

What Participants Say

The following is a sampling of reports and comments from the 2001-2003 seminars.



How did the seminar affirm or change your approach to your work?

- More than anything it affirmed the idea of developing and cultivating my own voice as a teacher and to trust the process. I did receive good suggestions and ideas from other participants that I will incorporate into my courses.
- Broader perspective, better understanding of best practices, lots of ideas, more willing to let go of the lecture and let students teach themselves, more group work.
- I became more aware of the different needs of students. I am able to relate more to the other teaching faculty.
- This was my second time attending the CGTS and it was even BETTER than the first one. It renewed my passion for teaching!
- I realized I am already quite innovative in my approaches. I also learned some ideas to implement in my courses.
- As a counselor, I gained valuable insight into instructor's challenges and concerns.
- Thought about using right/left side of brain to show students how to be beginners—renewed my enthusiasm for teaching. Made me a more purposeful person.
- This semester the students seem brighter, more motivated, more responsible. I really think that the students are the same and I am seeing them through a mind and spirit that has been tremendously reenergized, rededicated, and re-inspired by the Great Teachers' Seminar. I think my renewed enthusiasm for teaching has been communicated to both my students and my colleagues on campus.
- The seminar affirmed for me that I am on the right track. This was a huge confidence builder for me.
- My approach changed in the way that I used to focus my teaching around covering the material and so far I am working on focusing it around student learning. It is hard to explain...I think one of the most important things I got was that "less is more" and that anything I leave out to make it the "less" can be turned into time spent enriching and cultivating the less. This is as opposed to rushing through the "more" material. I also found the paradigm of "rigid minimal structure" to be most enlightening. It gave me an opportunity to see different views (disciplines) with similar problems and usable solutions.
- Thinking out of the box. Incorporating new ideas into practice. Reaffirming my commitment towards my profession.
- I left the seminar with the words "less is more!" as my new motto. For me this is important because I have always been driven to do it all and cover all of it. I am now more relaxed, knowing that I can accomplish much more by focusing on what is important with regard to the tasks I feel I must accomplish and the content I feel I must cover.
- It changed my approach in several ways. Specifically, it's helped me to encourage more cooperation among students. I found the Seven Principles of Great Teaching and its corresponding checklist to be very useful in illustrating what I was and was not doing to promote learning. I have used/am planning on using examples from the checklist to create and encourage this. Also, while I have my lectures on an overhead projector in outline format, I've never made those outlines available to the students because I considered it "spoon-feeding." After hearing the

reasons as to why it is beneficial, and hearing feedback from other teachers who do this, I have made these outlines available to my students.

- I'm definitely more excited about teaching than I was before. It was interesting and comforting to realize that even those who have been teaching for 20 years had some of the same concerns and problems that I had. I learned a lot of great things that I have already used in my class.
- I returned to work with a number of good ideas and have already implemented several this semester. Some are as follows: sorting exercise; 3 x 4 cards with comments to be handed out individually as appropriate; portfolio—help students connect ideas from lab to concept in lecture as well as basic lab concepts; create some games for review sessions; unpaper; require students to proof read each other's papers prior to due date.
- The seminar gave me the opportunity to interact with peers from diverse fields. This gave me more insight on ways to enhance student learning and success in the classroom. I took a lot of great ideas from the seminar back to my own campus. Especially the activity introduced at the beginning of the class; this made my students come to class on time because they didn't want to lose valuable points toward their grades.
- I feel more relaxed about "issues" and "problems." Stressors are just part of the scenery, but the more important focus is relationship between teacher and student; and teacher and other teachers. I am feeling more effective this fall, and happier and at peace with myself in general!
- The Great Teacher's Conference was a fabulous conference experience! What I learned at this conference about teaching and myself as a teacher has changed the way I teach and the way I view the art of teaching. I took away several meaningful adages that I will always remember such as: less is more - that teaching less and doing it better benefits my students far more; I will never cover the material again, but instead uncover the material for my students; and I will use the phrase "information festivals" instead of exams from now on so I can change the negative connotation of this event for my students who might have test anxiety.
- I discovered that getting up and moving around is very important especially for everyone after a period of time. I was also struck with the thought that I could be doing more real activities in-class or outside of class. So this semester, I am incorporating an experiential learning activity into my class. Brenda Ahnholz
- I brought back dozens of ideas that I am implementing in my courses. I had fun, I laughed more than I have in years, and I hope to attend the Great Teacher's Seminar often. I learned so many things that I plan on implementing, I don't even know where to begin. I also met some really great people and have stayed in touch through e-mail and, with one other participant to lives relatively close, socializing.
- First, I must say that I have attended a good number of conferences for the past two years, but I had never experienced a retreat style seminar before. Participating in the Great Teacher Seminar was a win-win experience since it allowed me to appreciate new perspectives on learning/teaching, learn from a critical reflection, and discuss and share my achievements as a teacher with equals. With no doubt, the Great Teacher Seminar stimulates reflection, supports an active dialogue among educators across disciplines, and offers a framework for reflection. Marcia Campos
- The California Great Teachers Seminar has been all that I expected and more. From the first day of the seminar to its final day I was exposed to a number of new ideas and exciting techniques that I could take back and apply in my own classes. Best of all, these ideas and techniques came not from the so-called experts who have never set foot in a classroom but from my colleagues who like me are practitioners of the art of teaching. One thing I have gained from the seminar that will help me become a better teacher is the knowledge that I am not alone in perceiving the teaching profession as a calling. To my great delight, I discovered that there were more than a

