

Sighing Seminar

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Citation

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Abstract

Sir,

The revisionist and reformist educationists are proposing the idea— with some substance in their argument – that the seminar as an educational tool has suffered a decline. A few months ago, the authors undertook the task of finding out whether the seminar is dead (Halavais A, 2003), dying or lastly sighing. The work is still in progress; however, we would like to present the preliminary findings of our study. Sans doute, it potentiated the notion that, unless seminars are reinvigorated, their ultimate fall over the precipice is a certainty.

Postgraduate seminars in forensic medicine were selected as case study. Each MD postgraduate student was asked to present a seminar. The study is based on a total of 50 seminars spread over a reasonable period of time to allow the students and the faculty to prepare. Four faculty staff, including a professor, associate professors and an assistant professor, and six postgraduate students were the attendees of these seminars. Each of them was advised to ask five questions on the topic of the seminar. Each question was assessed on the scale of analogous management principle; ‘V’=vital, ‘E’=essential, and ‘D’= desirable, i.e., VED. ‘Vital’ was the core element of the topic whereas ‘essential’ constitute aspects relative but adherent to the main theme. ‘Desirable’ was considered as frills that would lend additional steam to the locomotive (‘V’) pulling the carriage (‘E’).

INITIAL OBSERVATION

On the basis of delineating the importance, relevance and focus of the questions, 16% constituted vital, 32% essential and 52% as desirable domains. In terms of duration of presentation of seminars by the postgraduates through PowerPoint, 40 minutes was the allotted time limit, and another one hour was devoted to the interactive session. Sixty-five percent of the time was spent on the desirable

aspect during interactive session. It was found that questions asked on the desirable domain were relished by the audience, whereas it appeared that vital and essential domains were quickly glossed over. It was apparent that the speaker had lost interest.

ARBITRARY DEDUCTION

Since the study is ongoing, only the initial remarks can be made at this stage.

The attendees did not come well prepared, although the date for presentation was announced at least two weeks earlier.

The concentration of all was frayed. Their cognizance of the problems under discussion was taken up casually.

Since the faculty was experienced, it was easier for them to dwell on the desirable aspect of the topic and they managed to camouflage their ‘poor’ erudition.

The speaker naturally focused chiefly on the core element of the topic. Obviously, at the end of the seminar he stood the least to gain from it apart from that which he has delivered. It was purely his effort and there was no collateral advantage accruing to it that would be expected from the learning audience.

In view of the above, it appears that interest in the postgraduate seminar is waning. It needs resuscitation. In our opinion, it is not dead yet. Recent innovations in teaching and learning methodologies may hasten its death-knell, but we do not feel that this will be soon.

The authors contend that they are exploring ways and means to ameliorate the dismal status of postgraduate seminars, and that these shall be presented in a fully-researched article. Until such time, this finding is brought to the knowledge of readers with the desire that let the seminars remain buoyant.

References

1. Halavais, A. 2003. Death of a seminar. In 'A Thaumaturgical Compendium'. Retrieved Jan 8, 2012. Available at: <http://alex.halavais.net/death-of-a-seminar>

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