

## **Summer Seminar '08** Advice to First-timers



### **Important Information for First-Timers to Summer Seminar**

- The ESP website is designed to be as comprehensive as possible. Please refer to it for information about Summer Seminar Curriculum, Logistics, and Registration.
- The website also includes information about past Summer Seminars, a description page for each funded partnership, and a Resources page with documents to help arts educators create and maintain effective arts-in-education partnerships.
- Each ESP partnership is expected to send a team of no fewer than three people to Summer Seminar, and this team should include at least one teacher, one teaching artist and an administrator.
- Consultations at Summer Seminar with faculty are provided free of charge, which is not true if you meet with the same people before or after Summer Seminar.
- Summer Seminar is designed to be overwhelming. Well, not really. It is designed to meet the professional development needs of hundreds of people in a flexible way. Not every event will benefit every participant. Think of Summer Seminar as a very large, professional development buffet: Take the items that are most interesting to you, but don't feel you need to try everything—you'll feel overwhelmed.
- Each ESP partnership funded through NYSCA is part of a Regional Learning and Leadership Network (RLLN). These networks provide professional development and foster learning communities among ESP partnerships during the school year. The curriculum is based on Summer Seminar, the needs of the partnerships, and the input of individuals.

### **Advice to First-Timers at Summer Seminar from a Few "Veterans"**

Due to Summer Seminar's unique nature as a professional development retreat, we collected advice from a few participants who have attended Summer Seminar several times. The suggestions provided below are designed to help first-timers understand what to expect when they arrive on campus, and how to get the most out of a busy week.

#### **A few of the MOST IMPORTANT things about Summer Seminar a first-timer should know beforehand:**

- Summer Seminar is an informal gathering of cultural organization administrators, school faculty and teaching artists. As such, it is a unique opportunity to mingle and share with peers in a relaxing summer setting.
- The most important thing to know about Summer Seminar is that it will appear very confusing at first and you will be overwhelmed not only with the number of people there, but also with the number of learning opportunities offered. Of almost equal importance is the fact that you will somehow work your way through the process and find it one of the most thought-provoking and stimulating experiences you will ever have, both personally and professionally.

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- I believe every new person to Summer Seminar should bring an extension cord, shower shoes and a sense of humor. No, seriously; everyone should come ready and willing to learn, be inspired to learn and to develop life long relationships that make it possible to keep learning.
- It can sometimes feel like a “cult” at Summer Seminar. It is important to realize that each group is malleable, very gracious and totally accepting of “newbies.”
- Remember to make the art. This is very important to our spiritual, emotional and psychic well being and helps sustain us through the next year of intensity.”

### **Things to know about the curriculum and learning opportunities at Summer Seminar:**

- You get what you put into it. If you can be vulnerable enough to ask questions and make friends, the gift of Summer Seminar is that it lasts all year. Frequently the curriculum seems lofty and erudite and not down-and-dirty practical, but it helps me think about what I don’t know and what I need to learn. I love meeting with experts in one on one consultations where an hour can save hundreds.
- The many opportunities offered will appear very confusing, especially if you are not familiar with the faculty members and their particular strengths. I have always looked for topics that took me slightly outside of “my” field because it’s a great opportunity to see different perspectives. I have also tried different disciplines, for instance, a dance workshop because I work so much with visual art. It has often been helpful to have team members go to different workshops and then share what they learned. Consultations around a particular challenge in the project are really helpful.
- Peer-to-Peer discussions are enormously helpful to one’s own project, informative about other projects, and a forum where you really get to know colleagues who remain friends and mentors well beyond the Summer Seminar week.
- The Peer-to-Peer sessions are extremely helpful and offer an invaluable opportunity to receive input from other players in the field. However, as a new team member last year, I found the pre-seminar preparatory paperwork for the Peer-to-Peer sessions somewhat overwhelming to fill out. However, if you go through it systematically, it is not as difficult as it looks.
- Peer-to-Peer is for you and your team. Your peers’ answers are only as good as your question. Spend time with your team designing your question. Your facilitator’s job is to keep peers on track. Listen, participate and don’t get offended if the facilitator asks you to wrap it up or put your idea in the ‘parking lot.’
- Refrain from note taking: doodle, scribble, notate, but taking notes? Nah. You will miss the stuff of the activity. Journaling after an activity or at day’s end is a good reflective practice, to take home the meat of your work.

