

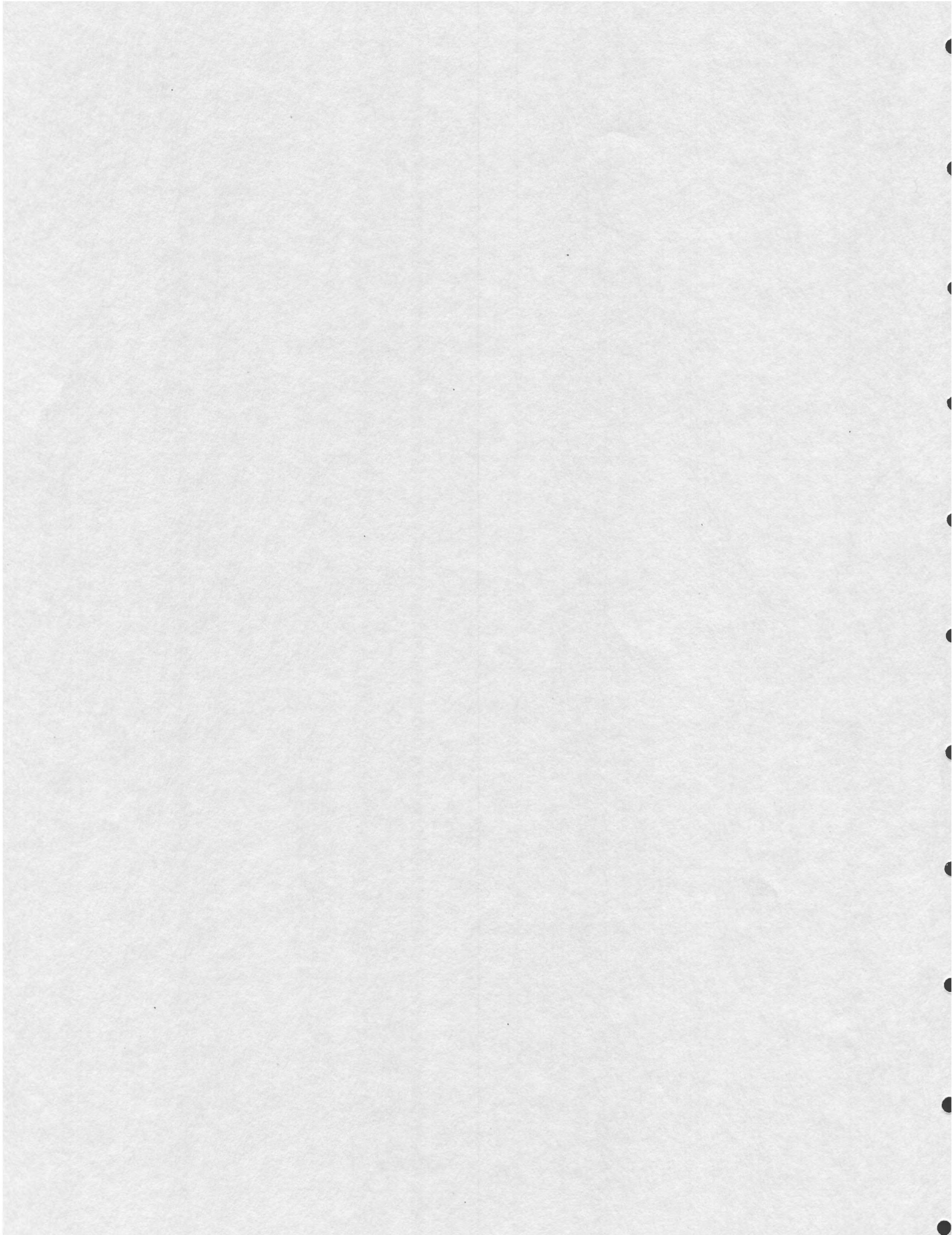
SEMINAR TALK: AN ASSESSMENT REPORT

By Susan Fiksdal

The Evergreen State College

Assessment Study Group

May 1991



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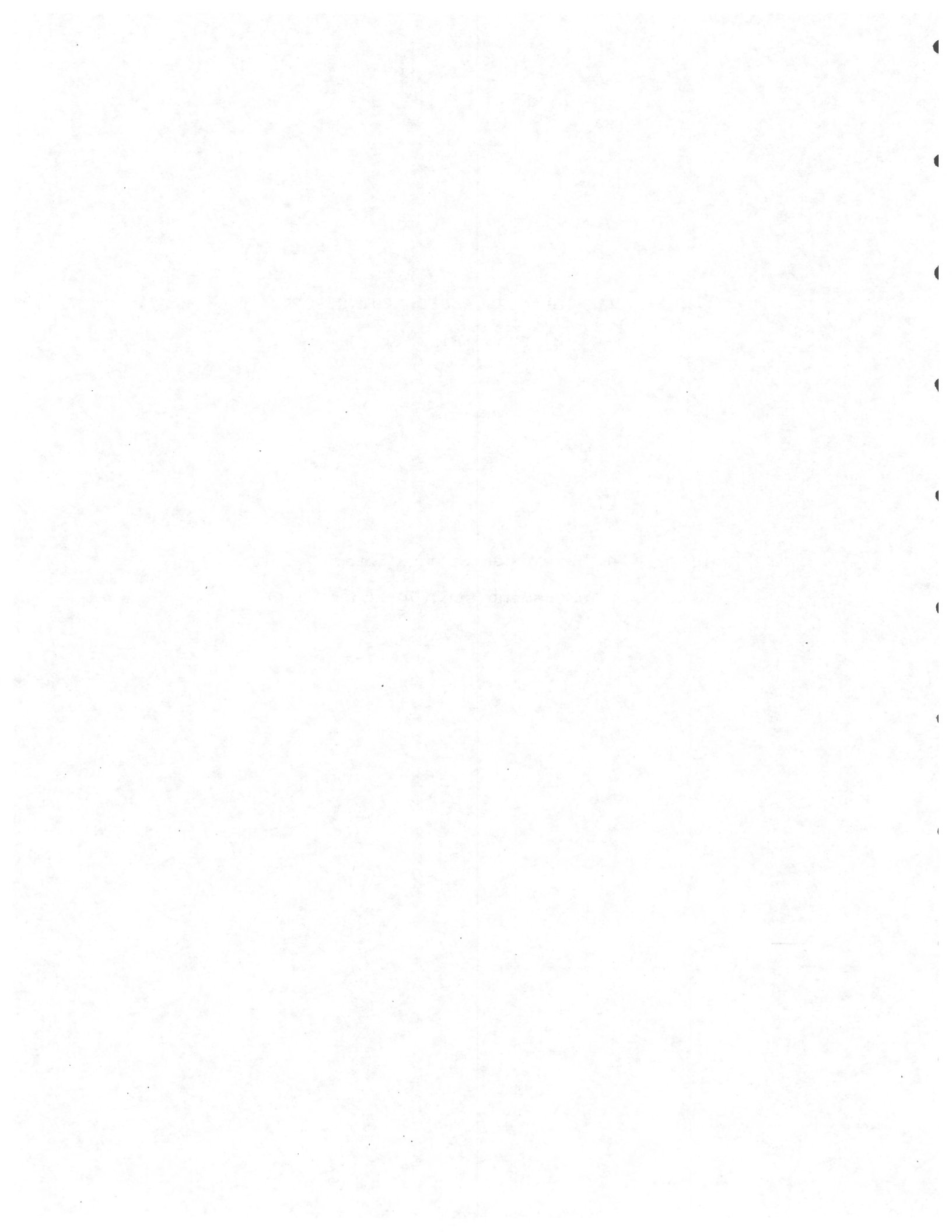
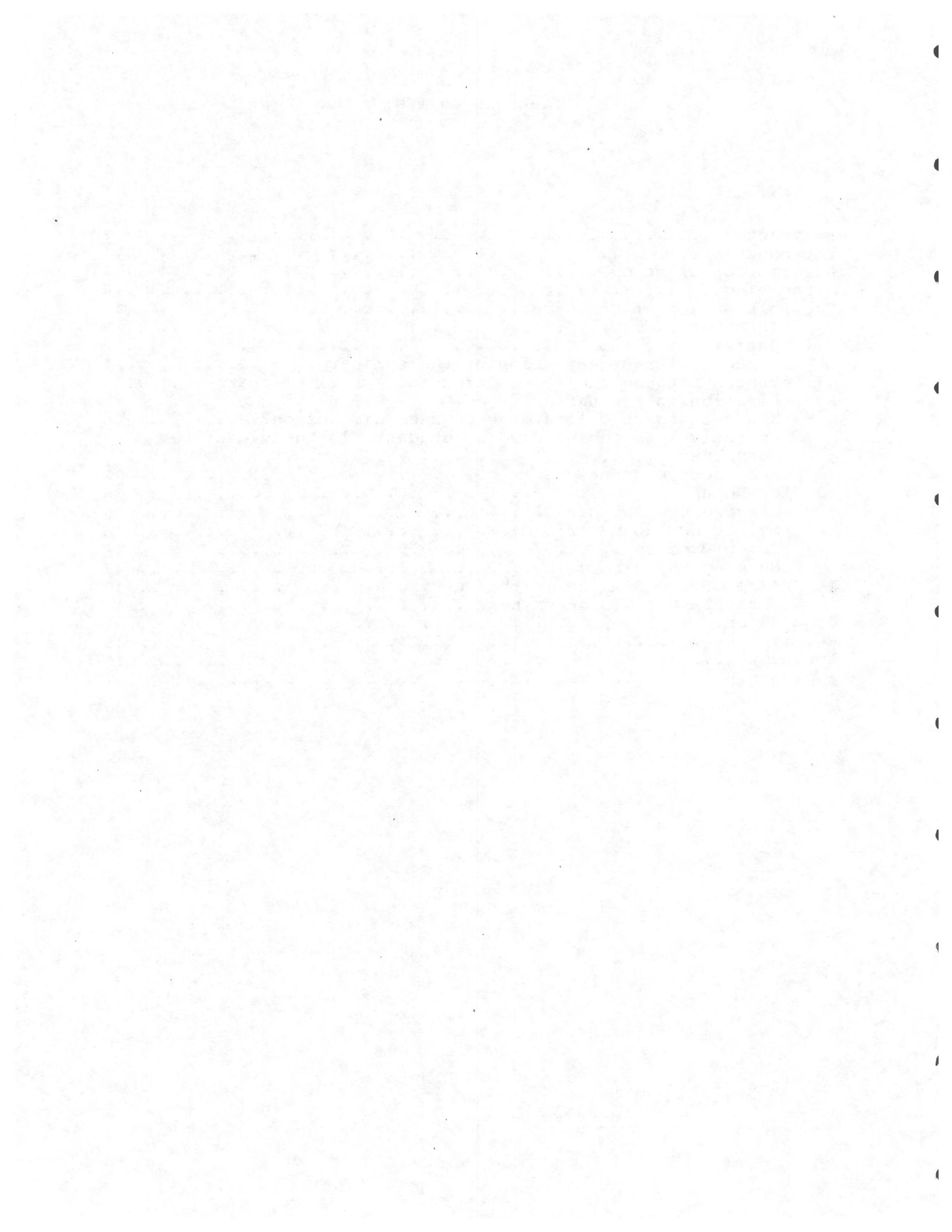


