**What are Seminars?**

Seminars are a major component of Evergreen curriculum and culture. Typically, at least a quarter of class time in Evergreen programs and courses is spent in seminar discussions. Seminars are forums in which issues are raised and explored, but not necessarily resolved; they require you to think, to practice the skills of analysis and synthesis, and by doing so, possibly leave with more and better ideas than the ones with which you came. Seminars are integral to most academic programs at Evergreen. They are the pistons which drive the intellectual heart of the college. Seminars are not intended as a mechanism for transmitting information; they serve as a means for groups of students to obtain a set of common experiences, usually based on a text, piece of art, film, etc. Seminars are not a place for the transmission of data. Ideally they go beyond the sharing of facts and probe the depths of the subject matter at hand.

**Evergreen faculty member David Marr describes the seminar process:**

*Seminars do closely resemble orchestral rehearsals. They are working sessions, full of false starts, much practice, and some extended flights of analysis and synthesis. But the analogy with the orchestra breaks down in one interesting and crucial respect: seminars operate with no equivalent to a musical score. Indeed, it is precisely something like a musical score that gets "composed" in the course of the seminar.*

The success of the seminar is dependent on the group's ability to work together and, through intelligent discussion, develop an understanding of the material that you wouldn't have thought of on your own.

**What to do and not do in seminar**

* **Be Prepared** - Here are some tips on how to prepare:
* Always complete assigned reading prior to the seminar.
* Take notes on the assigned reading, and bring those notes, along with assigned texts, to each meeting of the seminar. Such notes are of two kinds: paraphrases (glosses), and reflective comments or questions.
* Read specifically for ideas and for key concepts. Make your own index to them in back of the book.
* Get a study partner, or become part of a study group. Exchange papers or discuss the book before seminar.
* Bring questions. There are two kinds of questions you can bring to seminar: logistical questions that have answers, and the really important, open-ended questions that foster intelligent discussion.
* Be on time. If you must be late, do not join in the discussion until you are certain that you know exactly what is being discussed.
* Quote from the book and make references to specific passages. This helps to focus the discussion where it should be - on the text.
* At the center is the subject matter of the text, not personal opinion.
* Listen attentively to what is said by others and take notes on the general discussion. Taking notes in seminar is even more important, sometimes, than taking notes in lectures.
* Speak in turn and don't interrupt another person.
* Respond actively to what another has said before you contribute your own thoughts.
* Don't be afraid to try out ideas. Nobody expects you to have fully-formed ideas when you come to seminar.
* Remember to address the entire seminar, not just the faculty member.
* Avoid name calling or putting others down.
* Specifics from your own experience may be relevant. But place a DANGER sign here, because this is where too many seminars founder. Just talking about your own experience has little educational value. Your personal experience is relevant only insofar as you can show how it amplifies the point of the discussion.
* Be respectful of each person's culture, race, gender and sexual orientation. Don't expect that someone will be an expert on a subject simply because of their race, culture, etc.
* Don't engage in extended arguments. Seminars are for learning and listening, not for winning a debate.
* If you didn't read the book, don't talk. Instead, take notes.
* Don't engage in side conversations.
* Have Fun!!

**A good way to keep focused on the text is to respond to the following three questions:**

* What does the text say? Point to the exact page and paragraph so everyone can read.
* What does the text mean? Explain or interpret the passage in your own words.
* Why is this important? Discuss the passage's importance to the entire text or program themes.

**Tips for creating successful seminars**

* Seminars are collaborative adventures that require everyone's participation and ideas.
* Everyone is responsible for the creation of a good learning environment.
* Constructive roles in seminar include people who ask questions, people who summarize, people who refer to material, people who clarify. Try out each of these roles.
* Take advantage of pauses to ask if people who haven't spoken have anything to add.
* Attempt to give space for others to speak.
* Take personal responsibility for making the seminar a good one!
* If the seminar is not going well, address the group at the end of one of your meetings to discuss what each person can do to improve the seminar or how your seminar format could be changed to facilitate more meaningful conversation.
* If problems persist, talk with your faculty member.

Information excerpted from **Seminars**, published by the Washington Center.