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- You can't do everything. Before you arrive, choose one activity for each day that really appeals to you. You can add on the others that appeal to you, if you feel up to it.
- I like to wake up early, work out, do my Summer Seminar thing, TAKE A NAP, and then run with the evening. Remember the old adage: More business happens on the golf course than in the board room? It's true at ESP too. Relationships are formed, bonds are made and deals are agreed to.
- As with any other "foreign" experience, time will be chomped away with the unfamiliar. Simple things that you normally do without a thought now eat up your energy, because you have to think and make decisions about them. Example: 'Where the heck is the light switch?'
- I like to remember [former Summer Seminar faculty chair] David O'Fallon's admonition to us- people get the most out of a gathering such as this in different ways. Some like to hover near the periphery, some like it in the middle- in the heat of it- some like to flit from one activity to another. His two feet rule is a good one also. "You have two feet. Use them when you need to and do NOT feel uncomfortable about using your feet to leave. You are the professional and you know yourself better than anyone."

### **On the unique culture of ESP and Summer Seminar...**

- Summer Seminar is different from a typical conference because it is centered around a particular project, ESP, in which everyone is involved. In addition to its excellent workshops, it provides invaluable Peer-to-Peer sessions, project planning time, one-on-one advice from top experts in the AIE field (if desired), a collegial atmosphere and four relaxed days to learn from and share with ones colleagues.
- This is the only time during my year that I get to meet with just people who work in ESP's. It is genuinely an opportunity to share problems and strategize solutions. Typically there is a theme which may or may not feel relevant at the moment, but frequently resonates long after the conference ends. Typical conferences don't usually focus on just arts-in-ed without a specific spin from a national organization. Without exception, you can expect to hear and see experts in the field that are not accessible to small organizations anywhere else. You also get to meet peers that become life-long resources.

### **Advice about facilities, meals, and transportation**

- My dorm room was clean and comfortable with bathroom nearby, but lacks the basics that the students would provide. Bring items such as a reading lamp, hair dryer, quilt or blanket, etc. All facilities are within walking distance and a shuttle bus is often available when needed. Meals are cafeteria style, nutritious, tasty and food is plentiful.
- The facilities are spread out on a large campus and not especially conducive to medium sized impromptu group work. That said, resourceful ESP'ers find discreet corners and there is always the tent, which provides great party opportunities to wind down after a brain stretching day. The food is heavy

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and greasy, but seems to make small improvements each year. The facilities are college dorms-- some are very intimate, others are in suites with group bathrooms. The air conditioning works well. Bring the things that will make you comfortable. I bring my own sheets, duvet and cotton rugs for the floor.

- I bring my own towel and pillow, each of which is bigger and thicker than the “army-issue” supplies you get when you stay in the dorms.
- Advice about logistical concerns
- I drive to and from the conference and stay on campus. This makes the experience very relaxed and easy for me.
- One of my favorite parts about going to Long Island from western New York is the *Road Trip*. The 9+ hours it takes for us to get there is terrific, because we really have the opportunity to bond as a team in the car before we get there. As an administrator, it provides us the opportunity to deal with some logistical details and homework en route.
- The space at CW Post, while I’m sure ADA compliant, is not really easy for anyone with physical challenges. You will be doing a lot of walking in the heat for meals as well as classes.

### **Why “veterans” are excited about returning to Summer Seminar**

- What excites me about returning to Summer Seminar is re-connecting with colleagues, meeting new ones, participating in workshops that give me new ways of looking at my work and our projects, and the intellectual stimulation of being surrounded by so many good minds. And oh yes, the opportunity to engage in a hands-on art experience that is deeply satisfying personally and somehow always useful professionally. I still can’t believe how much time I spent making pop-up books one summer – and yet I did my deepest thinking around my “Core Beliefs” during that time, and found that I could directly connect it to one of our projects in the fall.
- I love seeing old friends, meeting new friends and taking the time away from the crazy paced schedule we all live with, to go to Summer Camp where I learn more than I can absorb with people who ‘get it!’

### **One Person’s view of Summer Seminar’s place in the work year...**

The basis of my work is creative process, from basic administration of our organization, to our work with students, to professional development for teachers and teaching artists. I serve as Artistic Director for our organization.

It is important for me to stay focused and keep the “work” very clear for many different people. The reason I am mentioning this is that we are very focused on outcomes, process, and details. As the year progresses, it becomes more and more intense. The outcomes are more in focus, the attainment of goals closer and realized. Tunnel vision tends to set in. To compound this, the work is very lonely work. Few peers have time or energy to commiserate, since they are just as involved in their work as we are. We have less and less time to squeeze in time to share, support and reflect with one another.

Summer Seminar breaks this cycle. We make new and see old friends, hear different points of view, have rich conversations, make art, reflect and have “Aha’s.”