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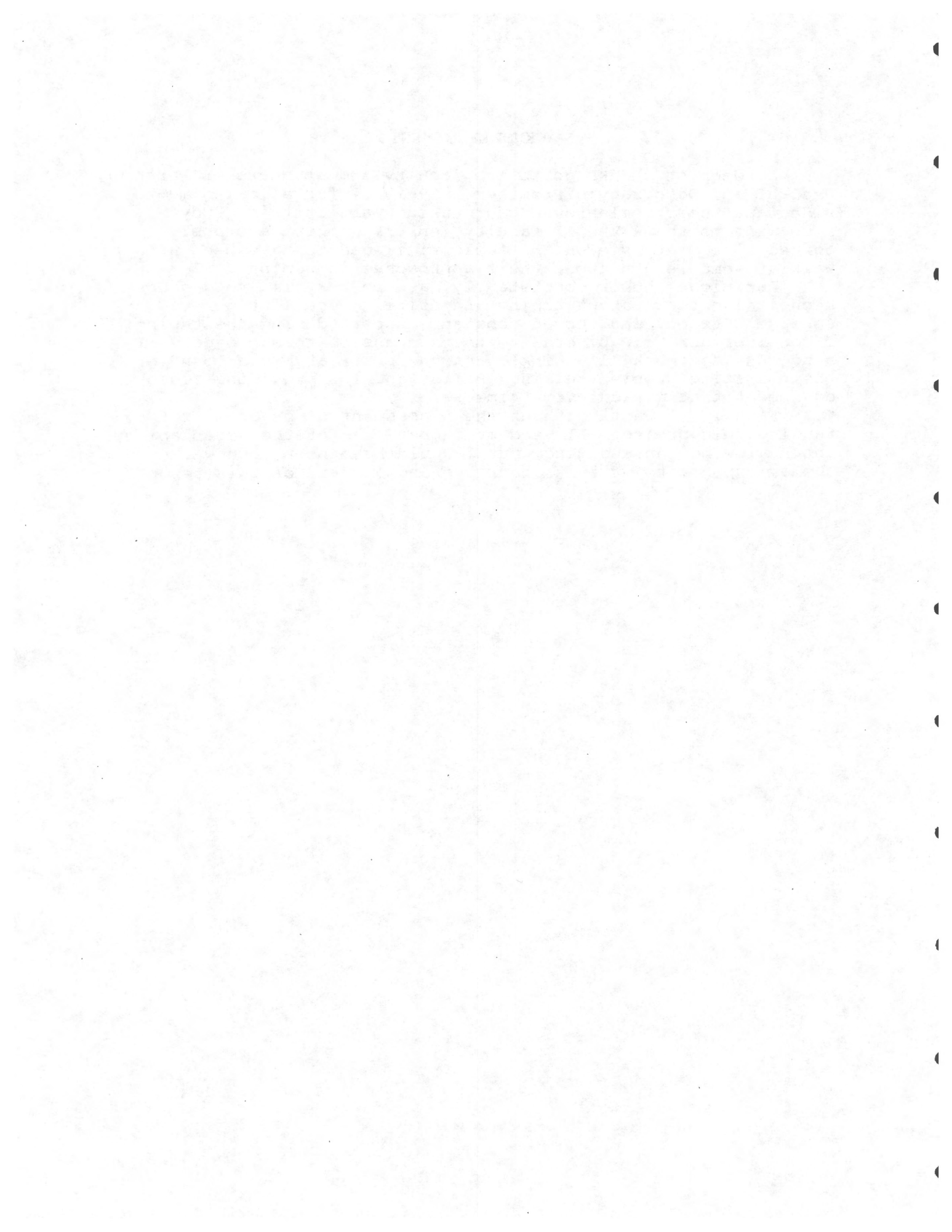


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Dominique Sepser consistently gave me her time to discuss technical matters about taping and editing; she lent her video equipment to me, and showed constant support during the taping. I consider her help pivotal to the success of this project. I also want to thank Ally Hinkle and the staff at Media Loan for their amazing problem-solving skills, and for providing video equipment that worked every time.

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ABSTRACT

There has been no systematic attempt to compare the "folk" notion of seminars which has developed over the years at The Evergreen State College with actual practice. This report compares the responses from interviews with faculty to comments made during playback sessions of videotaped seminars in order to define the seminar, describe a successful seminar, and identify which strategies seem effective or ineffective. Fifteen faculty members were interviewed, their responses audiotaped, and transcriptions made. Three seminars in a core program were videotaped twice each, and edited to 20 minutes. These edited versions were shown in individual playback sessions to faculty and students in those seminars, and their comments were recorded. The seminar is seen as central to the curriculum by most informants, yet unresolved questions, comments, and suggestions which address the issues of racism and gender differences call this centrality into question.

INTRODUCTION

"If you believe that there is any reason to study things collectively...then...the whole notion of the book seminar has got to be fundamental to that."

"The seminar is an arena for serious warfare."

"The seminar is the one place where people can come together and ask questions and really try to deal with the diversity of approach to issues and themes that affect us as human beings."

"I think what's fundamental here is the collaborative nature and the social interaction that goes on....I think that's essential and I think we do that with the seminar."

"Seminar is not a place for free expression. It really isn't. You disagree and if you're not ready to defend yourself...those people go after you. I feel like I've been just assaulted in seminar and it'll be for expressing a controversial opinion, you know."

"...[We need] to work harder to make the seminar a place where people bring different perspectives on knowledge to each other with the appropriate kinds of process tools for helping them individually change their models..."

Taken as statements about seminar process, these quotes suggest we are either hopelessly ignorant of each others' points of view or we have created some sort of mythology which has gripped our imaginations but not served us well. The conclusion I have reached in this comparison of folk notions with actual seminars is that most people see the seminar as central to our teaching at Evergreen. It serves an integrative function within a program and an evaluative one, in the sense that faculty can hear how well the ideas they are trying to get across are being understood. Most important, however, is the effect we believe seminars have on students: students discover that they can learn from each other and they are responsible for their own learning:

"I really think the seminar is critical in helping students gain an intellectual life."

"Seminar is essential [and] hearing your own voice is essential to claim it. You don't take yourself seriously until you hear yourself in public."

Several of my informants mentioned this importance of voice: "they need to learn to give voice to their ideas," and "they will need to speak with their own voices after college..." This view of the purpose of seminar discussion places primary emphasis on verbal interaction; yet primacy of verbal interaction may obscure other culturally valid ways of learning. As one informant put it, "some people are not in the business of talking to learn."

If we consider interaction in a broader sense, another informant says,

I do think that interaction is what's critical. I think we're socially interconstituted as humans and individualism is a pretense that's ideological and not fundamentally grounded organically in who we are. I think our learning model has to go with the realities of who we are as humans and seminar can be made to do that even though seminar is a pedagogical artifice like any other.

There is a tension, then, between our expectations of verbal analysis and some faculty members' desire to respect silence. This tension shows up in a reflection one faculty member made about evaluations, "it concerns me...how I evaluate seminar performance, given that seems to be a criteria, and how I do those evaluations without using language like, 'although John was quiet in seminar...'"

Just as important as this tension is the one between seminar content and seminar process. As one faculty member said,

I'm always struck by the duality of the seminar in terms of substance and process...it's real interesting for me in teaching with different people to see how different people put different weights on those two aspects. For some people it seems to me like it's almost unimportant what people talk about as long as they do it well and caringly with good group dynamics and other people don't care how they talk about something as long as they are substantively right there. I, of course, am an occupant of the wishy washy middle.

Amazingly, the process of seminar discussion -- the way in which ideas are discussed -- receives very little attention as a central part of the definition of the seminar. As we will see, the definitions offered include the type of activity, participants, and a focus. The ways in which we put our ideas across and converse with each other in seminar is discussed in various

ways in each interview, but as a well-defined focus, it was highlighted by only four of the 15 faculty members interviewed. Most faculty seem to see the seminar as producing a certain result: "I really think that seminar is one of the most important things that students learn here. How to seminar. How to get their thoughts across in a group." For the most part this result is seen as a natural outcome of seminar over the period of four years, not the result of active teaching.

Seminar can seem like a place for serious warfare or game-playing rather than serious scholarship if we do not include group process in our folk notion of the seminar and in our personal vision; in other words, the seminar is a discussion where analysis of a common experience or text takes place, but significantly, it provides students and faculty alike the opportunity to deal with diversity not only of viewpoints but also of ways of speaking.

DESCRIPTION OF STUDY

My goals for this project were first, to discover if there existed a "folk" version of a seminar and, if so, to compare that version with comments by participants in actual seminars as they watched one of their videotaped seminars; second, to describe effective and ineffective seminar strategies, and third, to identify the elements constituting successful seminars.

I examined catalogs across the years for descriptions of the seminar for indications of an evolution of its form or function.

In the earliest catalog in our archives, 1972-73, the catalog indicates that the seminar plays a primary role in the curriculum:

The heart of each Coordinated Studies program is a small-group discussion...A seminar is a small, dedicated group of very different human beings helping each other learn, helping each other understand a book, or helping each other grapple with the meaning and implications of a difficult idea... If you aren't willing to take responsibility for meeting the goals that you have set, or if you feel unable to respond sympathetically and helpfully to the needs of faculty and other students as teammates in learning, then you should seriously question whether Evergreen is the college for you. But if you really want to work with others, then we are here to help (p.24-5).

By 1986-87, the description of the seminar was reduced to a paragraph:

These are one of the activities of a full-time program where one faculty member and 20 students, on the average, discuss and dissect program books and assignments. Meeting as often as three times a week for the entire academic year, seminars encourage close-knit scholarship and intense debate, and are the heart of the educational process at Evergreen.

The change in the description is not due only to brevity. "Discuss, dissect, and debate" are the key verbs indicating the process, leaving out the co-learner status of the faculty, present in the earlier version. We also find that the seminar is the "heart" of full-time programs alone. In subsequent catalogues "heart" is abandoned for "centrality" and the explanation of the seminar is relegated to the catalog glossary. The description for 1990-91 follows:

Also known as Book Seminars, [seminars] are one of the central experiences of an Evergreen education. Seminars usually meet twice weekly to discuss the readings assigned in a particular program. The discussion group consists of a faculty member and an average of 20 students. The faculty member or, often, a student leads or facilitates the semi-

nar. Participants are expected to prepare for the seminar by reading and digesting the book to be discussed.

Over the years a number of helpful hints about seminars have been circulated. Fortunately, many of these were collected and organized by Burt Guttman in a paper called "Seminar Process" in 1988. He drew together papers and memos which had been circulated by Byron Youtz, Gil Salcedo, Craig Carlson, and Richard Alexander discussing seminar purpose, rules, structure, preparation, facilitation, and resuscitation. He discusses how one model developed by Richard Alexander has proved useful to some science faculty in group contract work. This document is in Appendix B.

I have often heard it said that the seminar is the most important innovation at Evergreen, since without it, the material within coordinated studies programs could not be integrated or synthesized, students would not accept the "co-learner" status of the faculty and students would not discover how to be active learners. Yet there have been no studies of the seminar to discover whether faculty and students regard it as fulfilling its mission or even if our catalog copy fits actual practice. More recently, criticisms have been raised that the seminar process supports and encourages discourse practices for the Euro-American majority, but for many people of color it is destructive and debilitating.

Any firm conclusions about these criticisms can only be drawn from a much larger and more comprehensive study. This report is a qualitative and in-depth report on a small number of

interviews I had with faculty and students. Clearly, not all issues relating to gender and ethnicity came to light in these interviews, but it is my hope that the comments by members of the college community cited in this report, taken collectively, will point to a broader understanding of seminar, one which will begin to address the concerns of our diverse faculty and students.

I began this study in spring quarter, 1990. I assumed that by interviewing faculty outside of the seminar setting I would discover the "folk notion" of the seminar; that is, I would be able to draw a picture of the seminar in its generic form which would fit most Evergreen faculty members' own image of the seminar. (I limited my study to the student seminar. For a full understanding of the role of the seminar at Evergreen, it would be useful to study faculty seminars as well.)

I limited the interviews to the faculty because of time constraints. (Originally I had hoped to interview two groups of students as well.) I interviewed 15 faculty, selected randomly, who have been at Evergreen from 2-20 years. The questions I posed can be found in Appendix A. These interviews lasted from 30-75 minutes although most lasted about an hour. I audiotaped and then transcribed these interviews because I wanted to use my colleagues' language. I wanted them to speak for themselves as much as possible in this report.

