

## Student Directed Seminars Program

### Guidelines, Policies and Responsibilities

#### *Overview*

The Student Directed Seminars (SDS) program, introduced at UBC Vancouver in 1999 and inspired by a model at UC Berkeley, gives upper-year undergraduates the opportunity to design and lead peer-based seminars on topics they choose. Building on the directed studies model, it fosters student-led, collaborative learning. While UBC Vancouver's program is managed by the Centre for Student Involvement & Careers, the UBC Okanagan program is administered by the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (FASS) Dean's Office. Aligned with UBC's strategic goals, the program emphasizes a learner-centered model that empowers students as partners in curriculum design.

Applications for the program are accepted annually from January to May, with approved seminars running Term 2 in the following academic year<sup>1</sup>. Eligible applicants are undergraduate students in their third year or higher, supported by a FASS faculty sponsor<sup>2</sup>. Application requirements include: a SDS application form, a draft syllabus, a faculty recommendation letter, and a faculty sponsor form. The SDS Advisory Committee reviews all submitted proposals and makes a recommendation for approval. The committee selects seminars based on the proposal's originality and academic rigour, the student's motivation and experience, their academic record, and the faculty recommendation assessing their readiness to lead a seminar.

Selected applicants will be notified by June, after which the TLC Office will coordinate administrative steps related to scheduling and registration. The SDS program begins with an orientation that serves as both a meet-and-greet and an introduction to the training and support available. Approved applicants assume the role of Student Coordinators and work closely with their Faculty Sponsor during Term 1 to develop their proposal into a full seminar syllabus. Training provided by the CTL in Term 1 is integral to both syllabus development and preparing Student Coordinators to lead their seminars. All mandatory training outlined during orientation must be completed, and final syllabi submitted to the TLC Office by the December deadline.

From September until April, Student Coordinators and their Faculty Sponsors are encouraged to establish a meeting schedule that works well for both parties. The TLC Office can be consulted as needed but does not need to be regularly involved. During Term 2, when the seminars are in session, Faculty Sponsors are expected to be readily available to support their Student Coordinators if any questions or challenges arise. The TLC Office administers a midterm survey to students enrolled in the seminar and shares the feedback with the Student Coordinator to support their continued development and facilitation. After the term concludes, the TLC Office will schedule a debrief meeting to discuss how the seminars progressed and to gather feedback for improving the program.

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<sup>1</sup> For example, seminars approved in spring 2025 will be scheduled for 2025W Term 2, starting January 2026.

<sup>2</sup> Graduate students and unclassified students are not eligible to propose seminars, nor are they permitted to register as student participants.

## ***Student and Seminar Selection Criteria***

The Advisory Committee will base their approvals on four core criteria:

### **1. Proposal Quality and Academic Rigour**

- Proposals must present an original topic not currently offered at UBCO or previously run as a student directed seminar, clearly identifying the need for the seminar and the gap it aims to fill in the curriculum.
- Content should demonstrate the depth and rigour expected of a fourth-year seminar, including relevant readings, assignments, and academic work that promote higher-order thinking and application of knowledge.
- Successful proposals encourage active discussion, shared responsibility among participants, and flexibility for course refinement throughout the term.
- While grading methods may vary, peer-assessment is strongly preferred, with faculty sponsors providing additional evaluation where appropriate to enhance the peer-learning experience.

### **2. Student Readiness to Lead a Seminar**

The Advisory Committee considers several qualities when assessing suitability, including:

- Strong motivation and ability to engage in self-directed learning;
- A clear grasp of the Student Coordinator's role as a facilitator rather than an instructor;
- Proven independence, critical thinking skills, and reliability;
- Interest in future teaching or graduate studies;
- Experience collaborating effectively in teams and encouraging participation from others.

### **3. Academic Background and Performance**

When preparing applications for the Advisory Committee review, the TLC Office staff will include a copy of the applicant's academic record. While there is no required minimum average to lead a seminar, consideration is given to the relevance of past coursework, overall performance in related subjects, and the student's academic results from the most recent year.

### **4. Faculty Recommendation Form**

Faculty recommendation forms are submitted directly to [fasscurriculum.ubco@ubc.ca](mailto:fasscurriculum.ubco@ubc.ca), meaning applicants may not have access to review them. This process is intended to encourage honest and constructive feedback from faculty. The reference does not need to come from the proposed faculty sponsor; another faculty member who can better speak to the applicant's suitability to facilitate a seminar may complete the form instead.

## ***Proposal Review Outcomes***

After review by the SDS Advisory Committee, proposals are placed into one of two categories:

1. **Approved:** The seminar is fully endorsed to proceed. The Committee determines that both the student coordinator and the proposed topic show strong potential for success. The course is expected to meet academic standards, address a clear curricular need, and present a well-developed plan for assignments, grading, class structure, and readings. The proposal is exceptionally well-crafted, demonstrating a strong balance of structure, clarity, and flexibility.

The seminar's approval is considered conditional until receipt of an email confirming the Student Coordinator has read and understands the **UBC Conflict of Interest Policy**:

[https://universitycounsel.ubc.ca/files/2024/04/COI-Policy\\_SC3.pdf](https://universitycounsel.ubc.ca/files/2024/04/COI-Policy_SC3.pdf).

**Note:** The SDS Advisory Committee may recommend a maximum of TWO seminars for approval each year. If more than one SDS seminar proposal within a single disciplinary area is approved, the department Head approval will be required.

2. **Not Approved:** The Committee has substantial concerns about the proposal's quality, academic rigour, and/or the applicant's readiness to coordinate a seminar. The submission lacks sufficient detail and evidence of planning. Unlike UBC Vancouver, FASS does not currently offer a "resubmission" option. Additional result categories may be introduced in the future as the program evolves or if an application warrants reconsideration.

