

Best Practices: Faculty Online Orientation

Recommended by UMAIE faculty instructors, April 2011

Dear faculty:

Designing and leading an on-line pre-departure student orientation can be challenging if you have never done it before. To help you with this process, the UMAIE Board of Directors suggests the following tips for creating a well-designed online orientation. These suggestions were elicited from January 2011 faculty instructors who received positive student evaluations for the quality of their orientation.

An important piece of advice is to remember that you are first and foremost a teacher. How would you handle your first class session if you were teaching on your campus? As instructors, we want to get to know the students, enable the students to get to know each other, and set the tone/expectations for the class. These same principles apply to this on-line orientation session.

Before the Orientation

- Contact students several times by email to congratulate them on their acceptance into the course, list things they might read in preparation or a movie they might see prior to departure if they have time, or give them more information about what to expect from your course. These kinds of contacts help students feel invited into your course, and give them a sense of who you are.
- These emails will also give students a sense of your own excitement for the subject matter.
- These emails can also begin the process of shaping student expectations, especially in regard to how demanding the course might be (in terms of assignments, amount of travel, emotional impact, or other components of your specific course).
- As you plan the agenda for your orientation, remember to build in a substantial amount of time for discussion or Q&A. Above all, *don't* pack the orientation with so much information that you are talking AT students all the time.

During the Orientation

- Help the students get to know each other. The biggest complaint from the January 2011 evaluations was that students felt they had no idea of who else was going on the course with them. When your orientation begins, introduce yourself and then ask students to introduce themselves with whatever method most suits you. One instructor had a photo of each student on his PowerPoint and had them each introduce themselves as their picture came up. Even without the pictures, you can ask students to provide their name, school, major and one thing they are most excited about for the course/trip.
- Introduce the course concepts and workload, but go over it rather quickly. Students want to know what will be expected of them, but they are only minimally interested in details of the assignments at this point. This material can be distributed in hard copy once you arrive on-site, or put on Blackboard, Moodle, the UMAIE course website, or your own website prior to departure (but please make sure to provide information so students from *all* institutions can access the course site).
- The students most want to know about the travel issues, so spend a ~~good~~ portion of time discussing that, e.g., packing, money, places they will go and things they will do, roommates and accommodations, food, medicines/vaccinations, etc. Though old hat for the professors, this is what the students are most interested in as they prepare for the experience. Follow up with emails to students after the orientation with more specific details on travel information. (Electronic packets will be available to instructors and students prior to the orientation. This can be used as a resource for the logistics discussion and will include a current version of the course itinerary, two pages of Frequently Asked Questions, and the CultureGram.)
- Use the orientation to get a feel for what students know/don't know about the subject matter. This will also help you reinforce the academic and intercultural nature of the experience. For instance, a simple question for you to ask them is "What do you know about [India, evolution, John Paul II, women's health, racial diversity in Hawaii, etc.]"
- Find ways to compliment them. If your course is going to an off-the-beaten-track location, tell them how adventurous they are to have signed up for it. If your course has a very significant workload, compliment them on their willingness to put a lot of themselves into this course. If your course is very

discipline specific but you have many students with different majors who have signed up, express enthusiasm for the diversity of viewpoints this will bring. You get the idea. One faculty leader who did something like this believed students felt proud and empowered, which helped them feel good about the class and the coming trip.

- Remember to include time at the end for questions and answers. When you ask if there are any questions, make sure to have enough *wait time* to give students a chance to think and respond. (If you have to, literally count on your hands up to 10 before you say anything!) Sometimes students are shy about asking what they think are “stupid” questions, so remind them that probably someone else has the very same question too.
- End on an upbeat note, by letting students know how much you look forward to working with them on your course.
- *Most Important Tip:* Don’t dominate the air time yourself! The orientation should be interactive. If you are doing all the talking, students will tune you out (just like in the classroom!).

After the Orientation

- Follow up with emails and invitations for individual conversations. Send out the roommate lists, updates on exchange rates, airport meeting times and places, development of plans, more information about how/what to pack, how to access the course website, and so on.
- Consider setting up an email alias, or a Facebook group, for your course. Encourage students to “talk” with each other this way.
- The emails can be short, but a few along the way will feed student excitement — which will be high!