I decided to concentrate on seminars in core programs because seminars are fundamental to them, and faculty are expected to help students learn to seminar effectively. I found

one core program willing to make a commitment to being videotaped spring quarter, 1990, and of the four seminar groups, three agreed to take part in this study. I videotaped each seminar twice, edited those seminars to 20 minutes each, then invited participants in each seminar to individually watch the edited version of their seminar and to comment upon it. I arranged 31 playback sessions, most of which were audiotaped. (I took notes during the others.) Comments from these sessions are cited in the report.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology I used for seminar videotaping and playback interviews is an ethnographic approach which I used in a previous study (Fiksdal, 1990). I was interested in hearing how the participants themselves might evaluate particular strategies during playback of their seminars and what sorts of global evaluations they might give of their seminars. By asking open-ended questions such as, "Please comment whenever you wish," and, occasionally, "What were you thinking here?" I hoped to hear which moments were salient for my informants, and thus not be locked into my own analysis of strategies used. I did ask one standard question at the end, "Would you consider this a successful seminar?."

It is important to note that the methodology I used to gather information could very well have influenced the sorts of comments I recorded. I videotaped naturally occurring seminars, and because I was the sole researcher, I was not able to impose

many controls on the study; for example, I could not videotape each seminar on the same materials, nor could I keep attendance constant.

The camera was placed in a corner of the room with the seminar arranged in a "V" so that each person's face was visible. I sat next to the camera for the most part, watching the action in a small monitor. I appeared to be reading a magazine most of the time, but actually I had one hand on the camera, moving it if necessary to focus on the various speakers. Because the camera remained stable, and the tables and chairs had to be arranged differently than usual, there were some complaints. In one case, the microphone I had placed in the middle of the V-shape created by the tables actually obstructed one student's view of the faculty member. In another, the seminar group felt the seating was too artificial, and they spread out. Those not wishing to be seen by the camera, sat with their sides or backs towards it. During playback several informants mentioned the difference the camera made for them, but most were able to ignore it. One woman remarked that she noticed it like she would notice the rain outside.

Looking at a seminar discussion from the camera's viewpoint during playback sessions may have affected feedback; for instance, several students commented on how relatively slow and dry their seminar seemed when looking at it in the playback session as opposed to their feelings during the seminar: "looking at this kinda makes me think our seminar's pretty dull to

tell you the truth... when I was in there -- during the seminar -- I thought it was pretty good."

Clearly, watching the interaction on a television monitor from the camera's perspective is a different experience than the actual one. In addition, students are involved in the process of the seminar while it is going on -- considering each other's ideas, coming up with ideas themselves, fitting them into the conversation, even flirting with each other. When they sit down to watch the seminar, they are watching the product of that work, and are no longer involved in it.

When editing the seminars to 20 minutes, I had to make many choices about which segments I chose to use. Because I wanted feedback from each member of the seminar, I decided to create a version showing some contribution from each student. As often as possible, I chose segments when many students spoke in what might be considered "energetic" or "spirited" discussion, but if there were many pauses in the seminar discussion, I included several of those as well. In addition, in some seminars there were moments which I believed to be uncomfortable for the seminar members, so I included those. These editing decisions clearly influenced the comments in playback sessions.

It should not be assumed, however, that the editing process cut significant moments which were then not commented upon. For example, one student watched the playback version of his seminar, and then explained that the seminar discussion had angered him so much, he had packed his bag and was ready to leave the seminar at

one point. This packing and a subsequent brief, whispered discussion with another student (who convinced him that he should not leave) did not appear in the edited version, yet it was important to the student that I understood what had happened. (In this case the value of using playback interviews to discover salient moments for the participants is well illustrated.)

In another instance, a faculty member seemed surprised by the quality of the contributions of one of the quieter students, and said, "you tend not to listen as much to students you don't think are good." The process of looking at the seminar from other viewpoints (the researcher's and the camera's) may, then, give a broader base for interpreting what actually happened.

Several students expressed satisfaction with the edited version, noting that I had followed the major ideas in the seminar, so that even this playback version was coherent and fit their memory of what had been discussed. For example,

I kinda liked the way it was edited -- it seemed to represent the class pretty well and you got everyone in there so it seems pretty balanced. You can tell I didn't participate as much and that J- didn't participate as much or W- but there's a comment from each of us in there, too...

Certainly, as an experienced seminar facilitator myself, I no doubt unconsciously chose segments on the basis of their salience in the discussion as well.

Despite the objections that can be raised about the edited version of the videotapes, they seemed to stimulate thoughtful and precise observations about the videotaped seminar as well as others my informants had experienced. Furthermore, the open-

ended questions I asked before and after the viewing sessions allowed critiques of the editing process as well as the opportunity to discuss the seminar in relation to others.

I showed the edited version individually to each student and faculty member involved in the seminar who volunteered for this part of the study. At the beginning of the playback session I explained the goal of the study, the purpose of the playback session, and I asked that they comment at any point that seemed important or salient to them. I also explained I would stop the tape from time to time with questions. At the end of the session I asked if the seminar had been successful.

I tape recorded most of these sessions, and took notes during all of them. Those playback interviews which were recorded have been transcribed.

In the following sections I provide the data I gained from my informants in the faculty interviews, with notations from the playback sessions of actual seminars whenever appropriate.

THE FOLK NOTION OF SEMINARS

Informants. I interviewed 15 faculty who had been teaching at Evergreen for the following amounts of time:

2 for 19 years	1 for 8 years
3 for 18 years	1 for 5 years
1 for 12 years	1 for 3 years
3 for 9 years	3 for 2 years

Additional characteristics: 5 were women, 10 men, and 3 were people of color; 5 have taught primarily in the sciences or core, 3 in the humanities or arts, and 7 in the social sciences.

Defining the seminar

"My idea about seminars is that everybody does everything differently so that if you were actually a fly on the wall you would find 120 different versions of a seminar and if you took the extreme ends of the spectrum you wouldn't recognize they were the same thing."

"It's sort of paradoxical. Everyone here immediately knows what you're talking about but then they have a very personal view of how it should work."

"I would say that seminars at Evergreen are as different and varying as are the teachers themselves. In other words we have a pluralistic school and we have a pluralistic seminar system."

These quotes suggest that the task of defining the seminar is quite difficult; however, by sifting through the transcripts, there does appear to be a core understanding of what constitutes a seminar. For one thing, no one asked me to define what I meant by the term "seminar." There are other indications from the interviews of the informants quoted above. For example, the informant cited in the third quote above answered my question about evaluating students saying, "I have all the same criteria as everybody else." This person must expect then, that some of the same sorts of things must go on in different seminars; otherwise, the criteria would have to be different. Another told me he asked students to make "simulated seminar sounds" to begin one seminar, and the room immediately began to buzz with authentic sounding seminar talk! Thus, these students as well as their faculty facilitator shared some understanding of what goes on in seminars.

In playback interviews, further evidence surfaced to show seminars are well understood by participants. A student identi-

fied one of the seminars I taped as a "feminar." I immediately understood what he meant since two of the female students articulated feminist viewpoints in the discussion.

Still, we know seminars are often quite different from each other. Faculty were asked what they would say to explain the seminar to a colleague outside Evergreen. Which characteristics get mentioned most?

The seminar is a small group discussion of faculty and students organized around a book or a common experience. These elements of the seminar were mentioned by five of the 15 informants. Three suggested the ratio of students to faculty (20 to 1), and three mentioned the work students do -- "to read and think critically about what they've read and put all of that into words." Two mentioned it was not similar to a graduate seminar. The following characteristics were each mentioned once. I paraphrased these remarks so they would fit the format of a list. They are in no particular order.

- it lasts an extended period of time -- 1 1/2 to 3 hrs
- there is a variety of possible goals
- it is for synthesizing and summarizing data
- it is a collective environment where we build blocks to another level
- it has a critical function of helping students gain an intellectual life
- it has two conflicting agenda: content and process
- it promotes active learning
- it promotes active discussion
- students see the experience from many points of view
- it gives everybody a chance to participate in the learning process
- through seminar students will become more articulate and more knowledgeable about the subject
- faculty and students discuss material and its relationship to the general theme of the seminar
- students learn courtesy and responsibility

- every student is expected to participate and to learn how to communicate in ways that they never thought possible
- students talk about this thing to understand it better by actively trying to explain to each other what the book or article is about and what they think about it
- students are active
- students learn to communicate both individually and as a group
- it is a primarily opportunity for students to develop their own thinking and interact with one another and the faculty about that thinking

I believe we can identify the seminar as a speech event (Hymes, 1974); that is, a routinized form of behavior, delineated by well-defined boundaries and well-defined sets of expected behaviors within those boundaries. Sociolinguists and anthropological linguists use this term to identify lectures, interviews, sermons, gossip sessions; in short, activities where talk is involved in particular ways identifiable within a given culture.

By combining my observations of seminars with the definitions offered above, I have formulated the following description: The seminar is a discussion involving a group of students and a facilitator (often a faculty member) about a common experience (quite often a written text). It takes place at an identified time and place, and the facilitator (or some other designated leader) opens the discussion. The group usually sits in a circle or modified circle of some sort and it is preferred that everyone can see everyone else's face. The discussion is expected to remain "on track" to some extent and the track is traceable by the common experience the group has had. The facilitator has the

responsibility to keep the discussion on track, to shape the discussion to some extent, and to encourage discussion. The reason for this organization of talk is for students to learn from each other as well as their faculty, to sift through ideas, to learn to read, write, and think critically, to learn to respect/accept differences of opinion, to learn to work/create together. The faculty member is responsible for documenting this learning and evaluates student performance in the seminar.

Our definition of the seminar thus must include this definition, but it also includes the idea that there are a wide variety of structures permissible within this framework. Some of these follow in the next section and serve to further clarify the folk notion of the seminar.

Structure or organization of the seminar.

The structure is, of course, quite variable. In fact, its variability may be responsible for a feeling among some faculty that we just can't define it.

The two most often mentioned structures were (1) have students list ideas on the board and then try to discuss most of those topics; (2) simply begin to talk -- either the faculty member will bring in a topic or students will. Other organizational devices were to begin in the following ways (explained largely in the words my informants used):

1. Assign a question for students to write on or discuss in small groups (then report on in the larger group) for the first part of the seminar, then discuss other issues or simply break into small groups for half the seminar time, then come together for the second half.

2. Assign students to small seminar preparation groups which meet for 1 or 1 1/2 hours. The group brings ideas and issues to the seminar and writes them on the board.
3. The faculty member sets the agenda the first week with the understanding that this won't happen after the third week. For the second week, assign people certain tasks. Talk to some students privately and ask them to take leadership.
4. Have student leaders who meet with faculty member before the seminar and who are absolutely responsible for the design of the seminar. At its best that leads to a number of creative designs; for example, students write little playlets that we've performed and show videotapes. [Another informant asks students to volunteer to lead the seminar but they don't meet with their faculty before seminar.]
5. Split the group randomly into two and float or just stay with one of the groups.
6. Ask students to prepare a paragraph or bring in questions and begin the discussion with these.
7. Ask students who have experienced other seminars to establish the ground rules for seminar: what drives them crazy, what seems to help and how to organize it. The students together then choose the model they want.
8. Start out without much structure, but move to it if the faculty member is doing all the work (i.e. framing the questions).
9. Set a general theme for the seminar and fit the discussion into that.
10. The agenda is stated in the syllabus: the texts are to be discussed in combination with films, videos, or speakers for a particular week and these two components are always to address program themes.
11. Spend 3-5 weeks actively working on seminar process. For example, set the agenda intellectually and in terms of strategy. "Usually the day before a seminar I'll give some questions to think about to focus the reading. For strategy I might ask if people have questions of clarification or definition and then move toward a discussion of the text around a specific theme."
12. Hand out a list of a range of ideas about seminar strategies and gradually transfer power to the students -- move from me facilitating to students facilitating. From then on my role consists purely of participating.

