

## Student Directed Seminars Program

### *Program Philosophy, Policies, and Guidelines*

#### Background and Program Structure

The Student Directed Seminars Program (SDS), originally piloted at UBC Vancouver in 1999, is modeled on an established student directed seminar program at the University of California, Berkeley. The program is an expansion of the directed studies option offered by most departments and allows upper-year undergraduate students to engage in an enriched educational experience by initiating and coordinating a seminar on a topic of their choosing. The seminars are intended to be a peer-based collaborative learning experience.

Establishing a student directed seminars program within the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (FASS) at UBC Okanagan was first proposed by an undergraduate student. The student suggested the SDS program could be an opportunity for learning and community building that aligns with UBC's strategic goals and Inclusion Action Plan. The SDS program is a learner-centered approach to curriculum development where students have the agency to be co-creators of their own learning.

The program at UBC Vancouver is overseen by the Office of the VP Students, specifically the Centre for Student Involvement & Careers, which takes a lead role in implementing the program and supporting it. While FASS pilots this program, the Dean's Office Teaching, Learning and Curriculum Portfolio staff will coordinate all administration, implementation, and evaluation.

Intake for applications will be from February to March each year, and the seminars approved will be scheduled in Term 2 of the following academic year.<sup>1</sup> Prospective students from FASS, in their third year or higher of undergraduate study, are eligible to propose a seminar.<sup>2</sup> Student must be sponsored by a FASS faculty member, preferably tenure or tenure-track, who will assist with the development of their proposal. The application also requires a full statement of the student's grades and a recommendation letter from a faculty member, which can be from the Faculty Sponsor or a different faculty member.

All applications will be reviewed by the SDS Advisory Committee. The Committee will be composed of faculty members, a student representative, a CTL Educational Consultant, the FASS Academic Advisor, and the FASS Manager of Curriculum Development and Academic Programs. Meetings will be chaired by the Program Chair, which will be the FASS Associate Dean, Teaching, Learning and Curriculum. Pending there are no delays approving the program, the Committee will meet mid-late June 2022 to review the applications and approve a maximum of two seminars.

When a student's proposal is approved, the student becomes the *Student Coordinator* for that seminar. Student Coordinators then have the unique opportunity of working closely with their Faculty Sponsor to expand the proposal into a formal course outline. Prior to the seminar running, Student Coordinators will participate in a mandatory training program, which will include online and in-person components. The Student Coordinator is also expected to take initiative in recruiting students to register in their seminar.

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<sup>1</sup> For example, seminars approved in spring 2022 will be scheduled for 2022W Term 2, starting January 2023.

<sup>2</sup> Unclassified students are not permitted to propose seminars and the program is not open to graduate students.

## **Seminar Selection Criteria**

The Advisory Committee will base their approvals on four core criteria:

### **1. Quality and Development of Proposal**

- This includes ensuring that proposals be original in topic (i.e. is not currently offered at UBCO and has not been previously been an SDS). Proposals must demonstrate a rationale/need for this seminar and outline the gap in curriculum that this seminar would fill.
- Proposals need a level of depth and integration of material that reflects a 300- or 400-level seminar, with appropriate readings, assignments, and academic work that allows for integration and application of knowledge beyond simple recall of information.
- There must be a strong emphasis on discussion amongst participants, and flexibility in syllabus for revision. Seminars that emphasize a shared role that participants will take in the class are often more successful.
- Grading can be done in many different ways, but there is a strong preference for peer-grading. Faculty sponsors may grade some academic work, but peer-marking can be a valuable part of the peer-guided learning experience.

### **2. Suitability of the Student to Coordinate a Seminar**

- The Advisory Committee looks for a number of things, including:
  - Motivation and a capacity for self-learning;
  - Clear understanding of the Student Coordinator's role as a facilitator, not an instructor;
  - Demonstrated ability to work independently and think critically;
  - Aspirations for a career in teaching, or pursuing graduate school;
  - Experience working in teams, inspiring others.

### **3. Student's Grades and Academic Qualifications**

- Administrative staff will pull a copy of an applicant's grades when preparing the package of submissions for the Advisory Committee to review. There is no minimum average to coordinate a seminar, but students' past course topics, overall grades in similar courses and performance in the most recent year are closely considered.

### **4. Faculty Recommendation Form**

- Faculty recommendations are sent directly to [fasscurriculum.ubco@ubc.ca](mailto:fasscurriculum.ubco@ubc.ca), which means applicants do not always have the opportunity to see these recommendations. This hopefully allows faculty to be honest about their reservations or commendations of the student. The recommendation form is not required to be from the faculty sponsor, as a student may have another faculty member that can speak more to their suitability to facilitate a seminar.

