



Teaching Conference for
Management Educators

**OBTC 2015 at University of La Verne
June 17th – 20th, 2015**

Submission Template

SUBMISSION GUIDANCE

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Please include ALL supplementary text at the end of this document* *Only one document should be submitted

**Submission Template for the
2015 OBTC Teaching Conference for Management Educators**

1) Title of Proposal:

Learning as a community through Socratic seminars

2) Abstract:

Please include a brief session description (not to exceed 100 words). If your proposal is accepted, this description will be printed in the conference program.

How can educators adopt a learning in community spirit? I have effectively used Socratic seminars as a collaborative pedagogy in my human resource management (HRM) courses. Students are assigned two articles and asked to develop five inquiry-based questions that generates a lively dialogue in the classrooms. The seminar takes approximately 60-90 minutes of my class time. This empirical study, conducted in 2014, showcases the results of 43 graduate students who have shared their perceptions on this method via surveys. Students have shared several positive experiences as this format allows them construct and question various interpretations of the learning material.

(98 words)

3) Keywords:

Use three or four keywords to describe your session.

- Collaborative learning
- Self-constructed knowledge
- Student-centered learning

4) Format

- Activity or exercise
- Discussion roundtable (60 minute only)
- General discussion session**

5) Time Requested:

- 30 Minutes
- 60 Minutes** (*Roundtables must select 60 minutes*)
- 90 Minutes

6) Planning Details:

Does your session have any special requirements for space or materials?

Equipment for power point presentation

7) Learning Objectives or Goals for the Session:

What are 2-4 specific learning outcomes that participants will get from your session?

- To share the results of this empirical study regarding students' perceptions of the benefits and challenges of Socratic seminars
- To discuss the three structured phases that I have developed for this learning format (Quiet, Reflective, and Learning phases)
- To identify any strategies to overcome the challenges as identified by students in this study

Management or Teaching Topics:

Describe what management and/or teaching topics are relevant to your session, and why. Please include theoretical, disciplinary, or theoretical foundations that will help reviewers understand how your ideas fit within the broader field of management.

Socratic seminars are identified as a teaching method that allow students to construct and question their own learning paradigms. These kinds of pedagogies provide students opportunities to reflect, question, and construct meaningful concepts around their subject materials. Thus in this learning process, students become active learners responsible for their own professional growth. This method allows students to form their own knowledge communities and develop a better understanding of their assigned learning topics (Bain, 2004; Alvarado, 2008). This paper identifies how Socrates seminars have been used as an effective teaching method in HRM graduate classes.

This pedagogy is very relevant to other teaching topics of student-centered learning where the burden of acquiring knowledge is completely on the student. This didactic method also provides an opportunity for instructors to modify the traditional environment of instructors questioning students to that of students interacting with their own peers. The student gets the spotlight in this learning format (Letts, 1998; McGraw, 1998). Also, learners retain information better when they are trying to construct their own interpretations of the subject matter. For example, students in a games education classes demonstrated better strategizing skills and teamwork as they developed an excellent comprehension of the games through the Socratic method (Butler, 1997).

The social constructivist theory is the theoretical framework that will be adopted for understanding this research topic. This model emphasizes the importance of meaningful social exchanges among learners. Vygotsky, a distinguished Russian scholar, pioneered the concept in understanding learning from a constructivist perspective. Learners will build or construct their knowledge only if they are provided opportunities to exchange ideas with other learners. The Russian word, “*obuchenie*” or learning, has a collective connotation suggesting that learning in a community rather than in isolation has positive outcomes (Wertsch & Sohmer, 1995; Biech, 2008). Purposeful interactions among students allows them to achieve their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), or moving from one level of knowledge acquisition to the next. As the learners work together, they generate their own interpretations enhancing their understanding of the topic (Francis-Seton, 2011; Stetsenko, 2010, Carter, 2005).

8) Session Description and Plan:

What will you actually do in this session? What activities will you facilitate, how long will they take, and how will participants be involved? Reviewers will be evaluating how well the time request matches the activities you'd like to do, and the extent you can reasonably accomplish the session's goals. Reviewers will also be looking for how you are engaging the participants in the session. Include a timeline for your session.

1. Presentation

20 minutes: I will present my paper with the results of my empirical study (Pearson's correlations, regressions, means, and open-ended answers)

2. Q & A

15 minutes: I will allow sufficient time for Q & A from the audience

3. Audience Activities

25 minutes: I will share the three phases (Quiet, Reflective, and Learning) of the Socratic seminar that I have developed and ask the audience for their input on this format. I will share my students' positive and negative responses via open-ended questions. I will solicit other scholars' opinions on how to overcome some challenges identified by students. I will also discuss how I carefully choose the two articles for each course and will share samples of these articles. I will get the audience involved by asking if any other faculty are interested in adopting this kind of collaborative learning in their classrooms. If they are, I will offer any suggestions to help them design such formats in their classes.

9) For Activities and Exercises:

Attach any materials needed to run the activity and debriefing questions. Evidence for effectiveness may also be included.

This empirical study (N= 43) was conducted on graduate students in the spring and fall semesters of 2014 in a private university in the north eastern region of the country. The survey included 10 questions that examined students' perceptions on Socratic seminars. The results of this preliminary analysis (mean or average) is provided in Table 1. The survey questions were provided in a 5 point Likert scale of Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. The results demonstrate that students perceived the Socratic seminars made the topic more interesting (4.37), allowed them to have a collaborative learning style (4.31), and allowed them to think critically (4.17).

The survey also had an open-ended question to understand any other concerns students may have about this teaching method. Table 2 provides these students' answers which has been differentiated into positive and negative themes. This analysis will help the instructor offer any strategies to overcome the challenges students may have. In their open-ended comments, students have commented on the collaborative nature, practical insights, learning as a community, and being engaging as positive aspects of the seminar. They have also indicated that digressing from the topic, domination by a few students, formulating questions, and seminar time as negative aspects of this learning method.

Also, the study *will examine* the role of demographic variables (such as age and gender) on the preferences for Socrates seminars as the surveys have collected such demographic information. Relevant statistical analyses of Pearson correlations and regressions will be performed to understand if any of these independent variables predict preferences for this pedagogy.

10) Implications for Teaching or for Teachers:

What is the contribution of your session?

My contribution is to showcase how I use this method effectively in HRM (human resource management) classes. To the best of my knowledge, I did not identify any empirical studies demonstrating the use of Socratic seminars in HRM classes per se. The HRM field allows for an inquiry format of discussion as several controversial themes abound the subject (Ezzedeen, 2008). The Socrates method has already been successfully adopted in a variety of diverse fields such as psychotherapy, political science, and games education (Overholser, 2011, 2010, 1991 1992; Howard, 2006; Butler, 1997). Thus, an instructor of HRM or OB (organizational behavior) can create a learning environment where the burden is on the students to initiate and hold a dialogue and discussion.

11) Application to Conference theme:

How does your session fit with the overall OBTC theme of Learning in Community?

This session fits aptly with the conference theme as it focuses on communal learning. Students in my seminars construct knowledge along with their peers as one big learning community. I encourage them to develop creative questions that will challenge traditional mental paradigms about the subject matter. We go through several examples of questions before the actual seminar. This method of creating questions and answering them as a group creates a spirit of collaboration as they seek input from one another. The seminar puts the spotlight on the students changing the traditional format of the teacher being the sole authority in the classroom. The unique experiences of students' from different

backgrounds enhance the variety in the discussion creating a mini learning community in the classroom.

12) Unique Contribution to OBTC:

Have you presented the work in this proposal before? If so, how will it be different? Is this proposal under current review somewhere else? If so, please explain. How will your proposal be different for the OBTC conference?

I have not presented this paper anywhere else.

References and/or Additional Materials:

Alvarado, S. (2008). Quick coach guide to critical thinking. Boston. Houghton Mifflin Company.

Bain, K (2004). *What the best college teachers do*. Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

Biech, E. (2008). ASTD Handbook for learning professionals. Instructional Design Models and Learning Theories, pp 202-210. United Book Press Inc, Maryland, USA.

Butler, J. (1997). How would Socrates teach games? A constructivist approach. *Journal of Physical Education, Recreation, & Dance*, 68 (9), 42-47.

Carter, C. (2005). Vygotsky & assessment for learning (AFL). *Mathematics Teaching*, 192, 9-11.

Ezzedeen, S.. (2008). Facilitating class discussions around current and controversial issues: Ten recommendations for teachers. *College Teaching*, 56(4), 230-236.

Letts, N. (1994). Socrates in your classroom. *Teaching Pre K-8*, 24 (7) 48-51.

McGraw, C. (1998). Teaching Teenagers? "Think, do learn!." *The Education Digest*, 63 (6), 4-47.

Overholser, J. (2011). Collaborative empiricism, guided discovery, and the Socratic method: Core processes for effective cognitive therapy. *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice*, 18(1), 62-66.

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Stetsenko, A. (2010). Teaching-learning and development as activist projects of historical Becoming; expanding Vygotsky’s approach to pedagogy. *Pedagogies*, 5 (1), 6-16.

Wertsch, J. & Sohmer, R., (1995). Vygotsky on Learning and Development. *Human Development*, 38, 332-337.

Table 1: Means of the Students’ Responses to the 10 survey questions

#	Questions from the survey	Means of Responses*
1	The Socrates seminar enhanced my understanding of the topic discussed	4.12
2	The Socrates seminar helped me interpret the material in a meaningful way	4.09
3	The Socrates Seminar made the topic more interesting and enriching	4.37
4	The Socrates Seminar made me understand the real-world relevance of this concept better.	3.93
5	The Socrates seminar was a difficult learning method as I had to develop questions	2.30
6	The Socrates seminar was a difficult learning method as I had to follow a dialogue approach	2.30
7	The Socrates seminar helped me understand the importance of an inquiry-approach (asking questions)	4.02
8	The Socrates seminar helped me to think critically (synthesizing, analyzing, & understanding information)	4.17
9	The learning approach was enjoyable as it allowed me observe and comment on other students’ perspectives	4.31
10	The Socrates Seminar enhanced my learning as it adopted a collaborative learning approach	4.14

N=43

*(Strongly Agree=5; Agree= 4; Neutral= 3; Disagree= 2; Strongly Disagree= 1)

Table 2: Analysis of Students’ Answers to Open-ended Responses

#	Students’ Positive Responses	Theme	Students’ Negative Responses	Theme
1.	Great experience to mix new material with “real” experiences and gain insights. We are forced to think more outside the box	Practical insights	Most difficult aspect was since everyone had many questions which led to many other related questions.	Moving away from the topic
2.	I enjoyed the “conversational” aspect of the Socrates Seminar.	Collaborative Learning	Identifying questions was a little challenging task.	Developing questions
3.	I enjoyed the Socrates Seminar but felt it was neutral in terms of enhancing the learning experience	Neutral Learning experience	I did not enjoy this activity as felt this was rushed and that a few people dominated the discussion while others didn’t have the opportunity to say much.	All students did not get equal opportunity to participate
4.	I was happy to hear other’s perspective on their topic of HR.	Collaborative Learning	It may be better in smaller groups to allow introverts to participate	Extroverts were able to participate more
5.	It was nice change of pace form traditional lectures	Different format of learning	The pace was a little bit fast, I had something to say but everybody moved on before I said it.	Learning format too fast
6.	I was dreading this activity before class, but really enjoyed it.	Engaging	Having an example was great for leading the class discussion. It would be great if we could have an example prior to creating the questions.	Examples related to developing questions prior to the seminar
7.	I really enjoyed the seminar. I think group discussions enhanced my ideas and gave me new thoughts	Collaborative Learning	The seminar should be longer to cover more important points and students have more chances to raise questions.	Longer time for discussion
8	It was really a good approach to learn better on the topic.	Different format of learning	Preparing for the Socrates Seminar required a strong understanding of the material.	Students’ responsibility to understand the topic
9	Great project	Positive comment	The challenge of this learning method is that some students do not stick to the topic and that takes time away from the learning	Moving away from the topic

#	Students' Positive Responses	Theme	Students' Negative Responses	Theme
10	Great learning method and tool for open discussion	Learning in a community	I guess the only difficulty was speaking at the time others wanted to change the question. It was hard to go back to the question you wanted to answer	Having structure to the seminar
11	I think the Socrates Seminar is a great method that is fun. It also helped me obtain a broader perspective on the subject due to the active discussion and opinions of others	Learning in a community	Short discussion. Hard to ask questions	Longer time for discussion
12	I enjoyed the Socrates seminar more than I expected. It was good to hear how others viewed the article and the questions they came up with.	Learning in a community	I would have liked a little bit more information about the seminar and maybe a different article	More prep on the seminar
13	The Socrates seminar really helped validate some thoughts I had about the article, in addition to providing some fresh perspectives	Collaborative Learning		
14	The experience was great and I got to learn from my classmates and learn their point of view on various HR and hiring issues/topics.	Learning in a community		

N=43