13. "I've never done it the same way twice" but I work with students early in the quarter to empower them to run their own seminars with me as a participant and occasional expert informant.

14. "Baggage." All members of the seminar say one sentence or a phrase about what's on their mind as they come to seminar. The idea is that it can be about the book or a person's mood. "My experience is that it really does help if different people in the group understand who's talking."

15. Everyone mentions memorable things about the reading -- what sticks in their minds, good, bad, and indifferent.

16. Start out in sort of a round table where everyone comments once to share their perspective. We try to ask questions but not challenge. It's a way to momentarily try to examine each person's perspective.

17. I come in with a very brief presentation to open up some question or some issue that I think will be productive, then withdraw for a while.

To end the seminar:

1. "For the good of seminar" or "Weather report." We simply go around the room and everyone has a chance to make a comment basically about the process of the seminar or how well it achieved its goal. It's also a forum for dealing with interpersonal issues that may have come up.

2. Summarize the discussion and tie it together -- sometimes also talk about seminar process.

3. Finish the seminar with an evaluation -- a sentence or two -- which is a similar go-round to the "baggage." (Five minutes for the whole thing.) Each says what the seminar was like for him or her. Sometimes this is useful to discover what the students thought about the seminar; other times you hear how the seminar energized or clarified things for someone.

4. There will be a student recorder who will then come back and tell us what he or she observed.

5. Spend some time at the end of seminar writing in a journal to help students draw conclusions, write down questions, and summarize what they've heard.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE FOLK NOTION AND ACTUAL SEMINARS

By videotaping core seminars and recording the comments during playback, the picture of the seminar grows more complex. Students and faculty comment predominantly on the interaction itself rather than the ideas; for example, "I put in ideas," "here I disagreed," "I went through minor panic at that point." Several faculty commented on the interaction in the seminar in their interviews. One of the most explicit follows:

By late quarter I'm looking for sharp critical thinking about the text, reasonably well-articulated thoughts, ability to connect with another's statements rather than sort of 24 voices in search of a [theme], more of a sort of "statement--connection--question" rather than "statement--statement--statement" and a high degree of communicating with one another nonverbally -- watching each other... being sensitive to the dynamics of the conversation.

It appears that the conversation itself dominates most students' thoughts during the seminar: whether to question someone's idea, how to bring up a new idea, when to change the subject. For example, a student asks a question he has brought up before and there is some laughter from the seminar members. In the playback session he comments, "This was the third time I've brought up the subject... have I gone off the deep end? Maybe they're sick of it. Last time the conversation died before we got to the point."

The content of the seminar -- the ideas expressed by seminar members -- usually was discussed in response to the question, "Would you consider this a successful seminar?" Students in these playback interviews routinely said the seminar is most valuable because of its function as a window or a way to see

other perspectives on a book. They saw it as successful if they left the seminar with ideas new to them. One student says:

I rarely think it's a successful seminar. I mean I always learn a lot and I learned a lot in this seminar but there's always so much frustration -- not always -- usually a lot of frustration which I guess is good it makes you need to keep searching.

This student, then, sees the seminar as an ongoing process where ideas are expressed and explored, but not necessarily resolved.

During a playback session one of the faculty members noted the absence of coherence in his seminar, but he pointed out a function for it beyond the discussion itself:

I think that ability [to critique an author's viewpoint] actually comes only after they've been through the seminar. I'm not sure they would have the ability to do that before the seminar so in that sense the seminar is really good. If they were getting the ability to do those essays afterwards then the seminar must have done something.

If the seminar in this core program served to help students focus their ideas and sharpen their critical thinking abilities, then the actual interaction during the seminar has heightened importance. Unfocused ideas, hazy intuitions, and cloudy connections may seem to dominate some discussions, yet by expressing them many students seem to benefit later when they express their opinions in writing.

While most faculty members agree that a primary function of the seminar is to encourage skills in critical reading and critical thinking, they do not mention the conversational skills required for approaching the subject matter. It seems apparent to me that these skills should receive increased attention by all

faculty members so that students and faculty can function effectively in seminars. We are placing heavy demands on faculty and students by assuming that collaborative learning can take place simply by forming groups and meeting regularly over the course of a quarter.

In my videotaped observation of three core seminars, the basic notion of the seminar as a speech event was supported. Everyone arrived at the appointed hour with their books and expected to discuss that book. In two different seminars students and faculty alike felt constrained by my arrangement of the room and commented upon it. I had arranged the tables in a V-shape so that I could record facial expressions with a stable camera, but everyone was accustomed to a distribution around the tables in a rough circle so that everyone could see each other's face. By changing the seating pattern, some people complained they could not easily see others. Clearly, being able to check facial and other nonverbal gestures is important to the seminar discussion.

I found the structures chosen by the faculty to be similar to those mentioned in the interviews: one seminar group began with a statement by each seminar member mentioning a point or two which interested them in some way. Another began by having students write questions on the board and then worked through them. The third had different structures the two times I was there. The first time began with a brief discussion about seminar structure, in which it was decided to simply begin without a particu-

lar structure. The second time the students divided into small groups for the first hour to study different aspects of the assigned reading and then met the second hour for reports and discussion.

In the playback interviews I asked the students and faculty if they would judge the seminar we had watched as successful, and then what might constitute a successful seminar. Mentioned most often was coming prepared and having ideas to discuss, having a lively or energetic discussion ("fireworks" and "controversy" were also mentioned by two students and both included coming to a resolution of the controversy or explosion). Finally, the seminar should deal with the materials in the book (these were all book seminars) and not be too tangential. These elements of a successful seminar were mentioned by five students. Three mentioned that everyone should be able to talk ("it's a problem if only three or four talk the whole time"), and that the seminar should generate a number of questions. Linked to the notion of new questions about the material was the idea that there should be diversity of opinion and of students. One student, for example, felt his seminar group wanted a consensus about the material; he wanted several viewpoints expressed, perhaps through role play.

Mentioned by at least one or two students were the following elements: "you get more out of it if you talk and express your ideas than if you observe -- breaking into small groups is conducive to this"; "talkative people should be sensitive to those

who aren't"; "comments should be related to the ones that went before"; seminars should last two-three hours so there is sufficient time for the discussion; faculty should be supportive so there aren't uncomfortable silences; it is important to respect other people's opinion and not be patronizing; "the seminar should relate to program themes, although that is secondary"; and one student, who was quiet during his seminar, said, "I don't have to talk to get a lot out of seminar... I like to follow the conversation rather than take notes."

Students did not always agree about whether a seminar was successful: an attentive student who made many contributions to the discussion in one seminar noted, "that was one of the better seminars because just about everybody was involved." After watching that same seminar, another student who was quiet most of the time said, "the topic was difficult for this one and to have a really good seminar everyone needs to read the book and I know of at least a couple of other people who didn't quite get it done along with myself... I kinda sensed that people were struggling a bit too much -- not only myself..."

The faculty I videotaped seemed to have either a content approach or a process-oriented approach when faced with the question of success in the playback sessions. For example, after viewing a seminar, one discussed the ideas the students had expressed as demonstrating that they had successfully understood a particular concept; another said, "this was the first time I

didn't have to act like a dentist pulling teeth. Winter quarter we never bonded; the chemistry is crucial."

The folk notion of the seminar assumes that faculty and students alike will enter into a collaborative learning process where critical reasoning will occur. This assumption requires that we all agree on what a collaborative learning process might be, and, of course, what constitutes critical reasoning. To illustrate the difficulty of agreement, I will discuss one faculty member's reaction to a portion of seminar interaction which I had labeled "an ineffective strategy." She was not involved in the study, and was reacting to a short segment of videotaped seminar during a presentation of my findings.

In the video clip, a female student reacts to the comments of a male student by saying,

you're speaking from a white male- you- no matter how sympathetic you are to women you're still in a world that's in a white male hierarchy and you still no matter how sympathetic you are- are in a white male situation. You have the advantage sitting right in your chair right now.

After her labeling of the male student, a debate ensued between the two students. The faculty member's reaction was that this was a spirited argument and she found it to be an example of good seminar technique.

In the playback session with a male seminar member who was quiet during this debate, I learned that this argument characterized the seminar as a "feminar." He had had to convince another male friend not to leave the seminar in part because of this argument.

Now, it seems we could make a number of conjectures based on the reactions I have described. First, an argument can be seen as a useful debate by some observers; second, an argument involves emotions and thus fits the description "spirited" which many students and faculty find positive; third, new evidence has to be presented during the argument or one person wins easily. By culling up new evidence the students are learning to think on their feet, they are demonstrating their command of the topic, and they are learning to voice their ideas convincingly.

On the other hand, if an argument causes students to label the discussion as a feminar, it is probable that this pejorative classification will hinder their learning during that discussion. And leaving the seminar seems to me to be the ultimate gesture of failure -- both the student's and the group's failure in collaborative learning. Of course we cannot imagine that all debate should be stymied because one student may perceive it as an argument and may not, then, participate in the group process. But as facilitators we should at least ask ourselves, Am I truly sensitive to all the issues being raised here and to all the ways they are being raised? At this point, it seems to me, we would have to answer, NO! how could we be?

Instead of then brushing off the question as impossible, it seems to me we could work on ways to allow students to express their feelings about seminar process so that students and faculty alike understand some of the complex feelings students have.

In the first public discussion of this report, Kitty Parker

(Director of the Advising Center) told us that seminar-related problems are in the top five issues students bring to our counselors, along with suicide and divorce. If students find seminar discussions so traumatic, our folk notion of a collaborative learning experience simply does not fit the reality.

In my observations of the "feminar" I was disheartened by the division along gender lines in the discussion and frustrated by the lack of any discussion of process. By the third quarter in a core program, we might hope to see students using some means of expressing their frustration rather than having to resort to leaving. I think it is important to point out that in this case the student feeling abused was not a person of color or a woman, but a white male. Anyone can feel abused.

This orientation towards seminar process and its function is missing in the folk notion of the seminar.

PARTICIPATION IN SEMINAR

How does the facilitator encourage discussion?

Given the goals for seminar -- integration of program materials and themes, demonstrating an understanding of them, and learning how to articulate ideas in a group -- attention to process has to be central.

Several of my informants expressed dissatisfaction with their own seminar methods or they worry about them. How can we make seminars better? Only one informant said that we shouldn't tinker with the seminar because by trying to make one thing

better invariably some other aspects becomes worse. Why then try to make them better?

"I think it's terribly important for people to be able to talk about ideas and in most... education students don't have that opportunity. They're never encouraged to talk about their own thoughts and argue points of view with other students... I think all of this eventually makes Evergreen students by the time they graduate very able to stand on their own and to discuss significant matters."

"[The seminar] is empowering because the student is directly participating in a collective environment in which he or she builds blocks to another level. It is also destructive because it can descend very easily into power games, battles for turf, needs to perform, and it... could be one of the more insidious ways of ignoring multicultural experience as opposed to working towards a particular goal."

"My role in seminar and my personal battle for how much or how little input I give [is] an ongoing question for me."

"I have my own major rule of seminar that really works for me and that is never be solicitous to students and since I've stopped, my results have been better."

"People come to seminar differently and I think sometimes it's gender-based. We need to really think more about those people we call quiet, make sure that they have an opportunity to get an education here just like the noisy students do. So that's one of my concerns right now -- how to foster that environment for everyone."

As these comments indicate, seminar can be seen as a tool which teaches empowerment, but it may empower only some of the students. As faculty members, we must be continually aware of our own methods as affecting the verbal and nonverbal interaction in our discussions.