## Academic Rigor

Academic rigor of the student directed seminars is ensured through three core groups of people associated with each seminar:

- 1. Faculty Sponsor:** Faculty sponsors are tenured or tenure-track faculty members tasked with ensuring the academic rigor of their sponsored seminars. They do so by assisting coordinators on seminar development, and by signing off on all grades at the end of the semester. Faculty sponsors may also assist in grading. The Advisory Committee asks that faculty sponsors only sponsor those coordinators who they believe to have the intellectual capacity to run an academically rigorous and successful seminar.
- 2. Advisory Committee:** The Committee reviews all proposals and may ask for further documentation (e.g., preliminary syllabus) if it is concerned that the level of academic rigor required for a seminar may not be reached. The Advisory Committee trusts that all faculty sponsors are fully supportive of the seminars they have sponsored, and will defer to the sponsor in matters related to academic rigor. That being said, all proposals approved by the Committee are deemed to have sufficient and necessary potential for the fulfillment of the program's academic requirements.
- 3. Coordinators:** The coordinators who apply to the student directed seminar program are usually highly-motivated students, with a keen interest in and a desire to maintain a certain academically-enriched learning environment for their peers. The program has often seen many of its coordinators go on to pursue graduate-level work in their student-directed seminar topics. All coordinators go through training to ensure they understand the various academic commitments they must fulfill during the duration of their seminar.

## Proposal Review Results

Proposals fall into one of two categories following the Advisory Committee proposal review:

- 1. Approved:** The seminar is fully approved to move ahead. The Committee believes that both the student coordinator and their proposed topic have strong potential for success and the course will meet both the expectations around academic rigor and fill a need within the UBC curriculum. The proposal is well conceived, reflects a strong approach to building relevant academic assignments, has a good sense of proposed grading structure, and demonstrates a clear class plan and set of academic readings. The proposal is exceptionally well written and has achieved an excellent balance between structure, clarity and flexibility.
- 2. Not Approved:** In this case, the Committee has significant concerns or reservations about the quality of the proposal, academic rigor, and/or the suitability of the student coordinator to lead the seminar. There is not enough information and thought in the proposal to support the idea and the proposal does not reflect the level of thinking, preparation, and planning expected for a successful seminar.

*UBC Vancouver's review process also includes "conditional approval" and "resubmission". Because FASS only plans to approve a maximum of two seminars in the first year these additional results categories are unnecessary at this time. The results categories will be reconsidered as the program grows, or depending on the quality of applications received.*

## Roles and Responsibilities

**1. Faculty Sponsor:** Faculty sponsors are tasked with ensuring the academic rigor of the student-directed seminar they sponsor. As such, faculty sponsors should only sponsor those coordinators who they believe have the capabilities and capacities to run successful seminars. A faculty sponsor's role encompasses many duties including, but not limited to:

- Ensuring academic rigor;
- Signing off on final grades;
- Resolving grade and academic-related disputes during the seminar's duration;
- Providing 'approval' on topics, grading schemes and syllabus;
- Assisting with the seminar development (e.g., rubrics, assessments, etc.).

To ensure faculty sponsors have the capacity to fully participate and commit to this innovative learning experience, it is preferred they be tenured or on tenure-track. Faculty sponsors that are not tenured or tenure-track will be considered on a case-by-case basis. The faculty sponsor role is voluntary.

**2. Program Chair:** The SDS Program Chair for the FASS program will be the Associate Dean, Teaching, Learning and Curriculum. The Chair leads the Advisory Committee and is the primary contact for staff in the administration and coordination of the program. The responsibilities and role of the Chair include:

- Advising the program staff in making academic decisions about the program, to ensure the program meets the academic regulations of the University and is providing high-quality educational experiences for students. This includes advising on aspects of program strategy, seminar enrolment and registration, working with departments and problem solving various academic issues as they arise.
- Responding to any issues of academic misconduct by working with the respective faculty sponsor, the student coordinator, and the department of the course to support resolution of the issue through processes outlined by the Faculty.
- Advising on the continued recruitment and revitalization of a strong-cross functional Advisory Committee that broadly represents the range of seminar disciplines.
- Chairing the Advisory Committee meetings, which are typically held twice a year, once in the fall to discuss emerging program development, and once in late April to undertake the yearly proposal review.
- Attending a portion of student coordinator training to help prepare coordinators to undertake peer-grading.
- Hosting 2-3 small orientation sessions for new faculty sponsors to outline the role of a faculty sponsor and answer any questions.

**3. Advisory Committee:** The Advisory Committee reviews all SDS applications, and will approve a maximum of two seminars in the first year of the program. The Advisory Committee's role is to ensure the academic rigor of the program by selecting only those proposals for approval that fulfill

the program's requirements. Proposals are not allowed to proceed without the Committee's approval. The faculty members on the Committee also help to build strategy for the program, ensure the program meets academic policy on campus, and helps to further develop the full scope of the program. This may also include resolution of issues that arise throughout the term, setting guidelines or policies, and promoting the program within their department.