few people in the profession who feel the same way as I do and this has strengthened my faith in the profession. I found myself at the seminar with a group of people who are dedicated to the profession, truly care for the success of their students and are willing to go the extra mile to make themselves better teachers. Myo Myint

- My personal goals before this conference were to become more energized, refreshed and prepared emotionally for the following semester in my teaching. This conference helped me achieve these goals. Now that I've been back for 6 weeks, I still feel that validity about my teaching and myself. Meeting with others really helped me look at teaching and life from several new perspectives. The ideas that I loved the most included mind-mapping; wireless pointer; chaotic recess; rubric grading table; ice-breaking activities. Jane Maringer Cantu
- The Great Teachers Seminar has benefited me in many ways. The most important thing that I learned was that my learner-centered approach to teaching is not off base. This approach was brain compatible which was the other thing that I learned. The Great Teachers Seminar also incorporated several brain appropriate strategies primarily giving participants choice, conducting workshops based on attendee interest, high emotion, low stress, and most of all, respect for the views of the participants. Regina Rei Lamourelle
- The seminar gave me the opportunity to interact with peer from diverse fields. This gave me more insight on ways to enhance student learning and success in the classroom. I took a lot of great ideas from the seminar back to my own campus. Wanda Morris
- I'm working on incorporating more small group work in my classes. As in the seminar, I strive to maintain a positive and productive atmosphere in my class. During our daily teaching life, ...we almost never have a chance to have such an exchange of ideas with teachers from other disciplines. Teachers shared about problems such as under prepared students, cheating and dysfunctional behavior of some students. These were issues that all of us have encountered and we all shared our experiences and gave each other feedback. I learned a lot from the mottos of the seminar and all of the words of wisdom the instructors gave the new teachers. Dominique Chapuis
- I was energized by the participants and the facilitators. I felt a sense of common purpose even as we came together from very different fields.
- It showed me that I am doing what others define as great teaching.
- I was affirmed in what I do. To have colleagues affirm one is even stronger than having students' affirmations.
- I refocused my attention toward the student and not just on course content. I was reminded that my students are talented people.
- It reinforced my commitment to establishing rapport and a good working relationship with all my students.
- The "less is more" code caused me to reduce my attempts to teach my students all that I have ever learned. We now consider fewer topics but understand them more completely.
- The seminar helped to renew my desire to teach.
- The conference inspired me to do my best work as I planned for the fall semester. I also had my dedication to the profession strengthened.
- I felt refreshed and inspired—ready for a new year.
- I can say I have been more organized so I can enjoy my class time more with my students.
- The main "new" idea that I came away with was how to invoke a sense of humor and give the students a break from the mundane. Great techniques were shared.
- I understand student needs better.

