



LOCAL AND REGIONAL RETREATS — "GREAT TEACHERS" STYLE

The success of the annual California Great Teachers Seminar in Santa Barbara has led to other statewide seminars and many local and regional seminars across the state. The seminars foster teaching skills, community, renewal, creativity, problem solving, and planning. The format has been used successfully as a professional development activity for teaching, counseling, administration, leadership, diversity, and shared governance, as well as to build a sense of community.

This document has been prepared as a resource for colleges and districts that are planning local and regional seminars using the "great teachers" model. Since the model and format are experiential and developmental in nature, we strongly recommend that local colleges use or rely on experienced seminar directors and coordinators in developing the seminars.

SEMINAR HISTORY

The seminar style is based on 30 years of development, beginning with the founding of the National Great Teachers Seminar in 1970 by David Gottshall of the College of DuPage. Gottshall has remained active in the movement and currently directs numerous state and provincial seminars in the US and Canada, as well as many regional seminars. The first California Great Teachers Seminar was held in 1979. The seminar was originally cosponsored by the Community College League of California, the Statewide Academic Senate for the California Community Colleges and the Faculty Association of Community Colleges Education Institute. In 2008 the Community College League of California and the Faculty Association of Community Colleges Education Institute partnered to celebrate the 30th Anniversary of the California Great Teachers Seminar. Beginning in 2009, the Faculty Association of Community Colleges Education Institute takes the lead in bringing the Great Teachers Seminar to California with the continued support of the Community College League of California and the Statewide Academic Senate for the California Community Colleges. It has been a prototype for seminars in Texas, British Columbia, and Hawaii as well as over hundreds of local and regional seminars sponsored at numerous colleges throughout California. The "great teachers" format continually evolves as the participants; staff and directors continually review and evaluate the seminars. However, there are some aspects of the format that are basic to the seminar and are described below. Without them, a seminar would not be considered to use the "great teachers" model.

SEMINAR PHILOSOPHY

The philosophy of the seminars guides their development and is responsible for their continuing success. The seminars are based on the assumption that the participants have the expertise necessary to teach and learn from each other. No outside experts are brought in. The structure for the seminar allows participants to determine much of the seminar content. The topics for the seminar are not predetermined but evolve from participants' discussions of individual innovations or successes or problems. The participants' various disciplines and backgrounds are considered assets to fostering creativity and diverse ways of viewing issues.

The seminar emphasizes accomplishments and problem solving. A positive and productive seminar

culture is established through recognizing and stating that positive and productive behavior is desired and expected; negative complaining is actively discouraged. The approach builds on people's motivation to succeed, to be productive, and to be empowered to have a positive effect on their students and their institutions.

A simple design and concentration on a few important concepts are major philosophical guidelines. Adopting the tenet of "less is more" results in an experience in which participants explore and reflect on a few important ideas in depth. The seminar has a rigid, yet minimal structure of large group sessions, small group discussions, and relaxation. The schedule is designed to provide a balanced rhythm of small group interaction, large group listening and presentations, and breaks for reflection and play

Brief papers related to the theme are prepared in advance of the seminar, one on a success or innovation and one on a problem. All participants share their papers in small groups, starting with the success paper in one group and the problem in a subsequent group. Possible topics for in-depth discussions are identified from the success and problem paper discussions and participants vote on which topics they would like to include on the agenda.

At many seminars, participants are asked to bring a "trick of the trade," a non-astounding teaching or other device that helps them be more effective or efficient in their job. These are briefly demonstrated in large group sessions. Participants may also be invited to bring a copy of a book which has influenced them in their profession, and they may be invited to read a paragraph or two. Other activities which may take place depend on the focus of the seminar and the time available. In all cases the activities are determined by the seminar staff based on its reading of the interests and expertise of those in attendance.

The seminars are held as a break from normal schedules and expectations. The most productive seminars take place away from campus and are at least 2 1/2 days. It is important that the participants have a chance to eat, relax, and socialize together in addition to the time spent in seminar sessions. Good food and a "retreat-like" location also contribute to the seminar success.

SEMINAR STAFF

There are three important roles involved in a great teachers seminar:

Coordinator(s) or organizer(s): A person at the sponsoring college would most likely assume the coordinator or organizer role, arranging for the site and meals, disseminating information about the seminar, registering participants, and coordinating logistics.

Director or lead facilitator: This person directs the seminar and would have significant experience as staff at other great teachers seminars, preferably working periodically with David Gottshall, the founder of the great teachers movement, for additional training and review. The director leads all seminar activities, conduct training sessions and staff meetings, and works with the coordinator to develop the seminar announcements and materials.

Group facilitators: Each small group (ideally 6-8 members, but numbers from 5-10 have worked) has a facilitator. Facilitators need to be skilled in listening, identifying issues, conducting group discussions, and recognizing group dynamics. While experience as a participant in a great teachers seminar is not a prerequisite, it can be very helpful. A training session for the facilitators should be arranged prior to the seminar.

Please contact the people listed at the end of this document for suggestions for skilled seminar directors. Facilitators may be selected from the sponsoring colleges.

