

## Colloquia instead of Seminars?

Thomas G. Field, Jr.

Professor of Law, Franklin Pierce Law Center

Aside from some tendency of limited enrollment to spark more class discussion and the need to grade papers instead of exams, seminars differ little from other law school classes. “Colloquia,” however, commonly defined as “seminars led by different lecturers,” are truly distinct.

More than a decade of experience has convinced me that student lectures, as the term signifies, yield better papers. Colloquia also, of course, offer enhanced opportunities for students to polish oral communication skills.

With respect to substance, students who know what all their classmates are doing can better share useful information. That occurs even when topics lack strong substantive relationships. Benefits only increase when each participant makes two presentations — something possible when the first is based on a preliminary outline and the second is based on a rough draft.

Substance aside, student presentations typically spark harder work and livelier discussions. Indeed, students disinclined to excel may work harder for peer approval than for grades. Most also enjoy learning from as well as teaching classmates. I have found, perhaps because they are motivated at least in part by mutual respect, students to evidence genuine interest in each-others’ work.

Only two difficulties seem likely.

First, the need to coordinate and schedule presentations isn’t trivial. I’d be happy to discuss strategies for addressing that with anyone interested.

Possibly the largest challenge, as when teaching someone to ride a bicycle, is to know how and when to let go. Most problems can be spotted by requiring students to submit outlines and drafts in advance. Once a class begins, however, faculty must be prepared to tolerate a, sometimes painfully, large amount of floundering to avoid taking over the class.