



# Briefing Note for Lecturers

## PARTICIPATING IN SEMINARS

Because most teaching at undergraduate level in mainland China is carried out in lectures, Chinese students will tend to have limited or no experience of what we describe here in Australia as a seminar. They also have limited experience of using English spontaneously and interactively. Because of this, a university seminar will be both an unfamiliar way of learning and often quite threatening for Chinese students. It is important, therefore, that we take the time to let Chinese students know:

- Why we value seminars as a learning experience
- What they can expect to happen in seminars
- What they are expected to do in seminars
- How they can use seminars to support their own learning and also the learning of their peers

### **Why we value seminars as a learning experience**

- It provides an opportunity to work closely with peers and a lecturer
- It provides a small and safe forum in which to express ideas and opinions, to ask questions and seek clarification
- It is a place where connections can be made with lecture material, with readings and other dimensions of a unit or course

## **What Chinese students can expect to happen in seminars**

Chinese students need to be alerted to the fact that seminars are places where:

- Challenging questions are posed (by both lecturer and students)
- Students are forthright and vocal
- Personal opinions are expressed and debated
- They will be expected to be active participants
- They may feel uncomfortable or intimidated initially – language may be difficult to understand and respond to quickly – student behaviour may appear aggressive / impolite
- The lecturer will notice if someone is struggling and will be able to provide assistance

## **What they are expected to do in seminars**

- Contribute to the best of their ability (without fear of losing face or feeling that their English needs to be perfect)
- Try out their growing knowledge of both discipline specific English and informal Aussie English
- 'Have a go' at voicing their own opinions (without fear of retribution or ridicule)
- Share their experiences and alternative cultural viewpoints and information
- Make personal / social connections with their peers (going beyond association with Chinese / other international students)
- Share the overall learning experience with their peers

## **How they can use seminars to support their own learning and also the learning of their peers**

- Talking about an idea may seem threatening but it is a good way to clarify information
- Other students can help Chinese students express ideas
- Chinese students can provide viewpoints from an alternative cultural perspective
- Ongoing reticence will be disadvantageous for all concerned in the seminar experience



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Additional materials and resources are available from  
<http://chinapostgraduates.murdoch.edu.au>

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