



Leading a SAGES Seminar

An Instructor's Guide



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Preface

Origins of the Guide

The SAGES Learning and Research Team at Case Western Reserve University prepared this guide. Led by Alice Kolb, Ph.D., team members who contributed to the guide include Lindsey Godwin, Duncan Coombe, Linda Ghazal, Simy Joy and Verena Murphy, all from the Case Weatherhead Department of Organizational Behavior.

However, scores of people have participated in the process and suggested ideas for *Leading a SAGES Seminar: An Instructor's Guide*. In a sense, this guide is the product not only of the SAGES Learning Team, but of the entire SAGES pilot program. Over the past three years, the SAGES Learning Team has been privileged to visit SAGES classes across campus, and to spend time talking with instructors, co-instructors, and students about their SAGES experiences. From these conversations and observations, many best practices have emerged. We have also woven in insights from current research on seminars, as reflected in the bibliography at the end of the guide.

Special Acknowledgments

We wish to thank the co-directors of SAGES, Lee Thompson and Peter Whiting, for their professional support and the enthusiasm they have expressed for our work throughout the three years of the SAGES pilot. We want to express our gratitude to Mano Singham, Patricia Princehouse, and Judy Oster, who have generously shared their expertise and deep understanding of what it takes to be a great seminar leader. We thank Heather Morrison and Philip Taylor for their valuable comments and suggestions. For their assistance in editing, we acknowledge Kimberly Emmons, Arthur Evenchik, and Brad Ricca. A special thanks goes to the SAGES faculty, whose participation was essential to the success of the SAGES pilot program. The major unnamed contributors are our SAGES students. This guide could never have been completed without their passionate and active participation in the SAGES seminars for the last three years.

Invitation for Feedback

This guide is meant to be a “living” document; it will evolve as SAGES continues to develop. We therefore invite you to share examples from your own experience with us. Perhaps you see the need for an expanded section or even a new module; whatever it may be, your feedback is welcome at:

sageslearningteam@case.edu

Welcome to SAGES!

A message to the faculty from President Hundert...

You are the heart of the SAGES program.

Through you, our students will experience firsthand the joy of higher education. They will discover that even the most learned professionals were amateurs first, and that we love learning for its own sake.



One of my favorite activities as president has been teaching my SAGES seminars each year. Whether it was my First Seminar or one of my University Seminars, the SAGES sessions have consistently been the highlight of my week. Learning through scholarly discourse with others is always a precious opportunity, but when other members of the group are first- and second-year students, the experience is even more rewarding. All of us involved in SAGES have found that our students teach us to learn, in ways we did not suspect possible.

What you offer your students in SAGES is far more than the content of the seminar. You offer an example of the rewarding life that intellectual discourse opens up for those willing to put in the work. Amidst the great living, breathing diversity of our learning community, you display respect and provide a point of departure for the intellectual journeys of others. You also serve as living examples of how critical thinking in one area prepares people to carefully weigh evidence, consider alternatives, and make choices and commitments in all areas of their lives.

Allowing our students to see us learning from them takes courage—a special kind of courage, greatly needed in our increasingly global economy and culture. The SAGES seminar is a space in which we come to value others because they are different, because they disagree, because their experiences of the world and the choices they have made have led them down paths unlike those we may have followed in our own lives.

SAGES provides faculty a unique opportunity to fulfill Case's mission directly—"to have a transformational impact on all who teach, learn, discover, and work here, so they are prepared and engaged to serve humanity." SAGES faculty gently and thoughtfully initiate students into the world of the research university and their new roles as educated world citizens. Thank you for all you do for our students and our community.

The Vision of SAGES & Your Role

The Mission of Case Western Reserve University is to ...

Be the most powerful learning environment in the world. We seek to have transformational impact on all who teach, learn, discover, and work here, so that they are prepared and engaged to serve humanity. As a great research university, we must embrace responsible risk-taking in pursuit of bold aspirations for national and global leadership.

