasts, peer teaching (e.g., students assigned to particular readings or topics and then teach each other), etc.

Prepare students for learning online. Despite our frequent assertions that students are “digital natives,” online learning may be entirely new to them. Explain your expectations, and provide guidance on how to meet them (for instance, explain how you expect students to participate in class, and/or share your participation rubric with students).

Anticipate issues of access and inclusion. Consider sending a short questionnaire in advance of the first class that asks students to share concerns they have about engaging the course, including technology and access. See also the guidance provided by the Office of Disabilities Services.

DESIGN FOR ENGAGEMENT AND INTERACTIVITY

Get to know your students and encourage them to get to know one another; you might:

- Allow students to get to know you through an introductory email or video biography
- Invite students to attend pre-semester office hours
- Use students’ names whenever possible
- Begin each meeting with a check in, going around the virtual classroom to ask each student a low-stakes question as a way of hearing from everyone and getting the discussion started
- Create opportunities for students to collaborate during class (such as by using the breakout rooms feature of Zoom)

Plan active learning exercises during class; ideas include:

- Ask small groups of students to wrestle with an interpretive problem or puzzle
- Assign small groups of students to complete one part of a larger task and report back
- Ask students to contribute to a shared document (a glossary, for example) related to course content

Plan and articulate guidelines for productive discussions

- Directly address the ways that the virtual nature of the class affects the seminar—how tools (e.g. Zoom features) can be used to aid discussion as well as how they pose challenges. For example, turn taking can be even more complicated virtually, but using the chat feature, the raise hand feature, and other Zoom tools can increase participation
- To avoid hub (teacher) and spoke (students) patterns of discussion, equip students with moves to engage one another, re-direct questions you receive to other students, ask for further elaboration or comment from different students, etc. So that you are not the center
of all exchanges, consider adopting a role other than question-asker, such as “class note-taker,” during discussions

Create **out-of-class opportunities for participation**; ideas include:

- Ask students to post questions and comments on the discussion board of your learning management system
- Create peer-review opportunities, using Google Drive or Canvas
- Use a tool like VoiceThread to allow students to comment on video clips and other media
- Create a student-generated wiki or collaborative document related to course content
- Offer a structured “office hour” in some weeks, where you’ll briefly review a particularly challenging concept or specifically prompt questions about an upcoming assignment

Use **“classroom assessment techniques”**; ideas include:

- Ask students to submit an unanswered question at the end of each meeting or module
- Conduct an informal mid-semester evaluation

**ASSESS YOUR STUDENTS’ LEARNING**

**Assign frequent assignments**, with opportunities for regular feedback. If appropriate, you might break larger assignments into steps and give feedback along the way.

**Vary the mode of submission.** Ask students to write essays, or record podcasts, or make blog entries, for example.

**Assign group projects.** These may be low- or high-stakes; ideas include:
- Ask students to collaboratively write and edit a document
- Ask students to engage in a collaborative research project
- Ask students to build and contribute to a website

**Address academic integrity explicitly.**

- Develop assignments that require students to make their thinking visible, which will minimize the risks of academic dishonesty
- Review University guidelines regarding plagiarism, emphasize any specific course considerations, and share resources from the Library and Writing Center on proper attribution

**PREPARE STUDENTS FOR LEARNING**

Encourage metacognitive thinking and self-assessment.

- Be explicit about your expectations for students’ preparation for and participation in seminar and provide guidance on how to meet them
- Direct students to review relevant sections of your syllabus so that they come to class prepared to engage
- Encourage students, in order to make the most of each seminar, to review earlier notes. Consider providing or asking for a brief recap at the outset of class
• Contextualize the assigned readings and explain your intention in assigning them. Provide advice about how to learn from assigned texts—especially for what may be unfamiliar types of texts such as scholarly articles
• Show your marked texts as a model
• Explicate or unpack your reading practices and processes
• Provide generative questions for students to ask and answer to achieve the kinds of readings you are expecting
• During seminar, incorporate short pauses during which no one is speaking, but which students can use to reflect or re-energize. The Zoom chat function might be used to collect student questions during these pauses

RECOMMENDED DIGITAL TOOLS

• Asynchronous discussion
  ○ Use the Discussion tool in Canvas or Discussion Board tool in Blackboard
  ○ Take advantage of Ed Discussion, available in both Canvas and Blackboard, for Q&A style discussions that also allows for inline LaTeX and run-able code snippets
  ○ Use VoiceThread, a platform for asynchronous discussions on multimedia resources, which makes it possible for students to leave audio, video and text responses

• Annotation
  ○ Collaboratively annotate course readings (PDFs or webpages) with Hypothesis
  ○ Leave timecode comments on video with VoiceThread or on a McGraw Commons course blog

• Digital projects and assignments
  ○ Create a collaborative course blog with one of McGraw’s Commons course website platforms
  ○ Encourage students to work on digital projects using free, online, easy-to-use tools such as ArcGIS Online, TimelineJS, StoryMapJS, or Google MyMaps (see descriptions in the Course Tool Finder)
  ○ Invite students to collaborate on data collection and visualization with Siftr
  ○ Use Codio, an integrated development environment (IDE), to create, assign, test and grade computer programming or data science assignments

• In-class collaboration
  ○ Brainstorm a topic collaboratively with Ideaboardz or visualize ideas with AnswerGarden
  ○ Make use of Google Docs for collaborative writing and peer feedback

• File sharing and collaborative writing
  ○ Share files in Canvas, Blackboard, or in Google Drive
  ○ Make use of Google Docs for collaborative writing and peer feedback.

• Video conferencing and engagement tools
  ○ Use Zoom and take advantage of its interactive features during synchronous class meetings
  ○ Use Mentimeter, an online polling tool which can be used in conjunction with Zoom, to increase engagement and participation