



FACULTY SPONSOR FAQs

How did this program develop?

The Student Directed Seminars (SDS) program is modeled after a similar program at the University of California at Berkeley and is an expansion of the directed studies option offered by most departments. UBC's SDS program has grown significantly since its inception in 1999.

What are the benefits of sponsoring a seminar?

Sponsoring a Student Directed Seminar is a great opportunity to:

- Work collaboratively with a motivated student to create a student-directed peer learning environment for undergraduates;
- Cultivate a student's academic development by offering mentorship and guidance;
- Explore an integrated or interdisciplinary topic.

What is my role as a faculty sponsor?

As Faculty Sponsor, you will guide the student Coordinator(s) in the various academic processes required for seminars, including: developing a syllabus, generating reading lists and associated seminar materials/resources, and presenting grading options. To further assist in ensuring a high level of academic rigor, you may agree to mark, or read and comment on, the academic material produced by students in the seminar. While you are not expected to attend seminar meetings, you will need to be available to the student Coordinator(s) for guidance, resolve any problems that may arise, and meet with participants in the seminar, if needed. You are also required to sign-off on and submit final marks to the appropriate administrative contact in your department or SDS program staff.

How much time is involved with being a Faculty Sponsor?

The time commitment depends on the seminar, and the experiences and abilities of the student Coordinator. In many cases, you will be most involved in supporting the implementation of the key administrative and logistical details of the seminar. These tend to require attention at the beginning and end of the semester. Most of these seminars are approved to run in Winter - Term 2 (January - April) of each academic year.

Do Faculty Sponsors earn teaching credit?

Individual departments will recognize their faculty members' contributions to the SDS program in different ways. Please check with your Department to determine how they recognize this contribution.

If I am a visiting or sessional instructor, am I eligible to sponsor a seminar?

The Advisory Committee expects that SDSs will be supervised by tenured or tenure-stream faculty members. Being a Faculty Sponsor requires additional work that may not be recognized by colleagues with all appointments with the university. For example, sessional instructors would not be paid to oversee SDSs.

However, with the support and approval of a Department Head, the SDS Advisory Committee will consider approving seminars sponsored by those holding academic appointment that are not tenured or tenure-stream faculty. It is imperative that non-tenured or non-tenure-stream faculty who agree to take on such a supervisory role do so voluntarily, and with the understanding that it is not a condition of their UBC employment.

Are Student Directed Seminars academically rigorous?

Yes. Student Directed Seminars are based on the same academic principles that guide other courses at UBC and have been approved by the UBC Senate's curriculum committee. An Advisory committee comprised of UBC-Vancouver faculty, staff, and students reviews all seminar proposals and provide approvals based on a robust rubric that assesses academic rigour among other criteria. Student Coordinators are provided with an intensive training program between September and December including topics such as design, facilitation skills, instructional design, classroom management, seminar evaluation, and grading practices. In many cases, the students' passion for the subject and future plans for graduate level study, make these seminars considerably more challenging than traditional courses.

What kinds of students are drawn to this program?

Our student facilitators are some of the most motivated, dedicated, and talented students at UBC. They are academically-strong students who have a passion for learning and the desire to critically impact the learning experience of their peers. SDS participants are equally-motivated and many actively select an SDS experience to participate in new and innovative learning opportunities.

If there is no 'instructor', how are students evaluated?

Most SDS courses are evaluated on the standard alpha-numeric scale. On occasion courses will be graded on a pass/fail basis. The grading system for each course is determined by the Coordinator and the participants, with support and approval from the Faculty Sponsor, and applies to both participants and the student Coordinator. The Faculty Sponsor supports Coordinators by offering guidelines and resources (e.g., rubrics or peer-evaluation guidelines).

Final responsibility for assigning grades to all students, including the Coordinator, rests with the Faculty Sponsor. However, most seminars will undertake rigorous peer grading for a good portion of the assignments and class activities. Faculty Sponsors may agree to mark final papers or assignments.

How many students can register for a seminar?

The minimum enrollment of each seminar is eight and the maximum is fifteen.

Is there a limit on how many times a seminar can be offered at UBC?

Seminars may only run once. Students who would like to revive a previously-offered seminar will need to clearly evidence how the second offering is different in approach, scope, and content. Additionally, seminars should also not replicate a course that is currently offered at UBC.

When do classes run?

While Student Directed Seminars run during both semesters of the academic year, most are offered during Winter - Term 2 (January-April). Fall - Term 2 (September to December) is used to complete coordinator training, order textbooks, prepare syllabi, create reading lists and grading rubrics, recruit students into the seminars, and secure seminar numbers and rooms.