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Sponsored by:  
The Student Sustainability Initiative  
The Graham Environmental Sustainability Institute  
The Center for Research on Learning and Teaching

# Combining a Faculty Seminar Series and Online Learning Teaches Research Skills

## Teaching Strategy

Stephanie Preston teaches a course that gives undergraduate students the opportunity to be exposed to and critically analyze faculty research presentations. This unique course format combines online learning and face-to-face discussion sections with a departmental faculty research seminar titled "Storing, Spending, and Saving: The Evolution of the Psychology of Decision-Making About Resources."

Students benefit from seeing faculty presentations and dialogues in an authentic departmental research seminar context. Following the faculty presentations, the initial question and answer period is reserved for undergraduate students. During a second Q&A period, the faculty join the dialogue.

Discussion sections prepare students for the research material that will be covered in upcoming faculty presentations and provide additional opportunities to reflect on previous presentations.

Assignments include weekly online submissions of "critical questions" for discussion with seminar presenters. Students receive feedback on and repeatedly revise their questions prior to the faculty seminar. Through CTools, students also submit and receive feedback on reflection papers that draw on peer-reviewed literature to assess the arguments and methods of the faculty presenters.

## Faculty Perspectives

*"I want my students to be able to think critically and evaluate their motives. I want them to realize that their emotions affect their decisions in ways that they might not realize. Once you realize these things, it's easier to reflect on them and create systems that work around the human inability to be consistent."*

*"When we make our classes interactive, and when we make the tasks for the students specific to what they need to learn for their career development and academic growth, everyone learns more."*

*"People from different disciplines come together to work on these issues, analyzing our own contributions to sustainability, not just how much oil we have left or how much energy we can get out of a battery, but our desire to consume and our ability to reduce consumption from the human side."*

## Student Perspectives

*"I had no idea how many interesting perspectives there were on sustainability. We learned to integrate perspectives from many different disciplines into our discussion of psychology."*

*"I like to think of consumption in many ways. It's hard to know which one is the most effective until you are exposed to it."*

*"If you just read the literature, it's hard to understand perspectives from different fields. Having it presented by experts and the opportunity to discuss it with them gives you the tools to be able to research the literature in many different fields."*

## Examples of Teaching and/or Student Artifacts

**Assignment Instructions**

Read and digest the background reading for the session.

Write a question for the speaker that is pertinent to the problem addressed in the reading. Aim to be polite in your phrasing, specific, and address the problem at a deep level. You will be graded on a 0-3 scale (0=did not do it, 1=minimal effort, 2=reasonable question, 3=shows insight and consideration). Type your question directly into the text box provided.

Note that you cannot just ask one vague question (e.g., "what do you think about X" - or "Maybe you should test Y type of subjects"). You need to write a very specific, critical question, that examines one aspect of the material. To help you toward this goal:

- 1) Note the aspect that interests you
- 2) Make reference to where this aspect appears in their work
- 3) Propose your alternative hypothesis in the first person ("I think" or "I hypothesize" not "Could it be that..." or "Do you think that...").
- 4) Suggest a way that your hypothesis could be tested or the speaker could incorporate your idea into future research.

You will not get full credit without a specific hypothesis in the first person and a suggestion for future research.

There is a sample "before" and "after" in the resources section to help you see what I mean.

Good luck!

CTools Screenshot: Preparatory Assignment

**Consumption**  
at the University of Michigan

**Welcome!**  
This site is dedicated to the interdisciplinary study of decisions about resources.

**Please visit the NMMSD link to learn about our spring conference.**

**Our aims:**  
This site is a resource for people interested in the scientific study of consumption processes where individuals directly or indirectly use resources such as time, energy, money and material goods.

**Our focus:** is the psychological and biological mechanisms of consumption. In particular, we want to know if different domains of consumption, or domains of consumption across species, result from the same underlying mechanisms (e.g., neural mechanisms, emotional bases).

**Typical examples of social and biological research on consumption include mechanisms of addiction, environmental education, decision making, and consumer branding. Our focus is on critical, primary scientific, teaching, and student goals.**

**Items showing back to the site will be improved over the year to include:**

- Special events and speakers
- New research findings
- Associated faculty/PhD students
- Student resources for the students
- Teaching modules for every education

Consumption Research Webpage  
<http://consumption.umich.edu>