

Jefferson Trust
Project Report on Flash Seminars
October 2011

1. Please give a summary of the project to date.

Flash Seminars are one-time mini-classes that create high energy spaces outside the formal classroom for learning and discussion. In the 2010-2011 school year, we held 74 flash seminars with faculty in over 20 departments. We have held 7 seminars to date this fall, have confirmed 9 more for this October, and have many more in the works. We have also expanded the program to allow visiting speakers lead Flash Seminars in addition to professors. For example, visiting Ashoka Fellow, Ben Powell, led a Flash Seminar on crowd-funding during his trip to UVA in September and Visiting Brown College speakers, Sean Borton and Vandana Shiva, are scheduled to lead seminars during their visits later this year.

2. What has been the total cost to date of the project?

Thus far, we have spent a total of about \$101 dollars on Flash Seminars so far. Funding has gone towards food (usually Kohn's cookies or tortilla chips/salsa) and space reservations at Morven Farms. The breakdown of this amount is about \$21 on food and \$80 on Morven space reservations since each seminar held there is \$40 and we have held a total of 2 seminars there so far.

3. What successes can you report coming out of the project?

In addition to the many thoughtful conversations and connections made between students, faculty, and community members, the project has inspired several other initiatives and programs. For instance, UNC-Chapel Hill began offering Flash seminars this fall, and has held three seminars to date (<http://flashseminars.weebly.com/blog.html>). Within UVA, one 3rd-year student involved in the early phases of Flash seminars began a literary discussion series called "The Breakfast Club" as a spin-off of Flash Seminars for people interested in coming together to discuss poetry and short stories. Breakfast Club discussions are held at the Art Museum every other Friday morning and now attract a steady group of professors and students. The Flash Seminar team has also met with a member of the Faculty Senate to discuss ways to encourage more professors to attend Flash Seminars and informed about other civic engagement events at UVA through the EngageUVA list-serv (which people can subscribe to simply by emailing engage@virginia.edu).

4. What problems if any have you faced as you rolled out the project?

The only minor problem we have faced has been encountering an overwhelming amount of interest from first-years, whom have never attended a Flash Seminar, that want to help organize them. We were excited by their enthusiasm so welcomed this idea at first.

However, over the past month, we learned that it is extremely beneficial for students to have at least attended 2 or 3 seminars before organizing one and to have been at the University long enough to establish solid relationships with professors so that asking them to do a Flash Seminar is natural and not forced. Since realizing this, we have guided the first-years whom have already initiated contact with professors and helped them follow through, and have encouraged the others to just attend seminars this semester until they gain more experience and get a better feel for how Flash Seminars work. Other than that, we have had no problems rolling out the project smoothly.

5. What was the total number of people working on the project?

A total of about 32 students have contributed to organizing Flash Seminars so far and about 81 professors/experts have contributed to the project by taking the time to plan and then lead one.

6. How many students were involved in this project?

There is a total of about 32 student organizers currently working on this project. These students attend occasional 'flash' meetings and have organized (or are planning to organize) at least 1 seminar. Of these students, about 10 of them have been proactive about organizing multiple seminars. Of these 10 students, 4 of them meet weekly to brainstorm future seminars, discuss planning progress, and to debrief the past week's seminars. Of these 4 students, 2 of them communicate daily to update each other on any news or developments and to ensure that everything is running smoothly, all of people's inquiries have been answered, and that loose ends are tied.

7. How many people did the project impact?

Since the start of the 2011-2012 school year, approximately 75 students, faculty, and community members have attended a Flash Seminar. In the 2010-2011 school year, we held seventy-four Flash Seminars, each of which hosted between seven and twenty-five participants. All in all, Flash Seminars has impacted hundreds of students, faculty, and community members. (Beginning this semester, we intend to be more diligent in tracking the number of participants to have a better sense of the impact the project is making.)

8. Do you feel that the project has had an impact on the University community?

Yes. Flash Seminars have encouraged intellectual discussion and fed intellectual curiosity in the University community by providing a forum where students, faculty, and the community can engage in knowledge-building and thought-provoking conversation. Many faculty members have asked to participate in the program in order to reach a new audience or take advantage of the opportunity to speak on a well-loved subject. Students return to Flash Seminars time and again to take part in discussion. Flash Seminars have also brought Charlottesville citizens into the University community in new ways, by hosting them as speakers or participants. While the program is still new and growing, Flash Seminars are being increasingly known for bringing diverse groups of people

together to critically discuss a wide range of topics.

9. Is the project completed at this time? If not, when do you expect to see the project completed?

No. The Flash Seminar program is designed to be an ongoing, organic project. Because it is meant to inspire relevant and timely discussions within the community, we expect it to continue as long as students, faculty, and community members are still curious and eager to engage in stimulating discussions. We have faith that the project will continue to run under strong leadership because there is a lot of enthusiasm and commitment from younger students who have demonstrated strong organizational and planning skills. We believe these younger students will be eager and capable of running Flash Seminars once the older students graduate. We are consciously making an effort to teach these students how to train younger ones to create and run Flash Seminars so that the project can continue even after they graduate.

10. Are there plans for the project to continue once this funding cycle is complete? If so, what are those plans?

The generous \$8,000 grant from the Jefferson Trust will be able to support Flash Seminars for the next few years since we only spend a small amount annually for food, space reservations, and potentially transportation and admissions tickets in the future. Therefore, there are no plans to find more funding for the project in the immediate future.

11. Any other comments that you would like to share concerning this project:

We greatly appreciate the support of the Jefferson Trust and can't thank you enough for making Flash Seminars possible. We encourage you to subscribe to EngageUVA (by emailing engage@virginia.edu) and hope you attend some Flash Seminars that interest you!