

TIPS FOR RUNNING INTERACTIVE SEMINARS WITH A CREATIVE FOCUS

- **Encourage student participation through structured exercises**

Exercises are a good way to get students involved in the material. Work can be done outside of classes (such as photo essays) and brought in for discussion and further exercises based on that work, or can be done directly in class (such as making masks or doing a visual autobiography). We run one or two experiential exercises each week where all students create new work or present the work done in the previous week and process it with other students. Processing takes place in a variety of formats, including pairs, quartets, single sex groups, and a round robin format. We ask the students to design and run a 45 minute exercise in the last week of class. We also have students develop questions for discussion and have them run discussions at least once a month.

- **Keep the class size small**

It is difficult to get a lot of intimacy and participation in a class which has too many students. In our experience, we have found that having between 8 and 12 students creates an ideal class size. Too few students doesn't allow for rich interaction: too many students doesn't allow students to participate as much.

- **Encourage student feedback**

We use weekly feedback forms at the end of each class session to gauge how our class has impacted our students. We gave students opportunity to act as coaches for other students in terms of suggestions for their final exhibits by having them meet in groups of three during the seventh week of term to give and receive feedback about the final projects. We have students fill out pre-class questionnaires as well as mid-term and end-of-term evaluations. We also spend part of the last week of class asking students for their feedback about how the class went.

- **Promote student-staff interaction both in and out of the classroom**

Students who get to know the instructors and each other in an informal, out-of-class experience are more likely to feel invested in the class and more likely to participate in class. We hold a class dinner sometime during the first few weeks of term (free for students) where we go to a local restaurant and chat about the class material and their lives. This helps create a sense of group bonding. In addition, we sponsor a class outing where we take students to a local art museum or a movie which addresses some aspect of self-portrayal or the value of visual art and writing in helping individuals understand themselves better. In the past few years, we have taken students to a movie about Indian children who are given cameras to record the world around them (*Born Into Brothels*) and exhibits at local museums on self-identity. In addition, during the sixth week of term each instructor meets individually for 30-45 minutes with each student to go over how they envision the theme and structural content of their self portrayals.

- **Team-teach from different disciplines if possible**

The value of team teaching from different disciplines is tremendous, not only for the students who are exposed to different views on the same subjects but also for the instructors who learn from each other. If you don't have the practical resources to team-teach an entire subject, consider asking a faculty member in a different department to give a guest lecture or run an exercise during one of your classes.

- **Have students exhibit their work**

We involve students in a two-week, end-of-term exhibition of their work, which includes a reception (open to the public) where students talk with the audience about their final projects and the class itself. The exhibition serves several important functions. First, it gives students a focus for their work in class. Exercises are done by students with the awareness that materials generated from these exercises may become elements of their final projects. This helps give an over-arching shape to the class and ties each class assignment to a greater goal. Second, for final projects, we ask students to choose a particular aspect of their lives that they wish to express to others. Beyond self-exploration, we are asking students to be self-expressive in a way that clearly presents their ideas to others. In preparing work for exhibition, students consider how their work will be perceived by an audience and how to be articulate in presenting their ideas. Finally, the exhibit opens the content of the class to a greater community, inviting feedback and interaction from peers outside of class.

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