Some of the ways to encourage discussion overlap with the discussion about how the seminar is organized. For example, one informant said that the agenda on the board cooked up by students in a pre-seminar work session is sufficient. The most common

suggestion I heard was to break the students up into small groups.

All my informants mentioned they ask quiet students to come into their offices (or they casually talk with them after seminar) and discuss ways of getting into the discussion. In seminar, several informants mentioned they watch for nonverbal indications that a quiet student might want to talk, then they either call on them or make an opening in the discussion for them in some way.

Some other ways to encourage discussion are cited from the transcripts of my informants with some adjustments for clarity.

I have a drawer full of ideas. One is the 3 penny game. Everybody in the seminar including me has 3 pennies and can only speak 3 times but everybody must speak 3 times at least until everybody's 3 pennies are gone. [Other ideas:] I'll go around the room and I'll get to hear everyone's voices. I'll run various sorts of exercises and I'll also do a lot of process work. Just asking the students to evaluate how it's going so far will help us come up with suggestions that I haven't found. Another game is to bring in a ball of wool/string and you can only speak if you're holding the ball. Eventually by throwing it around the room you see a network of wool/string that tells you who's been speaking a lot and who's not been speaking so much. You can then sit and talk about what this implies about the dynamics and change them.

I wave my hand at the board and say "well how about talking about this for a while?"

I encourage forming study groups outside of seminar.

I just call on people. I tell students to come prepared with their questions in writing and I say "tonight John Jones will start our seminar" so if they won't talk I'll force them to.

I give an exercise for people to work on in small groups. Sometimes I'll divide them randomly and sometimes I'll select.

I assign roles for students to play in a debate where one half of the room plays the role of one group of people in an institution we're studying (such as education in a newly independent country) and the other half plays an opposing role. Half way through I ask them to change roles and continue. I liked this invention because the students could state unpopular views that they didn't have to own.

I don't know my menu of methods as a list. Some of the things I'll do is have my students role play. A lot of times I'll have students lead the seminar and I'll pick quiet ones. That often brings them out because they have a specific role. A lot of times I'll ask the quieter ones for their opinion and keep referring back to it in the discussion which gives them ownership over a piece of the discussion. I'll prod the group with humor and make up whatever I can.

Lately I've decided to divide my seminar by gender and we have had some really good discussions. I've also divided the seminar by who is really quiet -- take the quiet people away and let them have their own seminar to try to build up their skill. I've tried dividing the group based on different combinations of students to change a dynamic when it doesn't seem to be working. If the problem is too much reading I try to cut back the reading or focus it somehow so they know what to read carefully.

I don't find any techniques necessary for upper division work. For core students in their first quarter there are two things I believe in: one is that I always wait them out if there are silences and that stops being a problem very quickly. The other thing is... I generally don't take any comment as being disallowable. I just take anything I can get. By spring we have terrific discussions.

I probably have a whole bunch of methods but I'm not even sure what they are. Anything from not saying anything and staring at everybody to putting people on the spot to just kicking off [the discussion] and asking questions. I also break the students into small groups and have them go for a walk for about an hour and a half then report back.

In the fall I spend a lot of time with the students doing things that involve their bodies as well as simply talking about books so we do experimental kinds of things like 'pigs that fly' and the simulation called 'The Voyager' with them. I also spend a lot of time coaching the students during the first two weeks. I talk to them about their learning styles and try to get them conscious about how they can use their learning styles in the seminar situation. To help quieter students a minor device is to go around having the students

read a paragraph each from a critical part of the book (or poetry works very well) then discussing each paragraph. I'm not compulsive about requiring students to talk in class. Increasingly we've got students who just culturally are not in the business of talking as a way of learning. Last spring I had 5 out of 15 of those students.

I have lots of little gimmicks some of them cooked up intuitively. One recent one happened this spring. We decided to meet in a room in the CAB and like most rooms that are not seminar rooms it was a lot noisier so I told people we were going to have to test the sound levels of the space and that they should simulate seminar sounds so we went around and we all produced simulated seminar comments. It was actually very terrific. I sometimes ask people to write for five minutes. I sometimes pick some tiny passage and we write it out on the board and really go over it. If the material we've read is quite abstract I often propose some introspectional kind of business -- go back into your personal experience and find a time when... and then I produce some phrase that's designed to locate an experience of theirs that's somehow related to the material.

I ask students to keep anecdotes about a question or response from their reading that is heightened -- they either 'love' or 'hate' something or it reminds them of another reading experience they've had. I tell them there are times when the discussion seems to break down but silence is important. When things get really silent I encourage them to go to their anecdotes and select one and that tangent might bring us back to a point. I will also bring myself in and provide background or tell a few stories.

A few faculty report on a strategy they don't like but which they use -- three- to four-minute mini-lectures. "That process would frequently draw them into discussions that they couldn't have engaged in otherwise -- it gives them a different perspective that somehow they missed when they were reading the book."

In the seminars I taped, two of the faculty often gave mini-lectures in which they gave further background for the students. One of the two said these lectures were not always effective:

I don't mind giving a few of those... as soon as I do start talking you know they very dutifully get quiet and more or

less attentive and maybe what I'm saying is terribly important but it keeps them from trying to raise the issues that they saw and so I don't like to do it much.

During one of these mini-lectures given by this faculty member, I noticed two students actually giggling so I asked the male student about it. He said, "I've been rather attracted to C- and in that seminar we kept making eye contact and she smiled and that turned to giggles... but it was something totally unrelated to the subject." I was surprised by his response since it was his question that his faculty member was answering. I asked if his question was answered, and he responded, "probably... I think shorter answers would be easier to follow to understand. Short attention span there (laughs)." Other students mentioned the need to stay quite attentive when the faculty member gives a mini-lecture or else they lose the train of thought that is being developed.

Another strategy which received comment in the playback session was being asked directly by the seminar leader to elaborate. A student had posed a distinction as a possible discussion question, but he had clearly not expected to begin answering his own question. In the playback interview, however, he said that it didn't bother him too much even though he found he was not prepared to answer effectively.

Effective strategies used by students in the videotaped seminars

This section and the following section discussing ineffective strategies deserve further study. It is not in the scope of the present report to comment at length here, but one strategy

which seemed to work well for a student was to name a concept.

The discussion centered on which solutions students were exploring in their research groups on particular third world countries. One student began outlining his ideas for leaving the most environmentally devastated part of India alone, and trying to help other sectors of the economy in other regions. He presented his ideas in a joking manner, and students responded by probing with jokes. The reporting student continued to hold the floor for about 3 minutes. Then, he pointed to a book they had all been reading and said he was trying to incorporate the concept outlined in the book called triage. The comments and questions by the students immediately began to refer to their own work, and a discussion resulted.

Citing a concept from a previous reading in this case moved the focus of discussion from a seemingly weak solution of a problem to a viable one.

Ineffective strategies

As we have seen, it appears that the mini-lecture can be considered by some students to be ineffective. A faculty member discussed the use of the mini-lecture at the beginning of his seminars:

... giving a mini-lecture at the beginning of [the seminar] is... very nonproductive because then everyone -- I think that students then think, 'well this is what we're supposed to talk about or this is the point of view that's accepted' so I try to start the group in a low-key way.

According to one of my informants, there are other ineffective strategies faculty members use:

-- the perversion of the Evergreen approach to seminar is when a teacher comes in and says, 'this is your seminar you run it the way you want I'm just a participant.' That leaves them hanging. That's a very ineffective technique in my judgement. Students learned a set of techniques from high school and... I think we have the job of replacing those old techniques with something of value which means an active teaching and learning process has to go on. We have to help them learn new ways of working together.

-- overly criticizing the seminar -- and overly criticizing means almost any criticism.

Some strategies reveal racist or sexist attitudes and are damaging to the student:

Do you notice that this person gets interrupted all the time? Or do you think as a faculty person it's more important that the flow continue as opposed to the fact that this person got sort of uh assaulted or affronted... as he or she is trying to talk? Or do you use this person as 'tell me, Jean, you're Asian, what do you think is the issue here'... So do you lean on students do you sort of assault them that way by taking away their ordinary student status by making them gurus within the classroom to make up for the research that other people are supposed to be doing?

A student in the playback interview spoke from a different perspective about raising the issue of sexism in the seminar:

We're very much against this whole thing -- we call it 'feminar' -- we don't call it seminar. The feminar is just getting out of hand in this program. Male-bashing has just gotten completely out of line... I was warned before I ever came to Evergreen [that] everyone's open-minded as long as you think the way they do... It's not like I want to censor free speech but you know this stereotyping -- there's no place for it... I can't say you only feel that way because you're a woman... It's like I inherited the sins of my grandfathers...

A student pointed out another ineffective strategy in the playback interviews, this time dealing with another male student. He was making a point, and to support it, said that if he only had the previous week's book, he could cite supporting evidence. Within moments a book was being handed down the table, having

come from another male student. The student receiving the book said,

I wanted to kill that guy at the other end of the table... I want to know what the motive of him giving me that book was -- was he trying to be helpful? Was he trying to make me look stupid? What's going on here because I had minor panic going through my mind. If I did not find what I was looking for [the passage] I was going to look like a real idiot.

Another student pointed out that "sitting back" often meant opting out of the discussion, so nonverbal behavior can act as a signal to other members of the seminar whether it is intended or not.

Seminar facilitators need to decide how to deal with racism and sexism. One faculty member said,

you know it has to be dealt with with diplomacy and with tact... because if you come down on them 'you're a racist -- you're a sexist' it can be devastating... The rule of thumb I've adopted with some of my colleagues is you stop everything and you look at it and you say, 'what can we say about that statement -- why is it offensive' and sometimes that's the end of the content but it seems important. You want people to be debriefed somehow.

Faculty members discussed other ineffective strategies used by students. These are cited below in no particular order:

-- I've noticed that sometimes students talk when they haven't read the material and generally they're not very effective.

-- I tell students statements of faith or statements of feeling, like 'I feel that blue is better than green' or 'I believe there is a god' I tell them that... those kinds of statements are categorically not to be argued with and that therefore they stop conversation or they should because you can't argue with them. I also say that the corollary is true that you should not leap at such bait and argue about such statements so whenever something like that happens I just say, 'look you know we're just talking into the wind. You can't argue with statements of faith or statements of feeling.'

-- I had an encounter with a student last quarter who thought that a particular book was really biased and he really resented having to read it... I told him, 'you really have to ask yourself "Does my criticism or critique encourage others to voice their opinions from that prevailing at the time or does my critique silence dissidence?"' so he had to admit that the way he articulated that point essentially silenced the others.

-- Some students think that it's one of the bill of rights to be able to swear in seminar... I try to say, 'If you can't say it on the floor of Congress, you shouldn't say it in the classroom. You have to learn to speak appropriately in public.'

-- Reading two-three pages to the group [from a personal journal] was generally very poorly received as are students who want to really take up a lot of time with things.

-- Having someone come into a seminar late can just about ruin a seminar for the rest of the period.

-- It doesn't work in my experience to let the students decide how to do the seminar especially when that results in extended discussion of how to do a seminar.

Five faculty members spoke to the issue of ineffective strategies by saying something to the effect of this statement: "I don't think there's a recipe. I think it's very situational. What could be a fabulous success one quarter could be a complete flop the next." There were several factors offered to explain how and why seminars fail overall:

- to fail means to run the seminar for ten weeks
- we fail when we don't create a cooperative environment
- it's the materials
- it's the weather

Through continued observation of seminars and individual playback sessions, a more complete description of effective and ineffective strategies could be made. The goal is not to institute rules or to suggest that there is only one way to conduct a seminar; instead, the goal is to cull from our collective expe-

rience and actual practice a description of strategies. In my view, seeing these strategies in context is probably the most useful means for understanding seminar conversation.

