

Graduate Seminar in Biological Sciences 748

Fall 2012

Instructor: Steve Bentivenga (bentiven@uwosh.edu; Phone: 7088; office: Room 111C Halsey)

Meeting time & place: Fridays 12:40 - 1:40 (we will go late some weeks), Room HS 175

This one credit course is meant to give students practice speaking in front of a scientific audience and to explore topics in detail. Students will research topics and organize presentations for faculty and other students. The topics may be any aspect of the biological sciences and must be approved by the instructor in advance (see schedule for deadline). Unless cleared with me, you may not give a presentation similar to one you have delivered in another class. If this is your second time taking seminar, then your topic should be substantially different than your previous one.

To help students improve as speakers, each student will receive feedback from the fellow students and the instructor. After your seminar, arrange a time to meet with me to discuss your performance.

Expectations:

Attendance at each seminar is mandatory for all students enrolled. In addition, students are expected to attend all other seminars in the department, such as invited guest speakers. It is expected that students will actively participate by asking questions of the speaker. The effort by students to meet these expectations will be considered in the determination of your final grade. Due dates will be established for topics, abstracts, and announcements. Failure to meet deadlines will also be taken into account in final grading. Submit a hard copy of your topic description to during class on **7-September**. At that time you will turn in a tentative title, a paragraph or two describing the topic, as well as several pertinent references (5-8 is sufficient). As with all assignments, proof-read your work for grammar and spelling. Use a citation format from a journal in your discipline, and be consistent in your format.

You should strive for professionalism in all aspects of this class. Speakers should dress professionally. Sneakers, shorts, jeans, tee-shirts are NOT acceptable. Whereas most students choose to use PowerPoint to present their seminar, overheads, 35-mm slides or the chalkboard are also acceptable media for visual aids. It is your responsibility to arrange for any equipment you require. Visual aids should look professional and be readable in the entire room; use spell check and proofread for typographical errors. Abstracts should be concise (<250 words), well written and free of grammatical and typographical errors. Be sure to tell complete story with your abstract. The abstract will also serve as an announcement and should include the time, date, and location of your seminar.

Each student will give two 20-minute presentations. Your first one will be a practice seminar in front of the class. Class members (and I) will take notes on various aspects of your seminar and give you immediate feedback and constructive criticism. For the second one, we will invite the entire department. Your seminar should cover several (3-4, or more) related papers in a given area. Tell a complete story about your chosen topic. You are encouraged to give seminar on your proposed thesis research topic (if you have not done so already – see guidelines below). If it is not your proposal seminar, the topic should be in an area not closely related to your own research. You should be thoroughly familiar with the literature on your topic. You should strive to organize your seminar into a cohesive presentation, and be selective about what you present. Be sure to target your audience and do not use the jargon of the field. Whereas everyone in the audience is educated, many will be unfamiliar with the topic. Explain concepts simply and clearly, and define all terms and acronyms. Be prepared to answer questions after your seminar. Do not “seed” questions in advance to your friends in the audience – I will consider this cheating. The seminar will be timed, and should be ± 3 minutes of the allotted 20 minutes.

Students will submit a detailed outline (1 – 1.5 pages) of their presentation and also a brief abstract (one or two paragraphs; **250 words max.**) describing their presentation. A draft of the abstract is due by noon on Thursday, eight days prior to your first seminar. Submit 3 printed copies (not electronic), which are **double-spaced**. I will review both your outline and abstract and return them to you within a day or two. I will also ask two of your fellow students to review your abstract and outline (thus the need for three hard copies). You will revise your abstract (perhaps more than once, at my discretion). Revisions are expected back promptly (1-2 days). The final draft of your abstract must be posted and distributed electronically to all department faculty, academic staff, and graduate students at least 3 days prior to your second seminar (by 5:00 p.m. Tuesday for a Friday seminar). Contact the departmental secretary for an email list. You do not need to distribute your outline.

I expect that graduate students will check and use their university email accounts (I will not reply to other email accounts) on a daily basis. I also expect you to check your departmental mailbox each day. If you are re-writing your abstract, or reviewing another's, I will expect a prompt turn-around (less than 24 hours).

Your final grade will be determined by several factors: the quality and content of your seminars, your improvement from the first to the second, your participation in the class as a whole, and your ability to meet scheduled deadlines.

Mandatory Reading:

Bennett, B. 2001. The three P's of scientific talks: Preparation, practice, and presentation. **Society for Economic Botany Newsletter**. 15: 6-9.

can be found on-line at: http://www.econbot.org/webmaster/pubs_p&p/issues/2001_spring.pdf

Guidelines for a Proposal Seminar:

You may give a proposal seminar once during your M.S. program. The time you choose to do this is up to you and your thesis committee. Usually this will be in the second or third semester. It should be after you and your advisor have fully developed your thesis project and you have thoroughly studied the background research and methods. You should have a thesis committee in place. You do not need to have all your data collected, but it is usually helpful to have some preliminary work already accomplished. Do not give your proposal seminar too late in your program, or your thesis defense seminar merely will be a repeat.

Discuss with your advisor and committee members if you are ready. If they do not feel you are ready, then you are not. Ask your advisor to send me a note stating that your committee agrees you are ready (email is acceptable). I will not allow you to give your proposal seminar without this statement.

Encourage your committee members to attend your seminar. Give them the date well in advance.

Proposal Seminar Format:

- Introduce your advisor and committee members (who should be in attendance).
- Give an introduction and background information on your topic. What relevant research has been performed previously?
- State the problem(s) that remain unanswered.
- Clearly state your objectives and give the specific hypotheses you wish to test.
- Describe the methodology you will use to test your hypotheses. Be sure you fully understand your chosen methods. Give reasons why you chose these methods over other approaches.
- Present any data you have collected thus far.
- Describe what remains to be done, and what you expect to find.
- Explain the significance of your findings (or potential future findings).

Cell Phones in Class:

Please refrain from using your cell phone at all times during seminar class. If I see you using your phone, I will stop the speaker and ask you to leave the room for the remainder of the day (your absence will count against your grade). At a minimum, you should silence your phone before class and leave it in your pocket or bag. It's best to leave your phone in your office. The same goes for laptop computers and tablet devices (e.g. iPads).