- *We combine experiential learning with rigorous scholarship in our undergraduate and all educational programs to produce educated learners who are awake to new possibilities.*
- *We invest in the arts, humanities, and social sciences as important areas of scholarship and as an essential foundation for preparing morally and socially responsible lifelong learners.*
- *We build on our existing strengths, including engineering, biomedical sciences, and professional education, and pursue productive partnerships with other outstanding institutions.*
- *We are guided by our values at every level to promote a diverse, challenging, supportive, entrepreneurial, and interdisciplinary environment of openness, respect, accountability, and academic freedom.*

The SAGES Vision....

As Case undergraduates develop into learned members of society, they should be able to conduct scholarly research or pursue other creative endeavors, first under the mentorship of our faculty, then as independent scholars and ultimately as mentors to those who follow. . . . Achieving this ambition requires that the student master essential skills while a member of our community. Ultimately, a Case student should be able to define a problem, critically research background material, and communicate an effective argument or response to that problem. The response could involve written or oral presentations or any number of artistic endeavors that seek to affect the thinking of other people.¹

¹ Adapted from the SAGES manifesto at <http://www.case.edu/sages/rationale.htm>

Using the seminar method to bring these visions to life

As a setting for inquiry, the *seminar* is difficult to surpass. Human beings, it seems, are hard-wired to learn by talking together in small groups. We thrive intellectually when we have the chance to generate ideas in the course of conversation, to reassess our customary views, and to participate actively in the generation of knowledge. Moreover, the seminar experience provides a foundation for successful learning elsewhere. By fostering habits of reflection and appreciation for diverse perspectives, the seminar prepares students to excel in their courses generally, in their capstone projects, and in their future careers.²

Your role as a seminar leader³

As President Hundert noted, SAGES instructors initiate students into the world of the research university and, through that, into their new roles as educated world citizens.

Achieving higher-order intellectual skills is not easy to do alone or even in peer groups, whether in science or the humanities. Students need support and confidence-building to master and apply abstract concepts, to question familiar ideas, and to solve complex problems. Too often, traditional university teaching encourages students to “borrow” understanding from the professor or textbook long enough to pass an exam. At Case, we want the students to build understandings and cultivate skills that they will retain for the rest of their lives.

This kind of knowledge cannot be acquired passively, by listening to lectures. Students create knowledge for themselves by building on what they already know. They each have their own personal ecology of learning, their individual toolkit of learning skills. But their continuing development as learners and thinkers requires active engagement in a supportive social setting. Hence the seminar format.

For most students, the traditional lecture format supplies answers too readily, short-circuiting their need to coordinate their own performance and cognition. Although students welcome it, traditional, authoritative, “professorial” intervention unwittingly undermines most students’ efforts to develop the patience, self-confidence, and persistence they need to create complex representations and abstractions.

A liberal education is at the heart of a civil society, and at the heart of a liberal education is the act of teaching.

~ A Bartlett Giamatti,
President,
Yale

² Taken from the SAGES website: http://www.case.edu/sages/sem_experience.htm

³ Special thanks to Patricia Princehouse for her generous contributions to this section.

Some students learn the nature of a discipline by spontaneously creating problems and questions for themselves from lecture material. Other students work through the examples that are provided to them, but they need peer collaboration and professorial encouragement to do so. In order to master an abstract concept—be it scientific, symbolic, or ethical—students must discover for themselves that it helps them make sense of their own experience. The role of the SAGES instructor is to provoke and support students as they engage with the cognitive challenges presented by new phenomena and abstract ideas.

Your role as an instructor is to translate the SAGES vision into reality. To this end, your areas of responsibility include:

1. Development of writing competencies

No matter what field your students eventually pursue, they will need to be proficient writers, able to convey their ideas (and earth-shattering research results, which we know they all will have!). SAGES has actually replaced English 150, the first-year writing course. As a result, the seminars have become pivotal classes for developing student writers. Working with your co-instructor (if you have one) and giving students constructive feedback on their writing throughout the semester is a critical part of the seminar.