## ***Roles and Responsibilities***

### **Student Coordinator**

Rather than serving as traditional instructors, Student Coordinators take on a facilitative role, guiding learning through a peer-led, collaborative approach. They are responsible for designing, coordinating

and leading the seminar, drawing support from their Faculty Sponsor and contributions from fellow participants. The aim is to create an engaging, student-centered space where shared inquiry and intellectual curiosity can flourish. Coordinators receive training and mentorship to help them navigate the academic, organizational and leadership responsibilities involved in delivering a successful seminar.

Student Coordinators are typically highly motivated and deeply invested in their chosen topic, with a desire to create meaningful learning experiences for their peers. Former Student Coordinators have gone on to graduate studies or teaching programs. Each student may coordinate only one Student Directed Seminar during their undergraduate degree.

### **Faculty Sponsor**

Faculty Sponsors are faculty members who voluntarily oversee and support student directed seminars, ensuring they meet the expected academic standards. They work closely with their Student Coordinators to guide seminar development, approve topics, grading schemes, and sign off on final grades. Faculty Sponsors may also assist with grading and help resolve academic concerns throughout the seminar. Beyond seminar oversight, they also serve as mentors offering advice on facilitating discussions, managing classroom dynamics and developing assessment strategies to foster engaging, collaborative and high-quality learning experiences. Faculty Sponsors are encouraged to support only students they believe can successfully lead an academically rigorous seminar.

Faculty Sponsors will receive departmental service recognition for their contributions; however, no course release will be provided. In the event that a Student Coordinator withdraws from the program mid-term, the Faculty Sponsor is expected to assume instructional responsibility for the seminar and ensure it is completed successfully. Prospective Faculty Sponsors are encouraged to reach out to the TLC Office if they would like to connect with past Faculty Sponsors to gain insight into the role, expectations and typical time commitment involved.

### **Student Directed Seminars Advisory Committee**

The SDS Advisory Committee reviews all submitted proposals and makes a recommendation for approval. The primary role of the committee is to ensure academic rigour by approving only proposals that meet the program requirements and selection criteria. The committee also shapes the program's strategic direction, ensures compliance with academic policies, resolves issues during the term, sets guidelines and promotes the program within their departments.

The SDS Advisory Committee includes faculty members, a student representative, an educational consultant from the CTL, the FASS Academic Advisor, and the FASS Manager for Curriculum Development and Academic Programs. The committee meetings are chaired by the FASS Associate Dean, for Teaching, Learning and Curriculum.

### **Teaching, Learning and Curriculum Office Staff**

The TLC Office staff manage the day-to-day operations of the Student Directed Seminars program. Their responsibilities include overseeing the application process, delivering information sessions, coordinating seminar scheduling and registration, supporting student coordinators and faculty sponsors and serving as the main point of contact for the program.

## **Student Directed Seminars Program Chair**

The SDS Program Chair, who is the Associate Dean of Teaching, Learning and Curriculum, provides academic leadership and coordination for the program. As head of the Advisory Committee, the Chair ensures academic quality and adherence to university policies. Key responsibilities include advising on academic matters, supporting program operations, addressing academic misconduct, recruiting a diverse Advisory Committee, and leading biannual Advisory Committee meetings for application review and program evaluation.

## **Student Directed Seminars Participants**

SDS participants engage as co-learners in a collaborative, peer-led learning environment. They are expected to actively contribute to shaping the final seminar syllabus and may take on shared facilitation roles throughout the term. Like Student Coordinators, participants are upper-year undergraduate students who demonstrate a strong motivation for independent learning. In addition to contributing to seminar discussions and development, participants are involved in processes such as peer-grading. Students may participate in up to two Student Directed Seminars over the course of their undergraduate degree.

## ***Terms of Reference***

### ***Student Directed Seminars Program Advisory Committee***

#### **1. Mandate**

The Student Directed Seminars Advisory Committee plays a key role in maintaining the academic quality and integrity of the program. The committee's primary responsibility is to review all submitted seminar proposals and make a recommendation for approval. The committee selects seminars based on factors such as the proposal's academic rigour and originality, the student's motivation, experience and academic record, and the strength of the faculty recommendation.

In addition to proposal review, the committee's responsibilities include supporting recruitment and promotions of the program, academic guidance on various aspects of program implementation, resolving complex student issues that may arise, and supporting the program's ongoing growth and development.

## **2. Governance and Administration**

Decisions on proposal approvals are made by a majority vote. In the event of a tie, the Program Chair will cast the deciding vote. The Advisory Committee may make suggestions or provide recommendations on all aspects of the program. Final decisions, if not made by the Committee, will be made by the Associate Dean, Teaching, Learning and Curriculum.

## **3. Membership**

The Advisory Committee composition is as follows:

- FASS Faculty Members (four voting members, from at least two different departments)
- One former Student Coordinator (voting member)
- One former Faculty Sponsor (voting member)
- Educational Consultant from the CTL (voting member)
- Academic Advisor (voting member)
- Program Chair, Associate Dean, Teaching, Learning and Curriculum (votes only to break a tie)
- Manager, Curriculum Development and Academic Programs (non-voting member secretary)
- Coordinator, Teaching, Learning and Curriculum (non-voting member, attends as needed)

Members are appointed by their Department Head for a two-year term.

## **4. Expectations**

Members of the Advisory Committee are expected to:

- Support and embody the mission, vision, and values of the University;
- Foster a respectful and inclusive environment by treating all members with kindness and valuing diverse perspectives;
- Attend meetings consistently and punctually;
- Engage actively and openly in discussions and decision-making processes;
- Thoroughly review all pre-circulated materials in preparation for each meeting.

## **5. Quorum**

Quorum is 40% of voting members.