

# Animal Science Seminar

## A Course Oriented Towards Developing Effective Communications

F. A. Thrift

### Abstract

*This Animal Science seminar offers students an opportunity to develop their abilities to communicate effectively with others in both written and oral form. Students in the seminar are evaluated on the basis of a written report, oral presentation of the report in class, performance as a discussion leader, evaluation of other seminar speakers, and participation in classroom discussion.*

### Introduction

Pope (1976) summarized results of a survey conducted by the American Society of Animal Science Committee on Future Career Opportunities for Animal Science Graduates to determine employer reactions to Animal Science graduates. Responses were obtained from 105 employers of Animal Science graduates. Twenty nine percent of the respondents indicated that lack of communication skills was the biggest deficiency of Animal Science graduates. This manuscript deals not with why a large percentage of Animal Science graduates lack communicative skills but with ways to help Animal Science students develop their abilities to communicate effectively in both written and oral form through an Animal Science Seminar. In the seminar, students are evaluated on basis of a written seminar report, oral presentation of the written seminar report in class, performance as a discussion leader, evaluation of other seminar speakers, and participation in classroom discussion.

### Seminar Format and Discussion

The Animal Science Seminar offered by the Animal Sciences Department at the University of Kentucky is a required one hour credit course (can be taken for maximum of 2 credit hours) oriented primarily for senior-level students. Requiring that students be senior-level before enrolling in the course guarantees they will have acquired considerable background in Animal Sciences and also fulfilled a three-hour departmental communication requirement that consists of either a speech course or an English course dealing with writing for business and industry.

The primary objectives of the seminar are (1) to familiarize the student with various sources of scientific information, (2) to instruct the student on proper proce-

dures for preparing a review paper from several scientific articles, (3) to enable the student to gain experience in presenting scientific material before a group, and (4) to enable the student to stimulate and lead classroom discussion.

The basic format of the course is depicted in table 1. By the end of the fourth class period, students have been introduced to what is referred to simply as background information. The first class period is spent filling out information sheets, preliminary seminar topic discussion (a list of possible topics is provided to each student), and use of the agricultural library. All students are required to complete the general information sheet. On the basis of this information and due to number of students enrolled in the course each semester, students are divided equally into two groups according to their subject matter interest. Those students primarily interested in genetics and physiology are placed in one group, and students primarily interested in foods and nutrition are placed in another group. One instructor whose background is in genetics and physiology has charge of the first group, and another instructor whose background is in foods and nutrition has charge of the second group. Although the two seminar groups remain separate after the first class

Table 1. Animal Science Seminar Course Format

Class period <sup>a</sup>	Subject matter	
1	Filling out information sheets; preliminary seminar topic discussion; use of agricultural library	
2	Course format; finalize seminar topic discussion	
3	Do's and don't's of writing seminar report	
4	Do's and don't's of presenting seminar report orally	
5	Written seminar report due	
	<b>Discussion Leader</b>	<b>Seminar Speaker</b>
6	Student No. 1 Student No. 2	Student No. 2 Student No. 1
7	Student No. 3 Student No. 4	Student No. 4 Student No. 3
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14	Student No. 17 Student No. 18	Student No. 18 Student No. 17
15	Summary of semester work	

<sup>a</sup> 50 Minute class period that meets once per week.

F. A. Thrift is associate professor of Animal Sciences, University of Kentucky, Lexington, Kentucky. Agricultural Experiment Station Journal Article 76-5-86.

period, course format procedures are coordinated by the two instructors.

Most of the first class period is devoted to a discussion of the agricultural library. The librarian from the agricultural library illustrates with a set of visuals the general layout of the library and how specific information may be found there. The first class period is an ideal time for detailed discussion of the agricultural library since students are in a single group.

The second class period is devoted primarily to discussion of the generalized course format, what is expected of each student, and the grading procedure. The grading procedure is presented in written form to each student and is based on the written seminar report, discussion leader performance, oral seminar presentation, evaluation of seminar speakers, and participants in classroom discussions. Seminar topics are also finalized during the second class period.

