Welcome to this presentation on Seminars: Synchronicity in the Asynchronous Classroom. This presentation will allow you to explore the rationale for incorporating seminars in the Kaplan University classroom and will provide you with some proven techniques that will help you maximize the benefits of the KHE Seminar for your students.
Presentation Overview

In this presentation, you will receive:

- Introduction to Seminars, including what is a seminar, what are the different approaches to seminar, how do seminars contribute to higher education, about seminars at Kaplan, and guidelines for seminar facilitation.

- And, seminar management techniques, such as ideas for preparing ahead, seminar pacing, keeping students involved.

- Finally, pedagogical seminar techniques, techniques that are grounded in pedagogy, such as questioning and encouraging critical thinking, self-assessment, and pitfalls to avoid.
Let’s begin with an introduction to seminars at Kaplan.
What is a Seminar?

- A seminar is academic instruction delivered in a synchronous format designed to bring together small groups for recurring meetings focused on a particular subject where all participants actively engage.

- The idea behind the seminar system is to familiarize students more extensively with their chosen subject and also to allow them to interact with examples of the practical problems.

- It is essentially a place where assigned readings are discussed, questions can be raised, and critical thinking conducted.
Approaches to Seminar

Approaches to Seminar

Seminars may be loosely arranged around two themes: Socratic dialogue and critical thinking.

- Socratic dialogue involves asking a series of questions surrounding a central issue and answering questions of the others involved. Generally, this involves the defense of one point of view against another and is, by nature, oppositional. The best way to “win” is to make the opponent contradict him/herself in some way that proves the inquirer’s point of view.

- Critical thinking consists of the mental processes of discernment, analysis, and evaluation, and is based on intellectual criteria that extend beyond subject-matter divisions. Critical thinkers gather information from the senses, verbal and/or written expressions, reflection, observation, experience, and reasoning.
How Do Seminars Contribute to Higher Education?

To serve a pedagogical purpose in the classroom, seminars must exist as part of students’ knowledge creation process, not as a fringe benefit. In order to fully become an organic, holistically integrated part of the classroom, seminar sessions should not be set apart as extraneous to the work students will do in more formal assignments, but should be presented as part of students’ ideation and creation of knowledge.
Seminars at Kaplan University

- Builds online community
- Provides a venue to:
  - Link topics and ideas to course and program outcomes
  - Address class topics in depth
  - Sharpen their communicative, analytical and critical thinking skills
  - Engage in collaborative inquiry
  - Build a community of scholars
- Holistic online learning experience
- Requires preparation and planning

Seminars at Kaplan

In addition to stimulating students to delve deeper into course topics, the immediacy of seminars can be a significant factor in building an online community.

The high level purpose of live online seminars is to provide students a venue in which they can:

- Link topics and ideas to course and program outcomes
- Address class topics in depth
- Sharpen their communicative, analytical and critical thinking skills
- Engage in collaborative inquiry
- Build a community of scholars

Many distance students report feelings of isolation and loneliness in purely asynchronous online study settings due to the lack of immediate social interactions typically found in face-to-face instructional settings. The inclusion of synchronous instruction as part of an holistic online learning environment helps to mitigate this condition while creating a greatly enhanced teaching and learning experience through active engagement and spontaneous exchanges.

The use of any synchronous technologies requires careful preparation and planning, given that it is harder to fix problems of any nature on-the-fly. By the same token, since the unexpected is virtually unavoidable, instructor and students should keep a good level of flexibility during their meetings, allowing for just-in-time changes and accommodations of the pre-planned agenda.
General Guidelines for Online Facilitation

Seminars are an opportunity for students to show what they know, not for faculty to display the breadth of their information on the topic. Seminars are not lectures. They are conversations.

Your role as instructor is to:

- articulate the purpose of the exercise
- constantly provide thought-provoking questions that let students know exactly why you are talking
- model for students how their responses should be focused in order to stimulate discussion with classmates
Now, let’s explore some techniques for managing successful seminars.
Preparing Ahead for Seminar

Faculty member Jan Bishop likes to use templates while preparing for her seminars. Read Jan's suggestion on the slide.

“I prepare a template of information in Word (by copying and pasting as I go) that I want to be sure to cover, including the topics for discussion, and general administrative issues I want to cover. While this document forms the bones of the seminar discussion, the actual dialogue that evolves fleshes it out. My students have told me that they like the degree to which I interact in the seminars, and appreciate how organized they are and that we are generally able to stay on topic and remain focused throughout.”
Keep Things Fluid

- Outlining points you’d like to cover is wise, but at the same time, try to go with the "flow" of the class and incorporate the relevant discussions that inevitably surface.

