

Presentation Development

Course Proposal

Introduction

Graduate Seminars were introduced in 2005 primarily as a medium for graduate students to practice presentations before qualifying exams, dissertation defenses, conferences and research group meetings. Seminars also publicize professor's research or even personal interest topics to broaden awareness and understanding of departmental research. They are loosely organized by graduate students for graduate students with the stipulation "no professors allowed" to relax the atmosphere and liberate students' questions and answers about their research. Generally food has been the main motivating factor for attendance, however the same core group of graduate students usually participates whether or not vittles are provided. There are scheduling conflicts with courses and teaching assistant discussion sections; assignments that further restrict attendance. Despite the obstacles, we believe that Graduate Seminars have nonetheless facilitated graduate interaction, helped broadcast departmental research, and honed presentation skills.

Based on expressed sentiment from the Graduate Student Advisory Council (GSAC), graduate students and faculty, we feel that the Graduate Seminars are under attended and underutilized and therefore we propose the following course for the consideration of the physics department.

Goals

The goals for this course preserve the initial purposes of its inception, namely:

- 1) To improve presentation skills of participants by instruction, observation, and practice.
- 2) To provide a friendly environment for constructive feedback
- 3) To present the broad range of physical topics studied in the physics department at a digestible level for graduate students
- 4) To facilitate discussion and understanding of other fields in physics
- 5) To provide an audience for presenters needing practice or experience

Class Structure and Timeline

A faculty member would be assigned to be the instructor and be present for organization, oversight, constructive criticism of presentation skills, and submitting grades. We recommend the focus of this seminar class to remain on the students and that the instructor to be, as much as possible, involved indirectly. For example, students could be allowed to introduce other students and direct the question/answer session and generally manage the seminars as if they were all professional peers. However, the instructor should act as a referee at all times to ensure a low-stress and fair environment; peer critiques should be kept constructive, tactful and never pejorative. An allotted time at the beginning and end can be dedicated for instructor comments if determined necessary.

The basic format for the class is a series of seminars, one talk per session. The class would meet once a week for one hour, but be scheduled for two hours to allow for overtime or for any additional talks when requested. During the first several class meetings of each semester, the instructor would give a course overview and requirements, followed by presentations on how to give a presentation, including guidelines, examples and tips of oral presentation, and as needed throughout the course. A light reading assignment could also be assigned.

Since there are fifteen weeks per semester, enrollment will be limited to twelve graduate students per semester. Every student enrolled in the class will be required to give an uninterrupted presentation (or poster, if approved by the instructor) once during the semester. Students not enrolled in the class will also be allowed to present by petitioning the instructor in written form. The instructor will determine the presentation schedule and will announce available presentation dates to outside students and faculty as soon as possible. All students not enrolled in the class but interested in the talk will be invited to attend. Non-enrolled students may also use this class to makeup one missed departmental colloquium per semester and will hand in a completed feedback form as proof of attendance.

The class duration is flexible and may vary, but on average should take about an hour. A suggested class meeting follows.

- 1) 5-30 min. of instruction
- 2) 1-2 min. introduction of presenter by a student
- 3) 10-40 min. uninterrupted student presentation

- 4) 5-15 min. question and answer period conducted by a student
- 5) 10-15 min. feedback session conducted by the instructor
- 6) Repeat steps 2-5 if there is more than one presenter (rare occasions only)
- 7) 5-15 min. of private feedback between presenter and instructor after the rest of the class is dismissed

We propose that this course be offered the first year (Fall 2007 and Spring 2008) as a Special Reading Topics course to refine and develop the class paradigm. Enrollment this first year may need to be encouraged by faculty advisors. The course would be offered starting the following year at the 7000 level for 1.0 or 2.0 credits. It would be a required replacement for one semester of department colloquium for matriculated graduate students enrolled from then on and as an optional replacement for previously enrolled students. In other words, graduate students entering the department starting Fall 2009 would be required to take three semesters of department colloquium and one semester of Graduate Seminar before graduation. Students who had enrolled before Fall 2009 have the option to replace one semester of department colloquium with Graduate Seminar.

It is recommended that all students would take this course during their third year, when they presumably would have some research to present, but before they progress too far into their graduate student careers. This would also help avoid conflicts with teaching assistant assignments or other class work, as it is anticipated that most students would have a research assistant position and/or be mostly done with courses. In addition, it would also exist at an excellent time to hone presentation skills in preparation for the qualifying exam. By offering this course every fall and spring, about twenty-four students annually would have the opportunity to present their research—roughly the number of new graduate students matriculated each year. It may become necessary to offer it over the summer, if there is a need for more presentation slots.

The department would provide audio/visual equipment (laptop, laser pointer, etc.) for student presentations. We also request \$100 per semester to continue to occasionally provide snacks before presentations to foster the low-stress environment.

Requirements

Enrolled students will be required to attend and to present a topic in physics of their interest to the class once during the semester.

Additionally, feedback forms (see example below) will be required from each class member for every presentation.

Grading

Grading will be based entirely on attendance and feedback quality. The mandatory presentations will not be graded. The default grade for this class will be an "A". Each student will be allowed one unexcused absence from a scheduled class. Every unexcused absence after the first results in the reduction of their grade by one full letter.

Individual feedback quality will be monitored to prevent useless or effortless feedback. Poor feedback to peers may result in reduction of grade at the instructor's discretion.

Prerequisites

Students must only have graduate standing in the Department of Physics.

Example feedback form

Graduate Seminar Presentation Evaluation Form

Presenter's Name: _____

Evaluation ratings:

- 1 – Not very successful
- 2 – Could be better
- 3 – Average only
- 4 – Quite good
- 5 – Very good

Evaluation topics:

1. Clarity of speaking (Could you hear the speaker properly and clearly?)	1	2	3	4	5
2. Audio-visual material (Are the slides organized and clear?)	1	2	3	4	5
3. Clarity of language (Was the terminology/jargon explained?)	1	2	3	4	5
4. Body Language (Was there good eye contact? Speaking to everyone?)	1	2	3	4	5
5. Pace of presentation (Did the presenter speak too quickly or slowly?)	1	2	3	4	5
6. Correct structure and procedure (Are the introduction, body, and conclusion, notes, etc. used well?)	1	2	3	4	5
7. Answering questions (Did the presenter encourage them? Answer them well?)	1	2	3	4	5
8. Overall presentation (Other than particular aspects, did the presenter do well?)	1	2	3	4	5

9. Other comments: