The Peer Group Format

Definition
In the Peer Group format, *course members are expected to actively contribute to the presentation of course content*. The principal role of the course leader is that of a class organizer and facilitator with respect to class members' responsibility for presenting portions of the course. Courses are based on material which the entire class reads. The setting encourages discussion.

Member Expectations
It is very important that members understand the nature of the Peer Group format before they register. Each Peer Group course description in the Osher course catalog needs to identify the basic elements of the format. Toward the goal of member understanding, this document will be available on the Osher at RIT website as a downloadable pdf. Additionally, the following standard language will be added to each course description where it is the course leader's intent to use the Peer Group format:

This course will use the peer group format. Course members will be expected to actively contribute to the presentation of course content.
(See osher.rit.edu/files/PeerGroup.pdf)

While participation as class presenters is encouraged in the Peer Group format, presenting class material is **voluntary** not required. Different courses will vary with respect to the number of course members who present course material. Members who register for Peer Group format classes should understand that while formal participation is not mandatory, they should also also understand that presentation of course content by course members is the central focus of the course.

Role of the Course Leader
The course leader (or leaders) should be prepared to lead the first two classes. At the first class, the leader should explain the format, discuss the benefit of peer group participation and clarify the role of the course leader. Also at the first session an initial overview of the course should be presented which will be subject to modification as presentation assignments are made for future classes.

The course leader should inform class participants that the content and format of each presentation will be determined by the presenter. Division of the course into segments appears to be especially easy to do when the subject of the course is a specific book as the division of the classes by book chapters is a natural process. It may be helpful for the course leader to identify specific topics from which course members could select for their presentations.

The leader should welcome all ideas about the material to be covered and should encourage discussion of ideas tangential to the core. By the end of the first 2 – 3 classes, the outline and assignments for the entire course should be completed.

Book-Based Peer Group Courses

The following process guidelines have proven useful in peer group format courses based on a book. These guidelines have general applicability and potential peer group format course leaders should consider their utility in their own courses whether the course will be based on a book or on a specific topic or area of study.

1. The book (or area of study) selected for the class should be broad enough to offer many potential presentation topics.

2. Presentations are not expected to be "book reports" which summarize or repeat the book's content, but jumping off points from which each member can develop in his/her own way.

3. The majority of presentations should be 15-20 minutes and thus not intimidating to new presenters. When members know they will need more time, they should inform the course leader (facilitator) as soon as possible so that they may be accommodated.

4. Facilitators need to be ready to fill in as needed whether for 20 minutes or a full session.

5. The first two sessions should be handled completely by the facilitator to give members the time needed not only to read the text but develop presentations for the following weeks.

6. Part of first class should be spent describing the concept of the Peer Group format and *encouraging* members' active participation. It must be stressed that the class cannot be a success without them.

7. If the class is full, it should be explained that with a full classroom there would not be time for everyone to take part. This will make more reticent members feel accepted.

8. At the first class session, the leader should identify specific potential presentation topics for course members to *choose from* if they wish. This reduces much of the unknown and some of the pressure of actively participating. In one successful book-based course, the course leaders presented 40 potential topics for selection by course members. The course leader should also be open to other topics proposed by course members.

9. Begin the process of getting course members to "sign-up" for a topic at the first class session. Course leaders should not expect to have the list of sign-ups completed before the third week. Even after that, it might be useful let members know if an interesting topic was still open - "The quiet sell"

10. It may not be possible to create a firm class schedule until the course leader can determine course member interest by their willingness to volunteer. A flexible weekly schedule should be established. This schedule will be subject to change due to members own schedules with travel etc. Maximum flexibility in scheduling may be achieved if the topics are independent of one another.

11. Use of PowerPoint or other A/V methods are fine, but not absolutely necessary for course member presentations.

12. Offer technical assistance in the use of PowerPoint presentations or other technologies as aids to course members. Assistance may be provided by a variety of resources including the course leader, A/V Wizards Committee, Technology Committee and Course Offerings Committee.

13. Time-keeping is essential when several people are presenting in one class period. A 5-minute warning, followed by a 2-minute warning can let presenters know it is time to conclude.

14. Create a group email list to let course members know the topics for the next and future classes.

Peer Group Coaches
There are a number of Osher members who have experience in leading courses using the Peer Group format. These members would be willing to act as coaches to course leaders as they plan their course. Contact the Chair of the Course Offerings Committee if interested in getting matched with a coach.

Course Offerings Committee
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