- Too much structure can be counter-productive, and may inhibit students from expressing their viewpoints.

- PowerPoint slides may provide a good focal point and conversation starter in seminars, but use them as reference materials rather than as reading materials. Some faculty use PowerPoints to outline their seminar topics and as reminders to themselves, but remember that they are only guides, not lectures.
Send Advance Materials

Emailing topics or notes to students can help them prepare for the upcoming seminar.

Instructor Dr. Diana Dee stated that about half-way through her first term with Kaplan, she started mailing students the questions she planned to ask in the seminar about 2 days in advance. She tried to indicate what questions were *most* important to know, given the amount of seminar time.

Math notes and problems were a challenge in live seminars for Sharon McPherson. She said she always had her lecture notes typed up in Word, but since the notes were difficult to copy and paste into the seminars, Sharon emailed the lecture notes to students in advance. Another option is to also post any PowerPoint slides and notes to the Doc Sharing area of the course. They were free to look the notes over before the seminar, which cleared up many questions and gave the students a hard copy of seminar topics. The students loved it and brought their remaining questions to the seminar.
Keep Students Involved

- Ask students questions by name
- Open the floor to students
- Consider using polls
- Send students on online field trips
- Use the course discussion board for seminar follow-up

Keep Students Involved

- When a particular student isn’t responding to the discussion, post a question and ask them by name what they think. That will get them participating!

- You can also give each student the floor for a couple of minutes to post their response to a lesson question - that way each student has a chance to be heard. After everyone has posted their response, open the floor to general discussion.

- Consider using the polling feature in seminar as a way to assess anonymously the classes understanding of a topic and to get feedback.

- Send students on an online field trip. Post an interesting web site, have students visit the site and report back to the seminar after a particular timeframe.

- If time is short or if students are off-topic, suggest moving the subject to the course discussion board. This is a great way to prolong debates and answer questions that you might not have gotten to during the seminar.
Setting Seminar Ground Rules

To successfully build seminar community set some seminar ground rules:

- Arrive early to the seminar room to talk with students as they enter the room.
- Then, begin each seminar with a review of the ground rules, especially regarding "sidebar" conversations that can really distract from the discussion at hand.
- Clarifying the expected good manners in the seminar can also be helpful so that students become comfortable with posting online and do not fear being judged for making inquiries.
- If someone has a question, inform students how you would like them to get your attention.
- Try using students’ names when answering questions so discussion threads are clear.
- Don't jump in too a conversation too quickly - let the students make several comments before entering the discussion once a question has been asked. Let them chat for awhile – often they’ll answer each other’s questions.
General Seminar Techniques

Here are some general seminar techniques that might prove helpful in your seminars:

• Think about what you do in seminar – what is your role? How best can you pace the seminar for the most successful experience?
• One pacing idea is to give enough time to students to answer. Noticing when the student icons are green and the “students are currently typing” message is up would be 2 key ways to help ensure students have time to respond.
• Also in regards to pacing, don't overwhelm them with way too much information; give them time to catch their breath.
• Give students feedback on their answers as much as you can, especially good answers
• Encourage everyone to participate by making them comfortable within the seminar
• Remember always, a seminar is a two-way stream; traffic coming in from students should exceed by far the traffic coming from the instructor.
• Never tell a student “This is a stupid question."
Our final section covers seminar techniques based on pedagogy.
**Pedagogical Seminar Techniques**

As with other communications-based areas of the classroom such as discussion boards, assignment feedback, and journals, practicing “questioning” rather than “telling” skills can lead students toward academic discovery.

- Ask questions that will lead to insight
- Ask provocative questions
- Use problems, questions, tools and other means to stir the mind and body to learn
- Do not provide all answers to the participants
Socratic Questioning

One type of approach to seminar is through Socratic questioning:

Leading questions, motivational questions, and targeted questions are types of Socratic inquiry. These questions are open-ended and may not simply be answered by a “yes” or “no” answer. Asking open-ended questions and allowing plenty of time for response from the majority of people works well in virtually any subject. Open-ended questions require students to draw upon their knowledge, experiences, and extrapolation skills to provide answers, and the ability to formulate such questions is a desirable skill in faculty members.

As well, leading students beyond short-answer questions helps them to develop their critical thinking skills; a necessary factor in their overall development as both students and individuals. Over-all Socratic questions facilitate deeper discussions, and when uninterrupted, students' ideas can flow more freely.

An open-ended questions such as, If you were president, how would you fix the Social Security system? is likely to stimulate deeper thought and conversation from students rather than asking … Do you think the Social Security system can be fixed?
Critical Thinking

Critical thinking marks the shift in paradigm where students move from absorbing rote knowledge to being able to draw on all of their skills, experiences, and talents to formulate their own ideas about how and why things work in the world around them. Critical thinking is the bridge that helps students merge their old ideas and experience with new points of view.