UMAIE/SEMINARS INTERNATIONAL FACULTY DIRECTOR TRAVEL GRANT PROGRAM

Applications are invited for travel grants made available through a program sponsored by the Upper Midwest Association for Intercultural Education (UMAIE) in cooperation with Seminars International, Inc. A maximum of \$3,000 is available to be awarded annually to support faculty research related to leading future courses for the UMAIE Consortium. A faculty may receive up to \$3000, at the discretion of the UMAIE Board, to support research related to leading future courses for the UMAIE Consortium.

OBJECTIVES

- 1) To assist faculty of UMAIE member institutions to test their suitability for UMAIE course leadership, and to assist them in the acquisition of leadership experience and skills.

And/Or

- 2) To assist faculty of UMAIE member institutions to become familiar with foreign settings and to develop indigenous contacts that might be helpful in planning new courses.

ELIGIBILITY

Any regular faculty member holding academic rank at a member institution of UMAIE may apply for a travel grant by submitting a written proposal to the UMAIE Board of Directors representative prior to April 1 of any academic year. A completed application must include:

- 1) A proposal, not to exceed three typewritten pages, specifying the nature of the course proposal that will result from the travel grant and how the proposed period of study will meet the objectives of the grant program.
- 2) A letter of support from the academic dean of the applicant's institution specifying the amount of institutional financial support that will be available to the applicant. The letter of institutional support should also address the likelihood that the applicant will remain in the institution's employment long enough to propose and direct a UMAIE course.
- 3) An itemized budget of how the travel grant will be accounted for in order to aid the UMAIE Board in justifying need and costs. The UMAIE Board asks that you consult with Seminars International, the UMAIE program and travel logistics provider, as you consider your travel arrangements. They can provide advice and recommendations for accommodations your student group may stay in, sites they may visit and guides they may use. Please contact them at travel@semint.com, for assistance in your planning.

PROCEDURES

- 1) Applications should be developed in consultation with the institutional representatives to the UMAIE Board of Directors.

- 2) Applications must be received by the UMAIE Board representative by April 1 of the academic year previous to the proposed period of study.
- 3) Completed applications will be reviewed and selections will be made by the UMAIE Board at its spring meeting. Grant recipients will be given a date by which they must accept or decline the grant (normally June 1). If the person declines, the alternate will be notified.
- 4) Notification of grant awards will be sent directly to the applicant with a copy to the applicant's academic dean and UMAIE Board representative.
- 5) Grant recipients must submit a written report to UMAIE within two months of their return summarizing their objectives, discussing how their objectives were met (or not), a draft of an integrated syllabus, as well as an indication of when the course will be proposed. Itemized original receipts must accompany this report. A copy of the report and receipts should also be given to the home institution.
- 6) Grant awards will take the form of a credit applied to the expenses of the travel that has been designated in the application. The UMAIE Board asks that you consult with Seminars International, the UMAIE program and travel logistics provider, as you consider your travel arrangements (travel@semint.com). They can provide advice and recommendations for accommodations your student group may stay in, sites they may visit and guides they may use. Any institutional support funds will be dispersed directly to the grantee.

GUIDELINES

Decisions of the UMAIE Board of Directors will be governed by the following guidelines:

- 1) Does the applicant have the necessary academic qualifications to lead the type of course anticipated?
- 2) Does the proposed course represent a significant addition to the courses previously sponsored by UMAIE?
- 3) Is there a perceived need for the proposed course?
- 4) What effect would a grant have upon the equitable distribution of travel grants among member institutions?
- 5) Is the amount requested accounted for or justifiable?

OBLIGATIONS

- 1) Grant recipients may choose to accompany one of the UMAIE sponsored courses. Grantees will have no leadership responsibilities for the course, but their level of participation in the course is expected to be appropriate to the objectives of the travel grant program. Grantees may depart from the group for brief periods with the understanding that such deviations are for the purpose of work on the course they plan to propose.
- 2) The UMAIE board expects that travel grants will result in proposals for future UMAIE courses.

- 3) The UMAIE board is under no obligation to approve a course proposal that was developed under the support of a travel grant.