The third class period is devoted to "do's" and "don't's" of writing a seminar report. During the second class period each student is provided a written seminar report prepared by the instructor on a specific topic. Through use of this report, students are shown the proper procedure for preparing each segment of the written seminar report (title, introduction, body of report dealing with research results published in scientific literature, summary, literature cited).

The fourth class period is devoted to "do's" and "don't's" of presenting the written seminar report orally. Improper (reading seminar report word for word, sloughing, blocking out what is being projected on screen and/or carrying on conversation with the projection screen when overhead projector is being used, not maintaining a reasonable degree of eye contact with the audience, etc.) and proper procedures for presenting the oral seminar report are illustrated using information in the written seminar report previously provided each student. Students are advised to make an oral presentation as simple as possible, i.e., say what is to be said, say it, and say what has been said so that all members of the class will be able to comprehend the subject matter with little difficulty.

Also during the fourth class period, students are instructed on the proper procedure for preparing visual aids using a grease pencil and transparent overlays (overlays are provided and used by all students; overlays are cleaned after each seminar presentation and transferred from student to student to minimize cost). Although the transparent overlays are the visual aid utilized for oral presentations, students may and are encouraged to develop other visual aids if deemed desirable for illustrating a specific concept during their oral presentation.

At the fifth class period, a written seminar report is due from each student. Students will have had a maximum of four weeks to prepare the report on a topic agreed upon by both the student and instructor at the beginning of the semester. The instructor spends most of a

Table 2. Evaluation Form for Evaluating Oral Seminar Presentation

Seminar Speaker _____	
Score	Item <sup>a</sup>
1. _____	Introduction to subject matter—Did speaker introduce subject matter in a logical and concise manner?
2. _____	Presentation of research results concerning subject matter—Did speaker adequately cover subject matter in a logical and concise manner?
3. _____	Summary of results concerning subject matter—Did speaker summarize subject matter in a logical and concise manner?
4. _____	Answering of questions concerning subject matter—Did speaker answer questions concerning subject matter very well?
5. _____	Legibility of visual aids—Did speaker prepare visual aids in such a manner that visual aids were easy to read and follow?
6. _____	Proper use of visual aids—Did speaker use visual aids in an appropriate manner to illustrate various concepts of subject matter?
7. _____	Distracting mannerisms—Did speaker have certain mannerisms that caused distraction from subject matter presentation?
8. _____	Stayed on schedule—Did speaker stay within allotted time?
9. _____	Neatness of dress—Did speaker dress in a manner that would be considered suitable for a job interview?
10. _____	Expressed enthusiasm during seminar presentation—Did speaker express enthusiasm about subject matter during presentation?

<sup>a</sup> Each of the above 10 items is to be scored on a scale from 1 to 10 where a score of 1 represents very poor performance and a score of 10 represents excellent performance.

Scorer \_\_\_\_\_

week grading the written seminar reports, with each report being analyzed at least three times. If not picked up before, the graded seminar reports are returned to all students at the beginning of the sixth class period. Each report is then reviewed on a one-to-one basis at the student's convenience sometime during the sixth week of classes. If a student is dissatisfied with the score received on his report, he may revise the report using suggestions offered by the instructor. If a second draft of the report is prepared, it must be returned to the instructor within a 2-week period (by 8th class period) after the first draft is returned to the student. The second draft is then graded

and an average of the scores received on the first and second drafts is taken as the final score for the written seminar report. For those students who did not need to rework or who chose not to rework their seminar reports, the score received on their first draft is the final score for the written seminar report.