FACULTY ROLES

Leading the seminar

Most of my informants lead the seminar at some point. Several see their role as a co-learner or participant so they work with students early in the quarter or year to enable them to lead. Still, faculty members believe they should help keep the discussion on track. Five of my informants used the metaphor of "cop" or "traffic cop" to describe this role. One mentioned this was not a preferred role to have to play. Some lead in unobtrusive or "machiavellian, manipulative, tacit" ways.

In the seminars I videotaped, the faculty clearly led the discussion by asking questions, deciding when it was time to move to another area of discussion, and both opening and closing the discussion.

Selecting the materials

Most informants mentioned that the materials were probably the most important variable in seminar success. Materials which can be easily discussed should be controversial, generate a difference of opinion, or be "classic." The informant who used this term specifically defined "classic" as not belonging to the canon, but as a text that has enduring qualities; that is, a text which holds interest page by page. This same informant has given up the notion of rigorously defining a logical sequence of texts

which correspond to the theme of the program; instead he finds it is better to choose excellent materials and then work at finding connections.

Group process

Although only two faculty members mentioned this term specifically, it is clear that several of the faculty members I interviewed believe they have a responsibility to "help the group flourish," "help everyone feel comfortable with the situation." One informant sees the seminar as a moving dynamic like a kaleidoscope so it's important to be attuned to the people one is working with. Another discusses the importance of allowing people to describe themselves rather than being labeled by someone else: "Students shouldn't impose labels on their fellow discussants for sure and people who are not there also but the main people that need to be protected are those of us who are there in the room."

Shaping the discussion

One informant does not shape or direct except to occasionally group topics written on the blackboard or suggest an order that leaves undesirable topics at the bottom. Another does not direct if it's a seminar that prides itself on its ability to discuss with thoroughness -- it is important to allow a sort of jazz spontaneity.

I think that seminars can be very creative and if I think they're creating a kind of intellectual form right there in front of us then I don't want to interfere because I don't know where we're going and what's going to come out of this. In that kind of seminar we're all learning and we're all being tested so to speak.

What do we do when we try to shape the discussion? It has to do with getting back on track, helping students clarify, keeping the discussion internally coherent, paying attention to seminar process (taking turns, being respectful, listening to each other, questioning, elaborating, building on previous comments).

One informant says, "It's somehow taking a part of what's said and raising a new question that pushes the discussion in one direction or another, but unobtrusively." On the other side of the coin, one informant brings in five points or subjects to the seminar and asks questions related to them. For example, "ok well so far you've talked about 3 or 4 small points the author made but now what's the larger point and who do you think the audience is?" Another says,

I'm not very subtle when it comes to directing the discussion and if there's something I think we ought to talk about and we're not talking about it I just come out and say, 'I think we ought to talk about X and we're avoiding it.'

One informant gives out a list of central questions to fit most seminar materials -- what is the author's thesis, how does the author develop the thesis or argument, what are the implications of this argument; for example, if the author was right, do you agree, what does it mean if you don't agree. Then this faculty member can direct the discussion around these questions by asking questions, "What's the point of your discussion, how does it relate?" or she gets others to do it. If there's a comment hanging out there she tries to help the student clarify by saying, for example, "oh do you mean this...?"

This clarifying role is the one most often mentioned by my informants. One calls it a ratcheting process when he says things like, "I don't understand how that's relevant to what we're saying here about metaphors; perhaps you can help me." At times this same informant might say "by the way, this was a technique any of us could use when the subject is wandering without hurting anybody's feelings."

If students are getting off the track, one informant says, "that comment was an interesting aside and we might be able to get back to that at some point but let's try to get back on the original track because we had a lot of good discussion going along these lines." One informant uses a gong. He passes it down to a student and says "ok when you see the conversation getting too far out of hand you can call for one or two minutes of silence." This functions to help students mentally put some things aside in order to concentrate.

Another technique one informant has to help students learn to keep on track is to take very detailed notes on what everybody says so as to get a sense of the statements, questions, and connections they make then share that information at the end of seminar -- read back to them the dynamics of their own conversation -- and ask them to talk about it.

Several informants commented on the need not to be too directive or the students will "just let me be the center and it'll be like a wheel and all the comments will come to me."

THE PLACE OF THE SEMINAR IN THE CURRICULUM

The last prepared question of my interview asked whether the seminar was fundamental to our teaching at Evergreen. Nine of the 15 faculty I interviewed said categorically yes. The seminar is "the most important thing we do."

"I see it as the center of the program... it creates a learning community... where students can develop a relationship with others in the class. They feel supported in their attempts to understand the material and the questions that we're posing."

"We talk a lot here at Evergreen about being interdisciplinary and to me that doesn't mean having an economist talk about geology. It means having students take real expertise from a variety of faculty and blend it themselves inside their own heads and inside their own learning context and so I think the seminar is the most interdisciplinary aspect of the curriculum here."

"I see seminars as the core of programs -- sort of the heart and soul because I think that's where you... learn by doing... that's where students can see themselves being successful in developing some understanding around a book or a program theme or both."

What are the disagreements?

"This is not the age of the book. We're... dealing with a McLuhanesque kind of quality that's occurred and I don't propose that means we should cater to that shift in books but I think we need to think in terms of more mixed-media ways of presenting information in the future... and work harder to make seminar a place where people bring different perspectives on knowledge to each other."

"I think what's fundamental here is the collaborative nature and the social interaction that goes on and I would perhaps prefer to call it group dynamics or the use of groups or the use of social interaction... It's painful to work with other people but it's essential."

Two faculty members who teach primarily in the sciences pointed out that it may not be fundamental but it is indispensable in Matter and Motion, for example, because "science is not truth; it's just as much a matter of opinion as any other sub-

ject." In Molecule to Organism, unless you can figure out "a good hook", it's not easy to have a seminar.

One informant said sometimes the seminar is fundamental and sometimes it isn't. For example, one year when they traveled a lot in vans together, one group contract did not have a seminar since there was so much informal discussion on a daily basis.

Finally, one faculty member states, "when it's good, it's probably the most important aspect of education here at Evergreen, but I think a lot of game-playing takes place, fighting for turf, and pressing somebody on the opposite side of the room."

CONCLUSION

One clear conclusion I have reached about seminars is that "book" seminars are but one possibility in a wide field: seminars may appear to be workshops, times for writing, or, as two faculty like to say, "spaces in which faculty and students learn something." Another says, "seminar is a form not a content." When we move away from a rigid definition of the seminar as centered on a written text, lasting two hours, sitting around tables in a classroom involving courteous, but energetic intellectual debate, some of us may feel more comfortable with the notion. As we have seen from this report, many faculty experiment a great deal.

This report should provide a beginning point of discussion. I would like see this investigation continued to include a larger

number of faculty and students both to help us understand each other's perspectives about seminars and "seminaring" and to discover ways of becoming more culturally aware of differences in learning styles and, importantly, of conversational styles. How can we educate ourselves and our students about hurtful practices and words? What can we do about seminar materials which exclude all but the dominant culture? When will our rhetoric about cultural diversity and multiple perspectives become a reality? For my informants, these are major questions without many answers except individual ones -- "here's what I try to do."

This report will make these ideas public and should encourage other initiatives which inform us about ourselves. Clearly, we need to find better ways to learn from each other. One way promoted by one of my informants would create an ombudsperson who can help faculty and students deal with difficulties they experience in seminars as well as in other areas.

I believe we can draw more fully on our own resources. Many faculty members have expertise in conducting studies which could clarify problems and identify possible solutions. Already, with assessment funds available, several studies have addressed the seminar in some way. For example, Robert Cole, Russ Fox, and Pat Labine have been working on a project (in progress at the time of this report) which examines the ability of students to utilize group-process skills in seminar discussions as one of its four aims. In contrast to the present report which examines students in a core program, these researchers are studying students at a

junior or senior level. In a memo explaining their preliminary results they write,

Our students' group-process skills are weaker than they imagine... For the most part they had little understanding of process or task roles, goal-setting concepts, or decision-making strategies. Leadership was generally viewed as something coercive (and thus to be eschewed), group controversy was associated with group failure, and conflict and uses of power were to be directly avoided (as if that would make them disappear).

Peter Tommerup, the ethnographer studying the setting and teaching at Evergreen, describes seminars as developing their own unique character because the faculty leader and students develop their own interactional style. Finally, Paul Mott and Steve Hunter, in a telephone survey of employers, graduate faculty, and former students of Evergreen assessed ability in speaking, cooperation, listening and understanding, appreciating differences, and integrating information (among other abilities). They found that employers and faculty were "about three times as likely to favor the Evergreen graduates as they were the comparable graduates from other institutions." In a follow-up study, these researchers propose determining the relative contributions of different Evergreen teaching practices, which would focus in part on the seminar. We also have a number of faculty skilled in teaching and using group dynamics.

As I sat in one seminar and watched battle lines being drawn, I found it easy to understand each side's perspectives, but appalling how naturally they divided into women's and men's perspectives. Two of the men in this seminar called it a "feminar", a speech event they have identified after a year of

seminar-based education here: "The feminar is just getting out of hand in this program..." One of the women in that seminar said,

I was thinking they just couldn't understand. The males all responded in the same way pretty much. They... all pretty much agreed that women -- that we were blowing it out of proportion... Usually [the discussion] is varied between male and female but this one was pretty much male versus female.

It seems to me we haven't come very far in educating each other and students in understanding and respecting differences whether they be differences of opinion or differences of conversational style. Consider the fact that at Evergreen we have been leading seminars for nearly 20 years, yet we have little shared knowledge or expertise about these differences.

Conducting a report of this nature allowed me to talk with my colleagues about teaching, and to interact with some people I didn't know previously. I realized that I sorely miss talking to colleagues about teaching. Of course we all learn about each other's teaching styles when we teach together, but we can have unpleasant surprises -- we often do not know in advance our colleagues' philosophy of teaching or methodology. In addition, we do not have a mechanism to actually observe the one methodology that we have placed so centrally in most of our programs -- the ways in which to conduct seminars.

A poignant quote from one of our colleagues underscores the importance of beginning to learn more from each other:

There's a mythology of the seminar at Evergreen. I think people who were brought up in the humanities, perhaps the social sciences as well, in their upper division schooling as undergraduates, had small seminar classes where things were in effect debated... But for people in the sciences and

perhaps for people in the arts as well, their undergraduate education may not have had so much of that and they, or at least I, felt somewhat at a loss in terms of how to conduct a seminar. I don't think there's much help in how to teach a seminar in fact. There is no book of tips people do that are wildly successful that people could read. My guess is you couldn't teach a course on how to do seminars because everybody does them a little differently, but there's no practical sharing of experience on workable tricks to use in the seminar... so that leaves inexperienced people to flounder around for say up to 17 years until they figure out something that might work by accident. I think we could do better than that in terms of sharing our knowledge. I think the idea of exposing differences that dymythify the seminar might also be useful. My idea is that the reality of what actually goes on in the seminar is far different than what goes on in the mythological version. I think the mythological version -- the ideal seminar where students act like polished scholars and discuss profound issues with great wisdom articulately and succinctly et cetera -- may never have existed.

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APPENDIX A: QUESTIONS FOR FACULTY

Introduction: I am conducting a study of seminars at Evergreen, so I have several questions about your own seminar experience. I would like to tape record our discussion if that is all right. I have a consent form for you to read and sign before we begin.