The composition of the Advisory Committee will be as follows:

- Program Chair (FASS Associate Dean of Teaching, Learning and Curriculum)
- 4 faculty members, 1 from each FASS department
- FASS Academic Advisor
- FASS Student Representative (in subsequent years this will be a former SDS Coordinator)
- Educational Consultant from the Centre for Teaching and Learning
- FASS Curriculum Development and Academic Programs Manager

**4. FASS Teaching, Learning and Curriculum Portfolio:** The faculty's Manager, Curriculum Development & Academic Programs and the Coordinator, Curriculum, Awards, Academic Programs oversee the day-to-day operations of the SDS Program. Their tasks include, but are not limited to:

- Being the primary contact for the program;
- Facilitating the application process;
- Providing support to student coordinators and faculty sponsors;
- Supporting the training for student coordinators;
- Coordinate orientation sessions for faculty sponsors;
- Liaise with FASS departments and Enrolment Services to schedule seminars;
- Coordinates seminar visits and sharing feedback to Coordinators;
- Coordinates the evaluation process for SDS courses.

**5. Student Coordinator:** Coordinators are not instructors, but are peers and facilitators in a peer-learning environment. The Coordinator's role is to develop, manage, and run the seminar with assistance from their faculty sponsor and fellow peers. Coordinators oversee the processes of the seminar and create a space for peer-directed learning. Students are allowed to coordinate a maximum of one SDS during their degree.

**6. Participants:** SDS Participants are co-learners in a peer-guided environment, and are expected to have a considerable role in finalizing the seminar's syllabus and taking on some facilitation responsibility. Like coordinators, participants are upper-year undergraduate students with a high degree of motivation for self-learning. Furthermore, participants are expected to participate in peer-review grading and other such seminar processes. Students are allowed to participate in a maximum of two SDS during their degree.

## **Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences Student Directed Seminar Advisory Committee**

### **Terms of Reference**

#### **Mandate**

The mandate for the Student Directed Seminar Advisory Committee is as follows:

- To recruit strong proposals and student coordinators, generating referrals to possible faculty sponsors within the Faculty as needed, and supporting the recruitment of student participants for approved seminars.
- To review and make decisions on the approval status of student directed seminar proposals for the upcoming academic year. This review will occur in the spring, once a year.
- To act as an advisor on academic issues related to the effective and high-quality implementation of the program. This may include advice and guidance on issues such as evaluation of courses, obtaining course codes, navigating academic policies, responding to complex student issues, making decisions on program policy, and providing advice on program development.

#### **Deliverables**

The Committee members are responsible for:

- The proposal review, which will occur in the spring each year. The final decisions will be made by June, to ensure seminars can be scheduled by Enrolment Services in time for summer registration.
- Promoting the program through their department, particularly to the following groups:
  - Talented upper-year students who are well-positioned for coordinating a seminar
  - Faculty members who might be well-suited sponsors for prospective coordinators
  - Students who might be interested in enrolling in seminars as a participant
- Attending ad-hoc meetings as needed to provide department perspective on academic issues, including how best to implement programmatic changes and develop the program further.
- Ensuring the program meets and upholds all of UBC's academic policies and standards.

#### **Governance**

- Decisions on proposal approval are made by majority vote. In the event of a tie, the Program Chair will cast the deciding vote.
- The Committee is bound by the academic rules of UBC Senate.
- FASS staff will submit a formal program report on a yearly basis to the Dean and the Advisory Committee.
- The Advisory Committee may make suggestions or provide advice on all aspects of the program. Final decisions, if not made by the Committee, will be made by the Associate Dean, Teaching, Learning and Curriculum.

## **Membership**

The Committee composition is as follows:

- One faculty member from each FASS department (*four voting members*)
- One FASS student representative<sup>3</sup> (*voting member*)
- Centre for Teaching and Learning Educational Consultant (*voting member*)
- FASS Academic Advisor (*voting member*)
- Program Chair, FASS Associate Dean, Teaching, Learning and Curriculum (*votes only to break a tie*)
- FASS Curriculum Development and Academic Programs Manager (*non-voting member-secretary*)

## **Expectations**

Members of the Advisory Committee are expected to:

- Advance and uphold the mission, vision and values of the University
- Treat members with kindness, respect and consideration, valuing a diversity of views and opinions (including those you may not share)
- Attend all meetings
- Carefully review all materials circulated in anticipation of a meeting
- Participate fully and frankly in the deliberations and discussions

## **Quorum**

40% of voting members.

## **Length of Term**

Faculty members will serve a 2-year term.

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<sup>3</sup> In subsequent years, the student representative will be a former SDS Student Coordinator.