Instructor, Will Brook-DeBock shares his experience working with critical thinking:

My best seminar is on critical thinking. I first cover the case-study provided in the course materials, and I lead the class through a series of questions to help us define critical thinking. I call it "Defining Critical Thinking by Thinking Critically." Questions are simple, for example, "Is critical thinking different than common sense?" "Is critical thinking creative?" "Is it possible to be overly critical?" Students get into it. Really get into it.

~Will Brooke-DeBock
Piggybacking

Piggybacking in the seminar is building off student comments and providing feedback that further promotes discussions. If someone has made a point that you want to amplify or highlight, first refer to that point, and then put your own spin on the idea, deepen the analysis, or make a related observation. Piggybacking is a great way to develop the continuity of ideas within the class and craft an interesting discussion. Piggybacking can also lead to opportunities for greater critical thinking development due to its building and branching nature.
Piggybacking Example

In this piggybacking example, the instructor first refers back to a post by a student, then leads into an observation based on the student’s post, and finally poses a question designed to further the conversation. Piggybacking can also be used to branch into new topics, present contrasting ideas, and weave together various student posts.

Cynthia stated “the most powerful method for motivating students to engage in group projects or any other form of online interaction is to have a conversation with them about group dynamics.” I have to agree – I have found that creating this type of connection, especially in the first group project, is very important. People who are not used to group work often don’t understand how to cope with group dynamics. What types of methods have you employed in motivating students to engage in group work?
Life Experiences

If students permit you, use samples from their work for revision practice. Ask them to demonstrate their own answers and work in response to seminar topics. Have students share some of their professional experiences, and share some of your own as well. If students bring stories to seminar about how they’ve managed to incorporate aspects of your class into their business or personal lives, it’s a win-win situation!

Some examples include:

- Ask an ethical question that draws on students’ personal experiences.
- Ask volunteers for a real-life experience that illustrates a topic from the seminar.
- Making seminars topics relevant to students will stimulate their interest far more than discussing unrelated, esoteric subjects.
Creating Presence in Online Seminars

Here are a few more tips for creating presence in online seminars:

- Enter seminars early, welcome students warmly by name, and allow students to ask questions. Treat each person as an individual and use students’ names. Students need to sense that you care and that they are not merely a name on an attendance list to you.

- Provide positive feedback to stimulate responses.

- Provide them with enough structure so that each may participate equally, but don’t overwhelm them by asking them to share more than they’re comfortable divulging.

- Let your personality shine through! One idea is to provide a self portrait in your PowerPoint so students can “see” you and have a visual to go by. Display your commitment to interaction by involving yourself with your students, show a sense of enthusiasm, exuberance, support, and interest.
Seminar Pitfalls to Avoid

A seminar Pitfall to avoid is the “too much” syndrome.

The curse of “too much” can undermine your organization, your goals for a seminar, your time management, and your effectiveness as an instructor. It’s a tough line to draw – freedom versus structure, praise versus pressure, and preparation versus academic inquiry. Use examples that you’re fairly sure are commonplace, and ask questions designed to lead students to answers, not stump them. Work to your strengths and learn from your mistakes.

Beware of “two much”
- Too much free-for-all can undermine your organization
- Too much praise can give students the sense you’re not paying attention
- Too much structure can overwhelm students
- Too much detail provided on one topic or to a small group of students can alienate others and sidetrack discussions
- Too much humor can derail your seminar goal and can undermine your cohesion and control
Evaluate Yourself in Online Seminars

Take some time to reflect on your performance in your seminars. Review the archive of the session. Ask yourself these questions, and see if your answers might suggest areas for future improvement.

- Are you enthusiastic and exuberant?
- Do you feel organized and prepared?
- Do most of your students come to seminar each week?
- Are students contributing regularly?
- Are students addressing class topics?
- Are students sharpening their analytical and critical thinking skills?
- Are you learning something from your students?
Conclusion

There are no sure bets in seminars, and just as in other areas of teaching, style is unique to each individual. We’ve shown you some techniques and ideas that have proven successful in seminars, and we’ve mentioned some pitfalls to avoid. Keep an open mind, and learn from your successes as well as your mistakes!

Additional thoughts on seminar:

- Seminar best practices are as diverse as KU students
- Use teaching tools for seminars as indicated
- What works for one instructor may not suit another instructor
- Set seminar ground rules according to your preferences
- Seminar is about what students know, not about what faculty know – it’s not a lecture, it’s a conversation!
- What works well for an introductory class may not work for an advanced class; likewise for different subjects.