

Student Seminar FAQs

Prof. Ismar Volic, fall 2010

Student seminar is an important venue for learning mathematics in a way that removes the faculty from the process to a large extent. Participating in the seminar can be beneficial in many ways because attending the seminar and giving a talk can help you see how mathematics behaves (and whether you like it) when you're in charge. In fact, gaining experience with this kind of an independent way of learning and experiencing mathematics is so important that many of our peer institutions make attending and presenting in the student seminar a part of their graduation requirements. My role in this seminar is therefore simply one of a facilitator and an administrator who will mostly just give you some guidance on how to prepare your talk (or send you to another professor who can help you with this) and help you schedule it. You are ultimately the ones who should make this seminar series interesting, realize its importance, make it matter, and help it build momentum so that it becomes a permanent event in the math department. Here are some more particulars:

1) *What is this seminar all about?*

- a) This is a seminar where talks are given by students and are aimed at students.
- b) The talks should be accessible to everyone with some calculus knowledge, but more advanced math might be required on occasion as prerequisite for some talks. A series of two or more talks might sometimes be given if it takes that long to cover something well. Talks can be given in pairs.

2) *How does it work?*

- a) The seminar takes place almost every Monday from 12:30 to 1:20 in SCI 364, with lunch in SCI 362 right before the talks. See http://www.wellesley.edu/Math/activities_seminars.html for the up-to-date schedule.
- b) Students (and occasionally faculty) give 45-minute talks on cool math. Everyone is invited.

3) *What do I get out of it?*

- a) You get to learn math you would not hear about in your classes and get a sense of the variety of math that's out there.
- b) You can get a flavor of a new subject and some sense of whether you want to take a class in it if this is something we offer or pursue it in an independent study or an honors thesis.
- c) You can get a sense of what it's like to lecture/teach (it's one thing to know math and another to be able to explain it).
- d) You can get a sense of what it's like to research mathematics (it's one thing to be handed math by your professors and another to discover it).
- e) You get to meet other math majors and faculty.
- f) If you give a talk, you can put it on your CV (grad school admission officials like this kind of stuff).
- g) You can fulfill your presentation requirement by giving a talk.

4) *Now I really want to give a talk. How do I go about it?*

- a) If you know what you'd like to talk about, skip to part c). If not,
- b) Peruse the list of topics available at http://www.wellesley.edu/Math/activities_seminars.html or contact Prof. Volic or Prof. Munson to obtain a copy. Also contact one of them if you need more ideas.
- c) If you have your own topic, contact Prof. Volic or Prof. Munson so he can direct you to the faculty member who is most knowledgeable about it and would be willing to help you prepare your presentation. If you like a topic from the list of suggested topics, you can also approach the faculty member whose name appears alongside it directly to see whether they're willing to help you prepare it.
- d) Contact Prof. Volic or Prof. Munson so they can help you choose the date for your talk.
- e) Work with the faculty member on getting your talk ready.
- f) Give the talk and feel great about it.