Oral presentations begin with the sixth class period. Because of the number of students enrolled in the course, two speakers per class period are required (Table 1). Each speaker has at his disposal 25 minutes which are devoted to speaker introduction by a discussion leader, the oral presentation itself, answering of questions from the audience concerning the seminar topic, and evaluation of the speaker by other members of the class and the instructor. The discussion leader introduces the seminar speaker and gives some brief background information about the speaker and seminar topic. The discussion leader-seminar speaker approach encourages students to work together and become familiar with each other and their seminar topics before giving their oral presentations.

After an introduction by the discussion leader, the seminar speaker makes the oral presentation, and at about 15 minutes after the hour the seminar is opened for questions from the audience. Questions are received by the discussion leader for eight or nine minutes, after which the instructor attempts to tie any "loose ends" together concerning the speaker's topic. This latter procedure is not required for all of the speakers and is strictly a judgment of the instructor. After the instructor has finished with any concluding remarks deemed necessary, each student and the instructor completes an evaluation sheet concerning the seminar speaker. The 10-item evaluation sheet is illustrated in Table 2. Each item is scored on a basis of 1 to 10, where 10 represents excellence. Each scorer must sign his name on the evaluation sheet; however, prior to returning the sheets to the speaker, the scorer's name is clipped off. Only the instructor's signature remains intact on the instructor's evaluation sheet. Also included on the instructor's evaluation sheet are any comments deemed appropriate concerning each of the 10 items. Immediately after the class period, the evaluation sheets for each seminar speaker are summarized by the instructor, and the summary sheet plus evaluation sheets completed by the other students and the instructor are given to the seminar speaker the same day of the oral presentation. On the basis of the evaluation sheet summary, a score is determined for the oral presentation.

At 25 minutes past the hour, the order of the discussion leader and seminar speaker is reversed, and the second segment of the class period begins as illustrated in Table 1. This same format is followed for the remaining oral presentations, during the remaining class periods. The order in which the students make their oral presentation is random, and the entire class is informed of this procedure at the beginning of the semester. The only exception is that prior information, such as performance

in a previous course, is utilized by the instructor to select two of the more outstanding students enrolled in the seminar course to make the first oral presentations. Hopefully, these first two students serve as examples for the remaining students. The seminar class is not informed that the instructor believes the first two speakers are the more outstanding students enrolled in the course.

If a student desires, prior to his oral presentation the instructor will listen to the student's presentation and offer constructive criticism concerning the overall presentation as well as various segments of it. Usually a preliminary evaluation session of this nature by the instructor can help the student to summarize research results published in the scientific literature and to present this information before a group in a logical and concise manner through use of a few well prepared visual aids. Although all students are informed of this policy at the beginning of the semester, preliminary evaluations are provided only if requested.

Since no final examination is given in this course, the final class period is devoted to informing each student of his grade, after which students are asked for their comments and suggestions concerning ways in which the course format may be improved so as to be more beneficial in helping students develop their abilities to communicate effectively in both written and oral form.

#### References

Pope, L.S., "Employer Reactions to Animal Science Graduates," *Journal of Animal Science* Vol. 42, 1:283. (Abstract)

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## Proposed Amendment to the NACTA Constitution

The following proposed amendment to the NACTA Constitution was drawn up by a special committee comprised of Frank R. Carpenter (Chairman), Charles W. Basham, Paul Curtis, and Edward C. Frederick and submitted to the Executive Committee in September, 1975. The Executive Committee has reviewed the proposed amendment and unanimously recommends it to the members of NACTA for adoption.

Article VII of the current Constitution will become Article VIII.

Article VII of the revised Constitution will read as follows:

Article VII. State Affiliates.

Section 1. Any state group of teachers of agriculture at the post secondary level with 20 or more NACTA members may form an affiliate organization with NACTA provided the purposes are similar and the constitution of the state group is not in conflict with the NACTA constitution and approval is given by the Executive Committee of NACTA. When a state submits a request to be affiliated with NACTA, a copy of the state's constitution, stating that such state is an affiliate of NACTA, must accompany the request.

Section 2. The President of the state affiliate, or his designee, shall serve as State Coordinator for NACTA.