PLANNING OUTLINE

1. The format can successfully be used with any topic in which all participants have a stake and have some experience.
2. The format is designed to fulfill the following purposes:
 - to practice rational analysis of educational problems and to find realistic, creative approaches to their solution
 - to cause participants to venture beyond the limits of their own specializations and environments in search of transferable and universal ideas
 - to stimulate the exchange of information and ideas by building a network
 - to promote an attitude of introspection and self-appraisal by providing a relaxed setting and open, humane climate
 - to celebrate and renew the commitment to education
3. Planning for the event includes the following:
 - the seminar should ideally run at least 2 and 1/2 days
 - select a good environment with good food, away from campus
 - carefully select an experienced director for the seminar (evaluations show that the director is essential to the success of the seminar by setting the tone for the event)
 - select seminar facilitators who are good listeners and are committed to supporting the growth and learning of others
 - have enough facilitators so that the small group sessions have 6-8 people each
 - orient the staff and work together as a consensus-based team prior to the seminar to plan the event
 - depend on the expertise of those attending the seminar – do not invite any outside speakers as “experts”
 - craft the seminar schedule to allow for plenty of free time for thought, networking, and play
4. While there is no standard outline, "recipe" or checklist for the seminar, the following are essential aspects of the great teachers format:
 - participants are introduced as people, and their professional roles are de-emphasized
 - participants prepare two brief papers prior to the seminar, one on a success or innovation, and one on a problem
 - participants bring enough copies of their papers for everyone to take with them as resources
 - participants discuss their papers in at least two small group sessions: the first session is devoted to the successes or innovations, followed by a session on the problem papers with a different small group
 - topics for the agenda are identified from the issues raised in the success and problem discussion sessions, and popularity votes by the entire group determines which topics are addressed
 - guidelines for the seminar are introduced early in the process:
 - equal time for all
 - no whining, griping or “war” stories
 - mutually enforce the above
 - the schedule and activities are adjusted as needed based on the needs of the participants
 - the staff meets frequently, particularly at the beginning of the seminar, to assess the process and identify the topics to be voted on for further discussion

SEQUENCE

The seminar schedule is adjusted to the needs of the participants and length of the seminar. However, an

order of seminar sessions might be:

- Brief overview of seminar philosophy
- Participant introductions
- Overview of ground rules for discussions
- Small group discussions of successes or innovations
- Small group discussions of problems or challenges
- Large group activity
- Small group discussions on topics identified in prior discussions
- Large group activity
- Closing

Regular breaks for meals, reflection and recreation would also be scheduled.

SEMINAR OUTCOMES

The following outcomes have been reported in evaluation letters and from follow-up surveys throughout the years. In all types of seminars, participants report:

- Openness, sharing, increased self-awareness
- Increased willingness and ability to problem solve
- Increased self-confidence
- Renewal and revitalization
- Increased willingness to take a risk
- Increased openness and recommitment to students and the educational process
- Less of a feeling of being "stuck" and increased optimism
- Increased respect for and trust in their colleagues
- Increased awareness of a wide variety of ideas and strategies
- Increased contacts with other in the college and across the state (depending on the nature of the seminar)
- Increased leadership roles and assuming new job responsibilities
- Implementation of one or more of the ideas they learned at the seminar

Teachers report, in addition to the above:

- Increased contacts with students in their classes
- Increased contacts with faculty both in and out of their disciplines
- Increased reading in professional journals and on teaching strategies

"Great College" seminars tend to foster the following outcomes:

- Increased team feeling and sharing of information
- Increased awareness of other points of view
- Recommitment to the college and increased loyalty and morale
- Revised or new mission and goal statements for the college
- Task forces and working committees are established to continue work on identified topics.

Seminars focused on cultural diversity and/or specific ethnic group concerns have some unique outcomes:

- Validation of experience as a faculty or administrator from an underrepresented group
- Increased networking, mentoring, and support across the state
- Empowerment and appreciation for other ethnicities
- Increased assumption of leadership roles
- Increased visibility and appreciation on campus

Participants in seminars for administrators report:

- Increased job responsibilities or promotions (45% over three years, 20.8% in one year)
- Awareness of different management and leadership strategies
- Greater confidence in handling personnel situations
- Greater awareness of resources available to them

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Additional assistance and information is available through the Faculty Association of California Community College Education Institute and others actively involved in the great teachers seminars. Please contact:

Silvia Farias, Program Director
Faculty Association of California Community Colleges
Faculty Association of California Community Colleges Education Institute
1823 11th Street
Sacramento, CA 95811
(916) 447-8555 Fax (916) 447-0726

Cindra Smith, Ed.D.
Education Consultant
2042 Roaring Camp Dr.
Gold River CA 95670
916-635-5733 / 916-955-5733
cindrasmith@comcast.net

David Gottshall
P.O. Box 363
Glen Ellyn, IL 60138
(630) 858-0469

Reference: Gottshall, D. B. (1999) *The History and Nature of the National Great Teachers Movement*. Glen Ellyn, IL: College of DuPage.

Prepared by Cindra Smith, former Director of Education Services, Community College League of California, based on information provided by David Gottshall and Mike McHargue.