Location and Staff

- The entire program was well planned and executed smoothly. It was relaxing and very productive. The staff also did a great job in facilitating the discussions.
- Yes, we were in an incredible place, great food, etc...but most of all people (David and staff) made this conference “special.”
- Casa de Maria is an energizing retreat location. I especially liked that there were few phones, no TV’s etc. to distract us from the opportunity to mix with our colleagues. I found the staff refreshing. I found the staff facilitators to be helpful, knowledgeable and energetic.
- Very well done—a little difficult to find La Casa...but worth it!
- Facilitators very supportive and non-invasive of process. Enjoyed a break to synthesize material and relax in between or at the end of sessions.
- No television, no telephones, NO ongoing news about the outside chaotic world—what a shock—WHAT A BLESSING. I found I could easily live without it. The food and socializing at mealtime was fantastic and I only gained TWO pounds.
- When I first arrived at La Casa de Maria, James and Mike were standing at the entrance and gave me a huge, warm, smiling welcome. I was immediately happy to be a participant. All of the facilitators were extremely friendly and helpful. They definitely let me feel safe and welcome, and that I was one of the group, “a great teacher with the desire to become even greater.”
- I was very happy with both. The setting was perfect, and the various meeting places and organization of meeting times helped promote a relaxed atmosphere of learning and sharing. The leader and facilitators guided us through the process expertly. I felt no pressure or anxiety whatsoever.
- Casa de Maria is the perfect place to hold a retreat. The wood areas, the trails for hiking and the rooms were all just right. It is quite a drive for me, coming from Sonoma County, but I enjoyed it. And as many have already stated...the food is great! The staff members of our seminar were great—knowledgeable, funny, helpful, flexible.

General Comments

- Thank you, Thank you, Thank you! It was wonderful to have the opportunity to openly discuss educational issues without the concern of “campus politics.” I have a much broader concept now of “community college.” I have made some significant changes in my courses. I’d go again in an instant.
- I gained invaluable experience from the sharing by many experienced teachers in all types of situations. The teachers shared all their tactics for teaching and dealing with students.
- Wonderful, energizing experience. Have recommended the seminar to several colleagues—empowering!
- Great challenges and opportunity to interact. Free hours in the afternoons were perfect—just enough ratio of worktime and playtime.
- The experience not only enriched my mind, but also opened my heart.
- I was blown away by the intellectual activity. This time I felt more subdued enthusiasm, but I also was energized for the coming school year. It is like a shot in the arm of positiveness in a world which doesn’t always celebrate teachers. It is good to be with others who “love” to teach and want to share their ideas.
- I think the seminar offers both new and experienced teachers a wonderful opportunity to find new ideas about teaching. I think the diversity of disciplines is a very positive aspect of the seminar; it makes participating in the seminar a very different experience from attending a conference in our

own specific discipline. We see how many different ways in all different disciplines we care about our students and do our very best to teach them.

- It was excellent and it reinvigorated me for the fall. It was especially great being involved with other disciplines.
- One of the best professional processes that I have ever experienced.
- Understanding the wonder of celebrating good teaching rather than looking deficiencies was important to me. I remember Dave saying something like, “Point out what your colleague does right—we already know what we don’t do so well.” This was SO important to me because I have a boss who works in the opposite way—he seldom recognized excellence or promise and easily recognizes things HE feels are deficiencies. My self-esteem was boosted tremendously and I now have strength to let his criticisms pass by me. The sharing of Innovative Teaching Methods and Tricks of the Trade were excellent.
- I left the seminar with a much better attitude than I came in with. Thank you so much for the enriching experience.
- Probably one of the best parts of the conference was meeting and getting to know the other faculty members. I agree with the statement I heard from the conference planners that we are each other’s best resources for improving as teachers. After I returned to school from the conference I pulled out some of the great teaching ideas and decided where I was going to use them this semester. I have also kept in contact with several of the people I met which is especially rewarding. I would recommend this conference to any faculty member interesting in wanting to be a great teacher! Thank you for the retreat and the rejuvenation!
- Great experience! I only wish I would have attended a CGTS earlier in my career.
- Such a great worthwhile endeavor. Very life affirming on a personal and collegial level. Now I’ll add...if you want to have a great teaching experience, be who you is, and remember...less is more!
- This seminar was akin to others I have attended for an exchange of ideas and expertise, with several notable differences. There was no feeling of overload or of fighting off boredom. The brevity and conciseness of the activities not only kept us involved but also gave us time to absorb and reflect upon what we had shared. Our leader piqued our interest, held our attention, gave us the briefest of directions, and sent us off to learn. Enough other disciplines were represented, and there was material for discussion on a variety of issues. I enjoyed listening to innovations on how to stimulate passive learners, apply brain research to classroom instruction and procedures, keep up with technological changes, and deal with uneven curricula, under-prepared students, literacy, and plagiarism. On Thursday, I left with a feeling of accomplishment and the readiness to try something different. In short, I found the Great Teachers Seminar a well planned, informative, supportive, and thoroughly enjoyable experience
- Attending the California Great Teachers Seminar was affirming, inspiring and rejuvenating. One of the purposes of the seminar was for teachers of all disciplines to learn from each other and to see what they all have in common. I felt that in a very short amount of time that I bonded with these teachers and learned from the sharing of all of our experiences.
- I will never forget this seminar. I might forget some of the topics we discussed, but I won’t forget the way in which we discussed them. I especially liked the humor of the seminar leader and the supportive environment fostered by the leader, the facilitators, and the other participants. I enjoyed meeting teachers from all over California and from different disciplines and finding out that we all share similar interests and concerns.
- As a 35-year veteran of community college teaching, I have been to many retreats, conferences, and seminars. I’ve student centered, MBOed, gridded, touched-and-felt, and collaborated. I anticipated that the Santa Barbara experience would be some combination of my past

