

PHYS 790
Graduate Seminar
Fall 2008

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Meets: Weekly on Thursdays at 4:00 p.m. in Goudsmit Conference Room (LP-208).

Attendance: Attendance at seminars is required (two excused absences are permitted). Plan to arrive on time. It is rude and unfair to your colleagues to arrive late. PHYS 790 students are also required to attend at least five Physics Department or Atmospheric Sciences Colloquia during the semester. A sign-up sheet will be available.

Description and Objectives:

PHYS 790 is a required one-credit course with several objectives:

- To give students practice giving oral scientific presentations.
- To supplement the graduate curriculum with topics of current interest.
- To promote internal communication among students and faculty about research activities in the Department.
- To connect the physics, chemical physics and atmospheric sciences programs.

Motivations:

Oral presentations are a standard means of communicating ideas and disseminating knowledge in all fields. The effectiveness of oral presentations is widely used by employers to assess the qualifications and communication skills of candidates for professional positions. Frequently hiring and million-dollar funding decisions boil down to the effectiveness of a single oral presentation! Therefore, learning to give an effective presentation will help you to get the job you want and to have a successful career as a scientist. The earlier you begin to acquire and to develop presentation skills, the more successful you will be. Bad habits, once learned, are difficult to break. You will learn not only by preparing, practicing and giving your own presentation, but also by paying careful attention to those given by others, by asking relevant questions, and by giving thoughtful, constructive feedback. As an added bonus, you will learn about some topics of current scientific interest that are not covered in regular classes.

General Format and Guidelines:

General information and all related course materials will be available via *WebCampus*. Each student enrolled will present one seminar, and will additionally serve as the moderator for the seminar presented by another student. Students are required to attend and to participate in seminars. There is broad discretion in your selection of a topic, but it must be scientific in nature. Topics related to your thesis or dissertation research are welcomed but not mandatory. An effective speaker always orients his/her presentation to the audience, and all graduate seminars must therefore be directed to non-specialists. Each presentation will be followed by a brief discussion and analysis.

Grading:

Your grade will be based on evaluations of your presentation by students and faculty, timely submission of a title and abstract, duration of your seminar, attendance and participation (by completing evaluation forms thoughtfully and asking relevant questions). Completed and signed evaluation forms or a sign-up list will provide evidence of your attendance at a seminar or colloquium.

Specific Guidelines for Seminars:

Please pay particular attention to the following when preparing and presenting your seminar.

- Meet with me in advance to discuss your topic, or to get advice if you are having difficulty selecting a topic.
- Prepare an outline for your talk. A rule of thumb that I learned early on in my career and have since found useful when organizing a talk is to divide it into three main parts:
 1. *Tell them what you are going to tell them (outline of presentation).*
 2. *Tell them (body of presentation).*
 3. *Tell them what you told them (summary of main points and conclusions).*
- Submit a title and a 100-word (approximately) abstract to me via e-mail at least three days before your presentation, so that a notice may be posted and circulated to advertise your seminar.
- Introduce your topic as though you were giving your presentation to an audience that is scientifically literate, but in another field. Clearly define all terms and acronyms that are specific to your topic, and try to give the audience a context and an intuitive feeling.
- Plan your presentation for 30 minutes. A presentation of less than 25 minutes or more than 35 minutes will indicate inadequate preparation and practice.
- If possible, practice your talk with your advisor, and/or with a group of students a day or two in advance to determine whether the length is appropriate and to make adjustments based on their feedback.
- Don't try to put too much information onto a single visual aid. Use fonts that are large enough to be readable from the back of the room when projected. Color is effective in highlighting information, but don't overdo it! Label the axes on all graphs and provide a descriptive title for each. Allow at least two minutes for each slide, and longer for those containing more information or complexity.
- Speak directly to the audience and make eye contact. Your voice will project best if you direct it to the people in the back of the room. That will also help you to keep your head up so the entire audience can read your lips.
- Expect to be interrupted by questions. Points clarified at the time that questions arise will keep you from losing the attention of your audience.
- Meet with the student whose seminar you will be moderating in advance, to get the information needed to introduce her or him to the audience.
- The use of presentation software such as *PowerPoint* is encouraged but not required. Please inform me at least one day in advance if you have special hardware or software requirements, or if you plan to use your own computer.
- You will receive a summary of the evaluations and comments following your presentation.

Name of Evaluator: _____
(Required for PHYS 790 students)

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Seminar Evaluation and Feedback Sheet

Name of Speaker: _____

Date: _____

Please evaluate the presentation by assigning a rating of 0 to 5 in the categories listed below.

0 = unsatisfactory 1 = poor 2 = fair 3 = good 4 = very good 5 = excellent

Space is provided for comments and suggestions in each category. Please continue on the reverse side, if necessary. Since the aim of PHYS 790 is to improve oral communication skills, your constructive criticism and thoughtful feedback will be important to the speaker.

A summary of ratings and comments will be prepared for each speaker after the presentation. The names of individual evaluators will be confidential. **Completed evaluation forms will provide evidence of your participation in PHYS 790.**

Feedback to Speaker

1. INFORMATION CONTENT

(Please circle)

Introduction of subject:	0	1	2	3	4	5
Explanation of principles, terms:	0	1	2	3	4	5
Clarity of arguments:	0	1	2	3	4	5
Scientific content:	0	1	2	3	4	5
Comments:						

2. ORGANIZATION OF MATERIAL

Structure of presentation:	0	1	2	3	4	5
Logical development of ideas:	0	1	2	3	4	5
Relative emphasis:	0	1	2	3	4	5
Comments:						

3. PRESENTATION

Effectiveness of visual aids:	0	1	2	3	4	5
Communication and audibility:	0	1	2	3	4	5
Pace and length:	0	1	2	3	4	5
Comments:						