1. How long have you been teaching at Evergreen?
2. If you were to describe an Evergreen seminar to a colleague, what would you say?
3. How long are your seminars? What length of time would be optimum? How often do you meet each week? What is the size of your seminar? What is the optimum size?
4. How are the seminars organized? Do you or the students set an agenda? Who leads the seminar? Is the focus always a written text? Should seminars stay "on track"?
5. What elements have to be present in a seminar discussion for you to judge it successful?
6. How often do you have a successful seminar from your point of view: seldom, often, regularly (any other adjective?)
7. Do you have methods for encouraging discussion? (What are they?) Are they effective? Do you try to draw out the quieter members of the group?
8. Are these methods different from those you use to shape or direct the discussion?
9. Do you present your own opinions or arguments during seminar? What are some of the ways you might do so? (For example, do you support or take issue with students' comments?)
10. Have you noticed strategies or techniques you or your students have used that seem ineffective?
11. Can you describe your role in the seminar? Does it change from week-to-week or program-to-program? Have you seen a development to that role?
12. How do you evaluate your seminar performance and that of your students? What criteria do you use?
13. What is the purpose of the seminar for the faculty and students in your program? Does this purpose change from program to program?
14. Do you see the seminar as a fundamental element of your contracts or programs? Why?

APPENDIX B: THE SEMINAR PROCESS
by Burt Guttman

The Evergreen seminar is a central activity in our educational system, but it is also the source of much pain and confusion for both students and faculty members. Over the years, many Evergreen faculty members have written about seminars; this is a collection and summary of some of these statements. It contains multiple perspectives and, therefore, possibly some contradictory viewpoints. Each seminar leader must find his or her own style, based on personality and educational perspective; the only hope is that this compilation of thoughts may be useful.

I. THE PURPOSE OF THE SEMINAR

Byron Youtz summarized his rules for the seminar in these seven points:

1. Student seminars are not intended as a mechanism for transmitting information.
2. They are intended as a means for a large group of students to obtain a set of common experiences, common heritage if you will, which allows it to function as an intellectual community.
3. Seminars give students an opportunity to float their own ideas, test their analytical abilities against important books and against the ideas of their peers, develop the ability to discuss and to think on their feet.
4. Seminars are a mixture of intellectual and experiential, an opportunity to relate universal experience to personal experience (Merv Cadwallader's moral curriculum).
5. Seminar groups should become "home base" for students -- a natural grouping for friendships and counselling as well as for academic work, and a unit that finds ways to play together as well as to do serious work together.
6. One of the tests for the success of a seminar is the extent to which each member of the seminar (including the faculty leader) has matured during the year; the extent to which each person has become more able to talk and to expose his/her ideas to the public glare and in turn take criticism of those ideas; the extent to which the discussions have become *group* activities; and the extent to which people have become able to listen to each other and to value occasional silence.
7. The seminar should provide a forum for the improvement of reading and writing and talking skills.

All of the above are difficult to achieve, difficult to perfect, but are exceedingly important as a part of the education of any and every student.

Gil Salcedo defined three purposes for the seminar:

- a) to develop skills of verbal expression in the forceful and persuasive articulation of ideas;
- b) to develop skills in the logical analysis of ideas by listening carefully to oneself and to others;
- c) to pool or exchange information through cooperative discussion toward improved factual understanding of a topic.

Richard Alexander set out the following general principles for the functions of a seminar:

- 1) Provide a forum in which each individual student is encouraged (perhaps even *forced*) to take personal responsibility for a major contribution, thus leading the student to master the skills necessary for (a) independent research, (b) coherent organization of thoughts and findings, (c) useful presentation of the material, (d) personalizing this work, so that it becomes an expression of that student's individual learning, goals and experience, and thus (e) further the goal of the student taking charge of her own education forthrightly and up to objective standards.
- 2) Provide a situation in which the students as a group can eventually take charge of their own education as a group, thus furthering skill in group organization, group research, group presentation. I want the students cooperating with each other in work that meets the group's needs, and within that the individual needs of each member.
- 3) Conversely, to break the students' dependence on the faculty, and to short-circuit all those little games and tricks mastered from so long by students whereby they get the faculty to do all the work and all the thinking for them, and avoid putting themselves on the line.
- 4) Incorporate into the seminar tasks which necessarily require writing, reading, research (of all sorts), verbal communication, both oral and written, and cooperation -- for it appears to me that these are absolutely necessary skills for living productively in our society. I am every day more and more convinced that clarity, precision, logical consistency, breadth of factual information, and skill in ferreting out information and ideas from resources are major, fundamental and utterly pragmatic. To the degree that we do not teach these things to our students and to the degree

that they fail of individual mastery, to that degree our academic programs fail.

II. GENERAL RULES FOR THE SEMINAR

Everyone agrees on a few general rules for a successful seminar. They were summarized by Gil Salcedo's 1979 *An Etiquette for Seminar*, from which most of the following is taken.

For a seminar to succeed, its members must take seriously the purpose of the seminar in general and the importance of the topic at hand. For this reason, and because a good seminar requires positive collaboration and mutual goodwill, seminar can be thought of as a public and collective enterprise. This is why etiquette is important to the theory and practice of seminar. Now, ordinarily etiquette is thought of as principles of good taste in public conduct and what is typically regarded as "good manners." But, in a more fundamental sense, etiquette is about the social necessity for a method to demonstrate esteem for, and respect toward, the other individuals who are part of a collective enterprise.

When this fundamental definition of etiquette is kept in mind, it becomes clear that "good manners" or "proper etiquette" are not ends in themselves but means to an end. Methodological discipline means, quite simply, rules. One follows a set of guidelines, or a step-by-step process, to achieve a particular purpose. Proper conduct, too, is a means to an end.

Etiquette consists of rules. What are the rules for a good seminar? In other words, how does one demonstrate esteem toward others in order to achieve the collective purpose of the seminar?

- a) Be willing and prepared to discuss ideas and raise questions by *completing the required reading and writing beforehand*.
- b) Come to the seminar on time or, better yet, a few minutes ahead of time, so you can settle in, get out your books and papers, and be ready to begin, so no one's time is wasted.
- c) Listen attentively to what is said by others and take notes on the general discussion.
- d) Speak in turn and don't interrupt another person.
- e) Try to address an idea or argument by addressing a particular individual in the seminar.
- f) Respond actively to what another has said *before* you contribute your own thoughts.

g) Actively concentrate your attention upon the topic at hand and don't let your mind wander.

h) Do not smoke, chew gum, or engage in private conversation. These are private, self-indulgent activities that subvert the purpose of the seminar; they are counterproductive and completely out of place.

i) If you didn't read the book, don't talk.

Seminar is a public enterprise that depends upon individual self-discipline, intellectual honesty and courage, and individual self-restraint upon capricious whims and moods. Private self-indulgence is therefore subversive and toleration of it invites a bad seminar.

In practice, this means that when someone is speaking, everyone should be listening; no one else should be talking, or whispering, or trying to catch someone's eye, or in any way attempting to distract the seminar or divert its purpose. Behavior contrary to this principle reflects lack of esteem for seminar colleagues.

There is disagreement over the question of people eating or drinking during the seminar. Salcedo, for instance, includes these among his private, self-indulgent activities. Craig Carlson, in contrast, feels that food adds a spiritual dimension to the seminar, since it is symbolic of sharing. Seminars commonly operate with people drinking coffee or tea, and they are often combined with a potluck lunch or dinner, at least for some special times. This is a matter for individual discretion.

III. PRACTICAL GUIDELINES FOR OPERATING THE SEMINAR

A. The physical and social settings are important. Set up the room so it is as comfortable and equitable as possible.

1. Circles are most powerful, because they give everyone equal position.

2. Don't put the seminar leader in any special position even though he/she will generally have a special role (but more about that later). (Craig Carlson says that the faculty leader should not be able to see out the windows or look at the clock, to force more active participation.)

B. Time. It is assumed that the group has determined (at its last meeting) what the general topic and plan for today's seminar is.

1. Warm-up: 10 minutes to determine the specific purpose and focus for the day. One useful strategy is to list on the blackboard a few key questions or topics that seminar members think should be discussed.
2. Seminar: the bulk of the time is spent in the discussion.
3. Closure: 10 minutes to ask how you did as a group, for criticisms (positive and negative), and to decide (*formally*, as a group) the purpose and direction of the next seminar.

C. Rules and procedures

1. People should be sitting up, with the assigned reading in front of them, taking notes and following the discussion.
2. At the center is the *subject matter*, not personal opinion.
3. The chief authority in the room is the book under discussion. Some members of the seminar, especially the leader, may be able to provide relevant information, but you are chiefly discussing what the book has to say.
4. Build a dialogue in some particular direction. If what you have to say adds to that direction, then say it. But if it tends to divert the discussion into a different direction, hold back.
5. Quote from the book and make reference to the book. This helps to focus the discussion where it should be.
6. Specifics from your own experience may be relevant, too. But place a DANGER sign here, because this is where too many seminars founder. Talking about your own experience is easy -- too easy. If people just share personal experiences, you have a bull session, not a seminar, and it has little educational value. Your personal experience is relevant only insofar as you can show how it amplifies the point of the discussion.
7. Try to listen not only to words but to intentions, to the meaning between the lines. Try to be supportive and to apply the Principle of Charitable Interpretation.

8. To bring up another topic:

a. If you've agreed to move on at a certain time, move on.

b. Ask a question: "Can we talk about . . . ?"

9. To backtrack: Don't derail a conversation to bring it up. Write the point down and mention it again in closure.

10. Conversational politics (from Craig Carlson): Reactions to people rather than to statements; happens to women, people of color, people expressing themselves through attire or style. Be assertive and say, "I don't think you heard me." Ask these politicians to repeat what they heard or understood and correct them.

D. Skills and other factors that help the discussion.

1. Writing at the beginning of a seminar. Some faculty members have everyone write something beforehand, to have at least one definite idea on paper at the beginning. Otherwise, try taking a few minutes for everyone to write something, then begin by having one or two people read their papers. Alternatively, do this only to get everyone focused; then destroy these papers and let people begin to speak about what they wrote.

2. Paraphrasing what others have said, as you begin to say something, develops listening skills and helps ensure that everyone is heard correctly.

3. Watch the group; try to pick out energetic spots and quiet spots, and try to notice expressions which indicate that someone wants to say something, or disagrees strongly.

4. Distinguish "Yes, and" from "Yes, but." "Yes, but" tends to cut off conversation and stop the flow of ideas. Rather, use "Yes, and." [from York Wong]

E. Roles participants can play in the discussion. Mature discussants switch rapidly between different roles as they see fit. Students must not "typecast" themselves by playing one role all the time. Best roles are the ones you don't usually take; listeners should talk, talkers should listen.

1. Devil's advocate: Tests and challenges the common-sense, values or logic of ideas.

2. Supporter: Paraphrases or underscores what another has said, adding other reasons or examples.
3. Questioner: Asks question to move discussion in particular direction.
4. Synthesizer: Tries to tie ideas together, show what the facts lead to.
5. Outsider: Backing off from the discussion, tries to help the group focus or refocus.
6. Historian: Gives an accurate report of who said what.

F. Advice for shy people:

1. Start with a question; this will identify you with the group.
2. You're probably shy because you feel you are challenged, but that isn't true here.
3. Talk to your faculty leader; he will try to move things toward you and open up the opportunity to talk.
4. Prepare!

G. Preparing for seminars

1. Read specifically for ideas and for key words. Make your own index to them in back of the book. Work on understanding key concepts; but also ask if author really understands them.
2. Know the thesis of the book. Take time, if necessary, to read more about the book's context, what the author is arguing for or against, contrasting viewpoints, etc.
3. Get a study partner, or become part of a study group. Exchange papers or discuss the book before seminar.

- H. One method that helps encourage student participation is to have students take turns being facilitators. The students must know in advance when they will be responsible for the seminar, so they can prepare. They must learn that it is not their job to become a resident expert, or to dominate the seminar on that day, but simply to do the faculty leader's normal job of keeping the discussion on track. This will make everyone more

aware of what is needed for a successful discussion and will encourage them to take responsibility for the seminar when they are not in a special role.