experiences. Boy was I wrong! The Great Teachers Seminar was the most exhilarating seminar I have ever experienced.

The idea that we would celebrate and share our “greatness” stunned me. My first reaction was to be somewhat annoyed that a new perfect answer to community college education wasn’t going to be proclaimed. This soon was replaced with the simple truth that there is no perfect answer, and that here was a gathering of extremely skilled professionals willing and eager to share their professional secrets. In the days that followed we were able to validate what we thought to be good teaching and to seek advice about problems we had to resolve.

Meanwhile, David, clever education con man that he is, kept our enthusiasm high and whet our appetites for more. The staff was extremely skilled, for they stayed in the background, supported, and let the process unfold. I came away having made many new acquaintances and some new friends. I was renewed, rejuvenated, and raring to go. This will be a great teaching year. Thank you, thank you, thank you! Bob Thaden

- It was very helpful to be able to discuss teaching problems that I was having with other faculty. So many of us are encountering the same problems. It was refreshing to hear some new ideas to solutions. I have already had a problem with a student this semester. The student was harassing me. I think the seminar helped to give me the courage to stand up for myself. Guess what, I received the help that I needed! Thank you, thank you! I have used some of the techniques that I learned at the seminar and I have been happy with the results. Christi Hamilton
- The seminar was an unexpected experience. I expected the usual conference materials, schedule, and agenda. I was surprised by how successfully the free-flowing agenda worked and by how affirming the seminar was. I left invigorated and inspired. I would love to be part of future efforts. Laura Hope-Aleman
- Truly amazing experience; I am so thankful to have been able to participate. Catherine Emley
- I have attended many professional seminars, but this one gave me the greatest feel for the teaching profession. I came away with a lot of practical methods! Geoff Schroder
- I want to do this again...what a way to charge the batteries! (No name)
- Thank you for a wonderful experience. This gave me the opportunity to break out of my shell and let my inhibitions break free. It was hard being away from my family for so long—but well worth it! Timothy Stewart
- When colleagues say, “how was it?” a single word or sentence won’t do other than to say, “wonderful,” and “go next year if at all possible!” The experience was 100% validating and uplifting. I met some dear/wonderful people—my peers! And I rarely venture out from my own discipline. That’s why this was so challenging. Taking the risk was so rewarding. Thank you from the bottom of my heart! Judy Farmer
- I loved it. I have used several experiences and will use more. I am much more (unintentionally) positive. The (non) structure works. I’d be surprised if anyone came away unchanged. A very good use of my time. Jill Kelly-Moore
- The seminar not only pushed me professionally, but personally as well. I experienced a tremendous amount of growth in both levels. I have already asked my school to send me next year. This was a tremendous experience!! Thank you for everything!! Elissa Caruth
- Now I know what all the rave is about. I have been hearing how wonderful the Great Teachers’ retreat is for 10 years. This has been the single most motivating activity since I started teaching in 1983. THANK YOU!! Carol Paxton