

The Return of the Great Teaching Seminar

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On October 24 and 25, 32 full-time faculty and six mentors/facilitators gathered at the beautiful Kingbridge Centre for two days (plus an overnight) of 'by faculty, for faculty' discussions about great teaching. The Great Teaching Seminar (GTS) centred around teaching challenges and innovations provided by participants. From participants' innovations came discussions about how to adapt or modify them for use in other courses or programs. From challenges came suggestions and ideas for solutions. Our exploration of challenges also led into sessions to address participants' needs and common interests.

Sessions at this GTS included discussions of the use of technology, changes in our student population, student preparedness, faculty development, teaching content-heavy courses, and student mental health. Feedback from faculty who participated praised the engagement, discussion, and community-building that resulted from interacting with other faculty from across the college – different courses, different programs, different schools, different faculties, and different campuses, yet similar teaching skills, strengths, and challenges.

Faculty enjoyed learning from other faculty's innovations and from hearing about common challenges that we could provide help and support with. Feedback from one faculty member praised the GTS because: "(1) You really do get to connect with others from different department. (2) It takes away other regular and institutional constraints and stressors and therefore allows for people to be more open and relaxed when communicating (speaking and listening) to others – authentic dialogues and meaningful connections, and (3) non-judgmental exploration of ideas, challenges and strategies." Another faculty member praised the "Networking, networking, networking! It was so refreshing to have been able to connect with new colleagues in a relaxed environment. That was the most valuable part of the entire conference."



Why does the GTS format work? In the words of one faculty participant, "There's a camaraderie that is formed when everyone stays overnight – when you commit to an event of this duration, you don't show up for a few seminars and leave. You share a number of meals together, you hang out by the fire pit, you have unstructured conversations that are really important for networking." While there was no consensus on the 'best' parts of the GTS, one participant summed it up like this: "All sessions were great, but the most valuable one was the session on Friday because the topics were participant-interest-driven. I think this is very valuable because there are real challenges being posed and real answers/strategies being sought and shared."

The GTS facilitators and participants would like to thank Laurel Schollen for providing us this wonderful opportunity to build community across the college. We came, we learned, and now we'll share our learning and build on the connections we made.

Faculty Reflections from the Great Teaching Seminar:

from Ioana Danciu, School of Health Sciences: If you are not new to teaching, I am sure you experienced both of the following: the feeling that the year begins in September and the feeling that teaching is an enchantingly complex profession requiring continuous refinement.

Every time I register for professional development, I get ready to learn more. When I registered for the GTS, I had my usual learning expectations. When I finished attending the seminar, I felt that my expectations were well exceeded by the complexity of the seminar, the approach to teaching and learning, and the opportunity to learn in small groups and share the group discussions. The GTS is a unique learning experience for professors in any program at Seneca. The teaching innovations discussed during group activities launched a platform for a blend of principles of pedagogy and applied strategies of learning to a specific program. The collaborative discussions during the sessions that focused on teaching challenges summarized solutions to teaching problems and highlighted assistive technology in the process of learning. The time allotted to group discussions proved to be insufficient; therefore, sharing teaching tips continued during breaks and it continues beyond the 2-days GTS.

In conclusion, the success of the seminar is to be attributed to many factors: great organization, wonderful facilitators, a beautiful venue to enhance learning, and a memorable team-building experience. The GTS itself was a teaching demo. Here is wishing Seneca professors many more GTS seminars to attend!

from Tu Doan, School of International Business and Management: The Great Teaching conference is an excellent occasion for us to be together and to learn from each other.

Being new in Canada and in College, I feel sometimes lost in questions of How and Why. Surprisingly, only after two days at GTS, I feel that I belong to a bigger community with all these wonderful professors doing our best for student success. We all have similar questions and just by sharing our experience, the responses came up.

Moreover, we laughed together (and sometimes cried together) through a number of amazing activities, which created a stronger bond among us. All my thanks to the facilitators and organizers for making us stronger so that we can build a better future generation.



The GTS Facilitators: Kathrina Lalog, Frank Robbins, Farveh Ghafouri, Jamison Aldcorn, Mary Trant, and Annette Pejic

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