



# Arrowsmith blog

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« [Introducing the Active tectonics, quantitative structural geology and geomorphology research group at ASU Geological Society of America Annual Meeting presentations](#) »

## Why going to seminars and talks is a good idea.

As a student, you learn in several ways: by taking classes; by teaching yourself; by interacting with your fellow students, your supervisor, and other faculty in informal situations, and by meeting with visitors. You can learn from visitors both by going to their seminar(s) and by engaging in informal discussions with them.

When I was a graduate student, the most intense learning opportunities came from the “crucible” that was the weekly geophysics seminar. Every week several faculty, postdocs, visitors, and numerous graduate students were in attendance. We listened to the talks given by visitors, faculty, researchers, or students and then engage in discussion. Often the students were pretty quiet, but it was amazing to listen to the faculty spar over a concept, or stand up to clarify it, or scold us for giving subpar talks (and then tell us how to improve). It was also impressive to listen to fellow students as they worked to make their presentation clear and to answer questions. It was satisfying to feel one’s own presentations improve over the years and to see my fellow students get better too.

It was a great learning environment for the following reasons:

1. the discussions were generally high level, but people also took a few minutes of each lecture to present relevant basic concepts that were central to the discussion. These were concepts one might not encounter in an ordinary classroom;
2. Usually several faculty members were in attendance, so multiple different viewpoints and approaches to the problem at hand become clear;
3. Discussions were about scientific ideas and students were expected to contribute and were treated as scientific peers.

Over the years here at ASU, we have had varying levels of success with seminar series, and with corresponding student participation. I think that as a student, you should attend seminars (including colloquium, special seminars, defenses, group meetings, etc.) for several reasons:

1. Even if it is not immediately germane to your research, you cannot be close-minded about earth and space science. Presumably you find these topics interesting in general, otherwise you would not be here. Allow yourself to broaden your knowledge. Ph.D. students are particularly expected to be widely knowledgeable in the earth and space sciences, and lack of this knowledge will catch up to you in exams and job interviews. Remember that your career will span decades. You may be required to teach (or at least understand) a whole host of topics down the line, and, you don’t want to be perceived as scientifically insular by only working and understanding the same research topic for the rest of your life. Furthermore, as a graduate of SESE, people will expect that you will have a broad knowledge base, especially about what is going on here.

Earth science is really a small community. You may be surprised about who knows who or what. This should motivate you to learn to speak intelligently about topics outside your own research interests.

2. You might actually learn something relevant to your work. This may be either a specific concept about a process or data, or it may be a method of analysis, or even presentation. Sometimes people solve their problems in ways that can be very helpful to you and can thus be adapted.
3. It is important to be part of the community of your research group, SESE, and ASU. Attending seminars is the main opportunity to be part of this community. SESE is us. You should not use the third person when you talk about SESE. It will be what we make it. You reap what you sow. While you might say it is too little too late, note that the SESE colloquium is now in the hands of the SESE Graduate students. This will improve over time. Why not go and why not get more involved?

Now, I realize that everyone is busy. But, you have to make time to be active in your education. I am busier than any student. I go to more seminars than most students. If I can make the time, you can make time.

One final note. Sometimes seminars are not good. They are boring, poorly presented, take too long, etc. So, you have to be patient. You win some and you lose some. But if you keep going to seminars, you will find the nuggets and you will learn something. Getting those nuggets takes practice; the more seminars you attend, the more efficient you will become at gleaning the relevant and interesting elements from them.

Please go to seminars.

This blog entry has important editorial input from Amanda Clarke.

This entry was posted on Tuesday, August 21st, 2007 at 3:14 pm and is filed under [Seminars](#). You can follow any responses to this entry through the [RSS 2.0](#) feed. You can [leave a response](#), or [trackback](#) from your own site.

## One Response to “Why going to seminars and talks is a good idea.”

1. *David Says:*  
[August 21st, 2007 at 6:36 pm e](#)

I would like to harp on the motivation mentioned in this entry about becoming multidisciplinary individuals. I have learned from my job-hunting “expedition” that being a multidisciplinary individual is an immense asset to have. Employers, be it within the private industry or the state/federal government, are constantly looking for multidisciplinary individuals that are not only experts in multiple fields of study, but are also willing to expand their scope of knowledge. If we (as students) get in the habit of attending seminars, talks, presentations (i.e. expanding our scope of knowledge), we would very likely be that much more marketable when the time comes to look for a bill-paying profession (be it in academia or the private/government industry).

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