

Faculty Seminar on Active Learning in Jumbo Courses

Anonymous Engagement Survey Analysis

Bernard L. Schwartz Communication Institute

About the Seminar

In July 2020, Weissman's Interim Dean approached the [Schwartz Communication Institute](#) with the goal of helping faculty facilitate active learning environments even in jumbo courses. As we all know, and as scholarship confirms, students learn most deeply, and for greatest transfer, when they have meaningful opportunities to learn through writing and speaking, and when their classes feel alive with energy. But large courses pose a special challenge toward achieving these goals. The Institute, therefore, designed and, in November 2020, facilitated a 3-day Seminar to support faculty in:

- Establishing a participatory culture through writing- and speaking-to-learn
- Designing and sequencing communications assignments to promote scaffolded learning and efficiencies for the instructor
- Responding productively—and time-efficiently—to student writing in large courses

More specifically, the Seminar shared strategies for the following, with special emphasis on the large course context, and with modifications for teaching online through synchronous and asynchronous means:

- Assigning low-stakes writing and speaking
- Facilitating meaningful and efficient group work
- Designing effective discussion boards
- Exploring variations in assignment design to promote clarity, authenticity, and efficiency
- Using minimalist, time-efficient formative feedback techniques for lower-stakes work
- Using rubrics, comment banks, and peer review for higher-stakes work

In the semesters following the Seminar, faculty participants were paired with a [Schwartz Communication Institute Fellow](#) for further individualized co-thinking and support in developing instructional materials for their next Jumbo courses.

Seminar participation:

The first cohort was comprised of 10 faculty:

Elizabeth Edenberg (Philosophy)
Ted Gordon (Fine and Performing Arts)
Zoe Griffith (History)
Ken Guest (Anthropology)
Brian Haggerty (Natural Sciences)
Viviana Rivera-Burgos* (Political Science)
Sarah Saddler (Fine and Performing Arts)
Hagop Sarkissian (Philosophy)
Susan Tenneriello (Fine and Performing Arts)
Orrette Wauchope (Natural Sciences)

*Only able to join for the first session

About the Survey

Upon completion of the Seminar, all participants received a short Qualtrics survey seeking anonymous information about their engagement with the Seminar. 8 faculty responded (representing an 80% response rate).

- The Survey contained four clusters of quantitative questions (two designed to support future instructional design, two designed to measure impact).
- The Survey also contained three open-ended qualitative questions.

Quantitative Outcomes

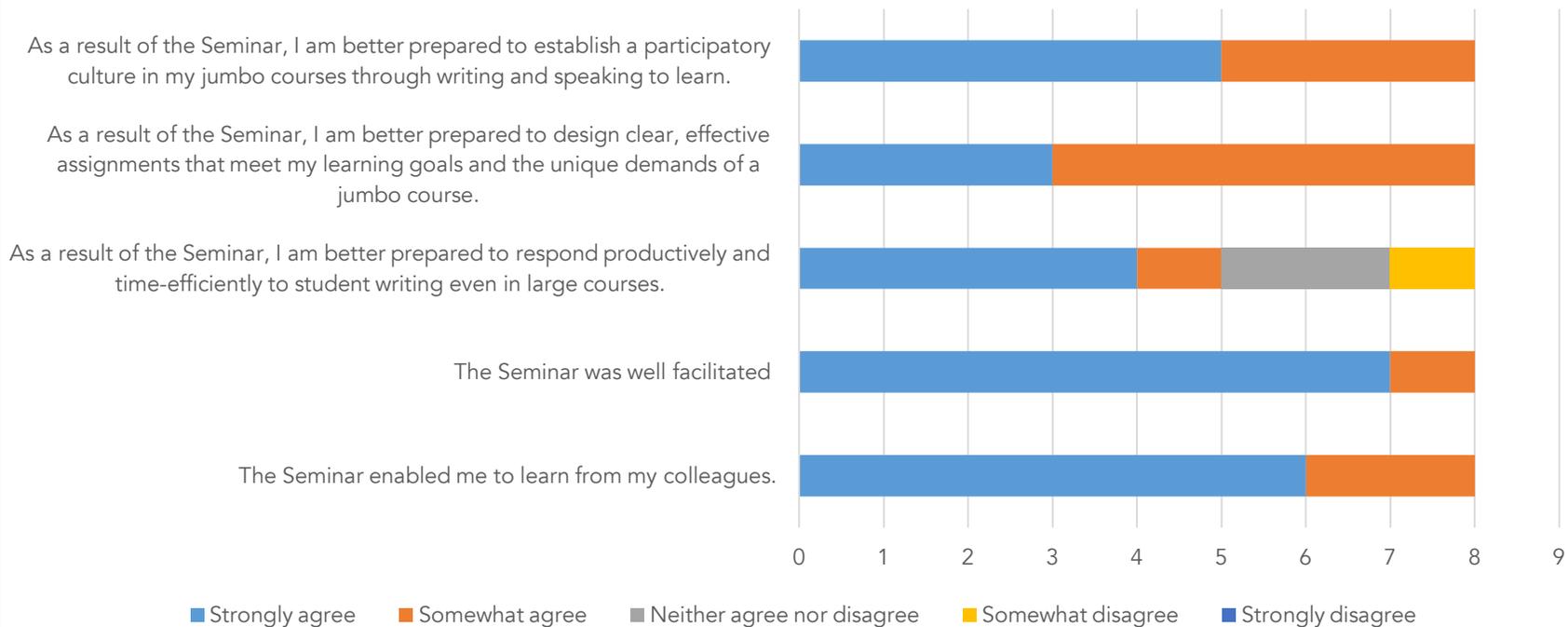
As you can see from the following two charts (next page):