IV. SOME THOUGHTS ABOUT THE SEMINAR THAT ISN'T WORKING

Salcedo addressed a common problem that arises after a seminar has been going on for a few weeks; the seminar seems to be bogging down, with a few people participating actively and the rest hardly talking at all. Salcedo believes this is primarily a failure of individuals to recognize their personal responsibilities for making the seminar successful. The most common violation of seminar etiquette, he says, is failure to participate actively and with a will. Here are some common excuses for failure to participate in seminar:

- a) "I was going to say something but someone else said it first."
- b) "I was going to say something but was afraid to sound dumb."
- c) "I would like to say something but really have nothing to say."
- d) "I would like to say something but I'm afraid of disagreement and criticism."
- e) "I would like to say something but my thoughts aren't yet worked out in their final form and I'm reluctant to appear foolish."
- f) "I didn't read the book for seminar but I just enjoy the social aspect of getting together."
- g) "I would like to say something but I don't understand what's going on."

l) "I really should speak in seminar but someone else can always say it better."

m) "I was going to say something but then someone changed the subject."

Salcedo argues that when people resort to such excuses the seminar is threatened by loss of purpose, self-indulgent dereliction, and demoralization. A common symptom of this degenerate situation is the commonly heard complaint that the discussion is dominated by a few people who unkindly make it hard for the others to get involved.

What has happened is that the seminar has informally split into two large factions. One faction consists of those who have accustomed themselves to making excuses for non-participation; they have individually abdicated responsibility and purpose, they sit passively on the fringe, and their intimidation has produced a feeling of vacuum at the core of the seminar. The other faction consists of active participants who, sensitive to the vacuum and bewildered by the others' passivity, try to compensate for the vacuum by talking even more, only to further frighten the fringe-dwellers.

In this situation, each faction complains that the other side has produced a poor learning environment. Some people will look to the seminar leader to bridge the gulf in some miraculous way and unify the seminar by causing some people to speak up and others to remain silent. But this hope mistakes the symptom for the underlying disease. Worse than that, it assumes that the leader has some kind of magic, or charisma, that can be used to rescue the community.

But it is not the heroism of the Great Man that is called for here. What is needed is renewal of self-discipline and sense of purpose on the part of each individual member of the seminar, whatever his or her factional persuasion may be. Rather than depending on the seminar leader, the members of the seminar must exercise disinterested independence of judgement, personal responsibility and willingness to restrain private preferences in favor of conscientious dedication to the seminar as a collective enterprise. Only this sort of voluntary renewal of effort can heal the breach of etiquette. Because seminar is a public enterprise, it is the manners of individuals in public that count toward vitality or disease, as the case may be. The seminar leader may, of course, do his utmost to persuade individuals, or the seminar as a group, to observe etiquette by cultivating discipline and purpose and restraining self-indulgence. Nevertheless, the influence of the seminar leader is limited.

V. THE ROLE OF THE SEMINAR LEADER

Much less has been written about the seminar leader's role than about the behavior of students, probably because this is so much a matter of individual teaching style. But conversations about seminars over the years have led to at least a few generalizations.

The most consistent feeling about seminar behavior is this: That the seminar leader can never entirely abandon her responsibility for keeping the seminar operating, but that her goal must consistently be to make the students more and more responsible for this function, and increasingly capable of doing so. Early in a seminar's history, unless you are lucky enough to have a group of advanced students who already know exactly how a good seminar should operate, the students will be confused and uneasy. The seminar will be a new and bewildering experience, and your first job will be to help students learn to operate well, by following the rules listed above and using these methods. This will take some hard work, and a lot of patience.

I have often begun by asking the students in a new seminar group to finish the following analogy:

- Seminar leader : seminar students ::
- (a) priest : congregation
 - (b) conductor : orchestra
 - (c) king : people
 - (d) leader : jazz combo

My preference, I tell them, is always (d). The leader of a jazz combo has to be in charge and keep things running smoothly, but the performance is primarily up to the individuals, who must play their own music when their times come; and, in contrast to the conductor, the leader gets to perform sometimes, too.

The seminar must be established, from the beginning, as a forum that only operates if all of its members play their roles, and as a forum that cannot operate if the seminar leader remains the focus of attention. In this connection, I think that Don Finkel's experiments on democracy in education are relevant. Finkel's essay *Democracy in Education: Education in Democracy* must really be read to get the richness of his ideas, but I think I can summarize an important part of them here. Finkel has set up so-called self-reflective groups (SRGs) in certain programs; they are distinct from seminars, but share many of the procedures and purposes of the seminar. The SRG is operated so that the students, who initially focus very strongly on their leader, come to feel more and more dissatisfied with the leader's (intentional) failure to tell them what to do; eventually they rebel, find their own strength, and throw the leader out. It is only after this act that they can let the leader come back in, but now as

one among many equal participants. On the basis of his work with the SRG, Finkel develops some thoughts about the democratic nature of education, relating strongly to Hannah Arendt's conception of political action -- essentially, that people must find their strength as unique individuals who all come together as equals in the political arena. In the same way, students only engage in a truly educational process when they come together as unique individuals in the educational setting, where they can exchange ideas forcefully as equals.

Now, I can hardly advocate that each seminar be operated so as to produce a rebellion against the leader. But there is a version of the process rather like what happens in the production of a good play by a competent director. The director initially has a vision of what the play should be; the actors have only the roughest and most confused idea, and they have little conception of how to play their individual parts. Gradually, the director must empower the actors by giving the play more and more to them, and by helping them learn to play their roles. This analogy relates back to Finkel's conception in an important way: The actors must come to realize that the play does not exist unless each of them plays his or her role in just the right way, just as the political body of a democracy does not exist unless each person plays his or her individual part.

It is in this sense that the seminar is an empowerment of its individual members, and one of the leader's major goals must be to work toward that end.

VI. A VARIANT MODEL FOR SEMINARS

When we speak of seminars at Evergreen, we often assume them to be book seminars in which everyone discusses an assigned book as a group of equals. This is not the only model; and, specifically, seminars in which various people have taken on specific tasks are often valuable. In one case, for instance, the members of a seminar became suspicious of the accuracy of statements in the book they were reading, so several students took on the task of looking up certain references; the next session was spent largely receiving their reports and reviewing what they found, providing valuable lessons about the book as well as more general lessons.

Richard Alexander once wrote at length about successful seminars, and especially about alternatives to the standard book seminar. The main point is to get the students working independently on specific subtopics relevant to the main theme and then bring them together to present and discuss their ideas. For instance, Alexander describes a time when he substituted for another faculty member in a program:

Here I adopted the simple device of saying every student had to make an individual report. Then I asked each student in turn to answer, "When you read a novel, what aspect of it interests you most?" If the answer was "symbolism" I said, "Okay, your topic is the symbolism in Great Expectations. Here's what you should look for. . ." If the answer was "Characterization" I said. . . If the answer was Historical Background, Then I just set up an agenda so that similar reports were grouped and there was an obvious flow from one topic to the next, and played my own moderator. It worked very well, and for the first time all year everyone around the table was participating, and I was not providing the dominant intellectual lead.

In this context I quote him at length.

I am not adamant about some specific format, nor am I convinced that only certain tasks are worthy. I can imagine numerous variations on the basic "pattern." Or, not so much a pattern as sets of principles which might be applied quite differently as different situations demand.

A) Every seminar must have a group task. This task might be anything -- design a park, master Platonism, understand local politics, learn to deal with psychotic children. The task must be shared by the group. The group members must at least share their devotion to the completion of this task. But the members do not have to share any particular orientations toward the task, and indeed it is useful for there to be many different orientations operating. Many different backgrounds and expertises, many different ideological or philosophical approaches, so long as all are agreed that the task is important and they want to complete it, and bigotry is avoided but logic and precision valued. . . then we are all right.

B. This task must be of such a complexity that it could not be well handled in the time provided by one persona alone, or from one perspective alone. Thus many people working cooperatively, and not all doing exactly the same work, are desirable. The members of the group need to know -- intellectually and viscerally -- that each member in the group is needed. Each member must know that *her* contribution is indeed needed. No way out.

C. For reasons that should be obvious by now, I prefer tasks in which there is considerable legitimate and worthy controversy. By "worthy" I mean to indicate that the controversy spreads out in important, serious ways into the life around us, and far beyond the simple narrowly defined limits of the task itself. I like tasks in which it is proper, necessary, and beneficial to introduce philosophical

considerations, political considerations, social considerations, literary considerations, aesthetic considerations, and so on. And for these considerations to connect, not only in this task, but with larger and other concerns. Thus what the students learn in this task, instantly and then continuously, proves useful in many other subsequent tasks.

D. The task should extend over a proper length of time -- certainly two weeks at a minimum, and a whole quarter if possible. You have to have time for general discussion of the task, selection of individual projects, the research and preparation of reports, the giving of these reports, discussion, integration, and conclusion of the project. It seems to me quite impossible to do all of that in less than two weeks, and two weeks is straining it hard. One would also like to see time for careful critique, and time for people to learn from their mistakes and errors, and time for them to correct those mistakes and errors. On the other hand, if the project stretches out to fill a quarter, then you need to make sure that all the activities which follow upon one another are clearly and obviously connected to each other and to the central task. We should avoid situations in which students are genuinely puzzled why they are being asked to do the next thing, or who the pieces connect. Serendipity is wonderful, and it will occur. But in my view it is always *lagniappe*, and we should not rely upon it to provide the backbone for the project.

E. The *necessary* and *fruitful* approaches to the task should be obvious, clearly defined and stated, and agreed to in advance -- by both faculty and students. There are always many different approaches to any really complex task, and many different side issues and considerations. Depending upon the purposes of the seminar, some of these approaches are necessary (If we don't learn about X, then we cannot complete our task.); some are fruitful but not necessary (It is a good thing to know about X, and may prove useful in some way; some are irrelevant, or even dangerous (This topic is valid enough, but it threatens to turn us away from the task at hand, and to take over). Everyone should understand and agree in advance about all of this. At the very least, the faculty should be in large agreement about it.

If all these things are built into the seminar situation from the beginning, then the faculty has to do relatively little "directing." There is no need to try to figure out during a faculty seminar what you should ask students, because that will have already been determined. Students can be allowed considerable freedom of choice on topics and approaches, so long as all the necessary topics are covered,

and the relevance of each proposed topic is clear to everyone. The faculty can relax their overt control of the seminar procedure.

As to behavior in the seminar, I like to see students speaking to each other, not me, and addressing each other's points, and working towards solutions of the already identified problems. This is in part the moderator's responsibility, and moderators must be trained to ask students to stay on the track, to ask the present speaker to address some point brought up maybe half an hour earlier, to insist that speakers be clear and detailed, and that they define their key terms, to point out conflicts and contradictions within the group, and maybe within what some one speaker said, also to point out similarities and agreements.

Alexander is describing a model that a number of science faculty members have used to run group contracts quite successfully. In this case, it is assumed that the students all have the proper preparation, since science must be built up quite systematically, and often the group works around some standard textbook, although they are not restricted to it. Suppose the topic for the quarter is physiology. The faculty leader divides the subject into topics small enough to be handled by one student, or maybe two working together, and students choose their topics immediately and start to work on them. To give the first students time to get ready, and to lay a foundation, the faculty member lectures for the first few weeks (usually). Then the students begin, each having an hour or two (depending on the schedule and number of students). Essentially the same rules that Alexander lays out here apply; it is important for the faculty leader to keep everything on course and to provide adequate criticism. This must be done carefully, to avoid bruising egos, but there are common mistakes students make in speaking (reading notes instead of talking to the group, not using the blackboard intelligently, being silly about pronouncing "big words," and so on), and if these aren't pointed out, everyone will do the same thing and the whole quarter will be miserable. Students' first attempts are often poor; and the best situation is one in which everyone has two topics, so he can correct his mistakes on the second try. Of course, the same general method can be used for short-term studies within a regular seminar.