2. Development of oral communication skills

Since effective communication is not limited to writing, SAGES seminars are designed to provide a forum in which students can learn to articulate their thoughts, coherently and powerfully, in spoken form. Seminar discussions and oral presentations give students the opportunity to practice essential communication skills while getting constructive, valuable feedback from you.

3. Development of critical/ethical reasoning skills

Part of your task as the seminar instructor is to help students begin to conceive of knowledge as something to be gathered from multiple sources, and then subjected to rigorous scrutiny and comparative analysis. An ultimate goal is to prepare students to define a problem and then develop a thoughtful response to that problem. Helping students explore and develop their critical and ethical reasoning skills is essential for their future success.

4. Advising first-year students

Under SAGES, every undergraduate has a faculty mentor from the moment he or she arrives on campus. The First Seminar leaders double as advisors to the students they teach, introducing them to the culture and resources of the research university and establishing close relationships with them from the very first semester. Students consistently tell us how much these relationships meant to them as they attempted to navigate a new academic world.

5. Development of appreciation for diversity

Your role as seminar instructor also entails exposing students to a wide range of ideas and approaches to scholarship. The seminar is designed to be a space where diversity of thought and opinion is not only offered, but also welcomed and valued. By fostering habits of reflection and appreciation for diverse perspectives, the seminar prepares students to excel in whatever career path they choose and to appreciate others with opinions and cultural backgrounds different from their own. Sometimes, the SAGES seminar provides students with their first exposure to individuals with different backgrounds and belief structures. Thus, it provides a rich learning opportunity, allowing them not only to explore why others believe what they do, but also to examine their own beliefs and assumptions about the world.



Using this Guide

This guide is designed to help you throughout your SAGES experience, right from the planning stage. It offers ideas and examples on everything from putting your syllabus together to dealing with problem students. Through the various, self-contained modules, you can select the topics that you most want to explore.

I always pass on good advice. It is the only thing to do with it. It is never of any use to oneself.

~
Oscar Wilde

I don't give advice. I can't tell anybody what to do. Instead I say this is what we know about this problem at this time. And here are the consequences of these actions.

~
Dr. Joyce Brothers

! It is important to note that this guide does not presume to be prescriptive, or to promote one “ideal” kind of teaching process. Rather, its aim is to help support you—whatever your teaching style—as you set about creating an effective seminar. While seminars can look different all across campus, there are some basic building blocks, provided throughout the guide, that will help you construct an engaging learning space for your students.



Module format & features

The guide is designed to highlight points and practical tips you can use in your classroom. The following icons will help you navigate through the materials:



— States the aim of each module



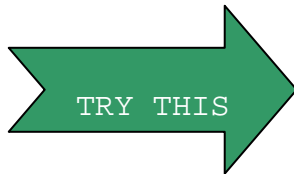
— Denotes an important caveat



— Describes observable student behaviors



— Indicates the “Instructor’s Toolbox,” which offers suggestions for dealing with particular situations



— Suggests comments and questions you might try saying in class when you encounter an issue

?? Questions for Reflection

?? Questions for Reflection

— Poses questions for you to think about in preparation for your classes as well as ideas for conversations to have with your fellow SAGES instructors

General SAGES Information

Contact Information:

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FYIs for every SAGES Instructor

- You have access to Blackboard as an e-tool for your classroom. Contact the SAGES office if you need help setting this up for your class. Address: <http://blackboard.cwru.edu/>
- The academic calendar for the year is located at: <http://www.case.edu/provost/registrar/calendar.html>
- The SAGES website has additional information and insights for you at: <http://www.case.edu/sages/index.html>
- The Writing Resources website includes advice on writing instruction and assessment, sample assignments, and links to a wealth of online resources. Address: <http://www.case.edu/artsci/encl/writing/pedagogy>