- **Implementation.** The Seminar had clear and immediate outcomes for active learning in large-enrollment courses.
- **Establishing participatory culture.** Participants overwhelmingly left the Seminar feeling more prepared to engage students in, for example, meaningful small-group work, low-stakes writing and speaking, and effective online discussion boards.
- **Designing assignments.** Participants overwhelmingly left the Seminar feeling more prepared to design clear, authentic assignments that would engage students, and better serve course learning goals.
- **Responding to student writing.** It is not surprising that there is a more mixed response to this question: responding and evaluating to student writing remains a legitimately significant concern for faculty teaching large-enrollment courses. Nevertheless, the survey reflects progress. Further, in the follow-up partnerships between faculty and Communication Fellows, this was a common goal for support, suggesting ongoing engagement and experimentation.
- **Facilitation and Collaboration.** Participants overwhelmingly appreciated Seminar facilitation as well as the opportunity to learn from peers.

How likely are you to implement something you learned in the Seminar in an upcoming course?



To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?



Qualitative Data

Responses to each of the three open-ended questions revealed clear trends, which we delineate and provide examples of below. Qualitative responses are also provided in their entirety as an appendix to this report.

What did you learn in the Seminar that will be most useful for your teaching?

In response to this question, we see four key trends:

- **Practical advice and strategies:** The Seminar's carefully planned, evidence-based, and praxis-oriented approach yielded high impact.
- **Variety in what was most useful:** The Seminar's scope and duration meant that there was something useful, new, and practical for everyone. Interestingly, many mentioned strategies for responding productively and time-efficiently to student writing even in large courses, an area that in the quantitative responses reflected ongoing challenge, but that in the qualitative responses reflected development and growth.

Practical advice and strategies:

"This was the best run teaching related seminar I've participated in across 3 different universities. The strategies were clear and effective and took seriously the demands we face as teachers."

"As a teacher, I benefited from the program's emphasis on practical advice, as well as real-world examples and viewpoints."

Variety in what was most useful:

"Strategies for making low stakes assignments and rubrics."

"As someone who struggles with giving student feedback, this material was also helpful [...] I also learned new things, esp. the peer review suggestions (I have done peer review in the past and felt I was terrible at it, but now feel more prepared to utilize this)."

"I liked the strategies you all suggested for giving useful feedback without increasing the grading load, though I'm interested in focusing on how specifically to reduce grading load in the work with the fellows one-on-one in future semesters."

Is there anything you'd recommend we revise or do differently?

In response to this question, we see two key trends:

- **More time, more done at home, more time in small group discussion:** As is often the case with our longitudinal Seminars, faculty wish there was even more time, they wish that more readings were done at home to maximize time spent on in-person discussion, and they wish there was more time to learn from one another in small-group discussion. We spend considerable time planning these balances, and will continue to process-improve.
- **Even more tailoring to Jumbo context.** We hypothesize that until faculty actually implement and experiment with Seminar content, that much will feel uncertain and unresolved. Our expectation is that in the semester that followed, especially with support from a Communication Fellow, many of the strategies shared felt applicable to their jumbo courses.

More Time:

"I think the only thing I would have liked is to have the readings that we discussed during the sessions to be sent prior to the seminar time so we could have more time for discussions."

"Consider making more time for small group interaction"

Even more tailoring to Jumbo context:

"I do wish we had spent more time talking specifically about how to implement these great pedagogical tools in a jumbo."

Is there anything else you'd like to tell us about your experience of the Seminar?

In response to this question, we see two key trends:

- **Gratitude and engagement:** A large number of faculty expressed gratitude that reflected energy and excitement about upcoming teaching.
- **Looking forward to ongoing support – with Communication Fellow and future Seminars:** Several faculty members mentioned looking forward to future collaboration and support.

Gratitude and engagement:

“Thank you. The seminar was excellent in providing a multi-part forum to learn new techniques, exchange ideas, and share experiences with colleagues teaching jumbo courses.”

“Thank you for your labor in putting this together; it is valued and appreciated!”

Looking forward to ongoing support:

“I’m looking forward to working one on one with a member of the Schwartz Institute on syllabus design for next time I teach a jumbo.”

“I look forward to enrolling in future sessions.”

“I learned a lot during the Seminar and I’m excited to be paired with a Fellow from your office to help me think through implementing these new tools in my jumbo course.”