



Lifelong Learning

A Nonprofit Education Organization

P.O. Box 23228, Santa Barbara, CA 93121-3228

Phone (805) 967-6030

Email: vistas@silcom.com

Web: vistaslifelonglearning.org

Instructor's Handbook

By Ted Anagnoson

Vistas Curriculum Committee Chair, 2014-15

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Mission and Vision.

VISTAS Lifelong Learning, Inc., a non-profit membership organization, provides adults in the Santa Barbara area opportunities for continued learning through in-depth study of art, cinema, history, literature, philosophy, science, public policy, and other areas.

VISTAS seminars are for people who appreciate the relevance of our cultural heritage, like to think creatively, want to seek knowledge for its own sake, have the time to pursue these interests, and enjoy meeting like-minded people.

VISTAS is a self-governing, peer-led discussion group, and its members organize seminars, occasional lectures and social events. We are one of the few lifelong learning groups in the country unaffiliated with a university or college.

Instructors and Seminar Leaders.

The first and foremost thing to emphasize about giving a course is the sheer pleasure of learning and mastering a subject proficiently enough to speak to a group of others about it. Some of us do this routinely and know the feeling, but if you do not, we'd encourage you to try a single presentation of a half hour or hour or even a whole course of one, two, or three sessions. It's a good experience. Almost everyone who has done it feels a strong sense of accomplishment.

Instructors and seminar leaders are volunteers who subscribe to the mission and share the vision of our organization, designing and leading courses which promote the sharing of ideas and develop knowledge among all participants. Instructors choose topics for their courses, prepare lesson plans, select texts and allied teaching materials, and encourage participants to examine and discuss the issues that arise in the course sessions. Courses may be led by single instructors, or multiple speakers may contribute. There is no single model.

Instructors should aim to come to each course session well prepared, enthusiastic, and primed to anticipate the many questions and comments that bubble up when intellectually curious people exchange ideas.

Courses.

There is no typical Vistas course. Some courses involve text analyses of literature, others are self-reflective, still others have new information, historical information or something else to impart. Participants may be asked to read a lot or a little, listen to others, write a few or many pages, engage in discussions, or any combination of these and other learning experience.

Courses range from one to as many as eight weeks or more. There is no minimum or maximum, only that for one session, we need enough material or discussion to fill the time block of three hours. Generally speaking, courses run from 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. or from 1:30 to 4:30 p.m. the same day each week, and they are usually held at Maravilla in Goleta or Valle Verde in Santa Barbara. Other venues we have used in recent years include the Maritime Museum auditorium and the Museum of Natural History's Farrand Hall. We also have a program of small seminars that enroll about 15 students each. Most courses are larger, with thirty to sixty students.

I. Before the Term Begins.

A. Proposing a course.

Our courses usually begin in September and run through May or June. We don't have terms or semesters/quarters. If you wish to propose a course, you can see what has been done in the past on the Vistas web site (www.vistaslifelonglearning.org). We have a course proposal form that you can obtain from the Vistas business manager (vistas@silcom.com) or from the chair of the Vistas curriculum committee. It's a good idea to consult with the chair of the curriculum committee, but it isn't required. The form asks for a title, some idea of what will happen week by week, some information about you, etc. Proposals are sent to the members of the curriculum committee for their appraisals before a final decision is made by the curriculum committee chair.

B. Planning your course sessions.

You should think about your course carefully in terms of its aims and goals and how these can be accomplished in the given number of sessions. Try to ensure time for questions and discussion – the more discussion the better – and think about alternative ways to deliver the material such as debates, a panel of Vistas members who know about X issue, or other models, in addition to lecturing and taking questions. The most exciting Vistas courses are usually those that combine some lecturing with exciting discussions and give and take among members.

C. Class Liaisons.

Every Vistas class, except those led by a member of the curriculum committee, has a liaison appointed from the curriculum committee to assist the instructor or coordinator with course details. These include facility questions, audio-visual questions, computer questions, when the break is, how much copying Vistas will pay for, etc. If the liaison doesn't know the answer to a particular question, he or she will know who to ask. The course liaison can offer to show the instructor the room in advance of the class. See the appendix to this handbook for a list of course liaison responsibilities.

D. Course syllabus.

Most Vistas courses don't have a full syllabus along the lines of what is done in colleges and universities, but a shortened version is useful, consisting perhaps of an outline or list of topics for each week along with some suggested readings, plus contact information for you. You can email this (the office will do this for you) before the class or distribute it at the first class.

E. Welcome letter.

Always a nice touch, welcoming people to the course, saying something about you and the course, and including a one or two page syllabus. This should be sent about a week before the course, but earlier if certain readings should be done before the course starts. You can ask for biographical sketches of those in a small course and send those out too, if relevant, saving valuable class time if your class is one where each person will take some time to do a short introduction at the first session.

F. Facilities and parking.

Most Vistas courses are held at Maravilla senior living community, 5486 Calle Real, Santa Barbara, CA 93111 in the Clubhouse or Valencia room, or at Valle Verde senior living community, 900 Calle de los Amigos, Santa Barbara, CA 93105. Parking is available at both locations. We have also used the Maritime Museum auditorium (parking at the harbor) and the Natural History Museum (free parking) or the Goleta branch library on North Fairview (free parking).

G. Rooms.

Except for the auditoriums, we generally have the flexibility to arrange the chairs in a circle if desired. You can normally visit the room in advance. Make sure you have requested the computer and projector/screen if needed. Vistas normally has a mike and speakers for every class, so that instructors can just talk to the audience and not have to project their voices.

H. Internet access.

Maravilla, yes in the Valencia Room and Clubhouse. Valle Verde – yes in the Social Room. There is a password that needs to be obtained for the Social Room at Valle Verde. Not at this point in the Theatre. These were confirmed in March 2015.

I. Macintosh vs. Windows.

We won't rehash the debate but just say that our machine is a Windows laptop, and that those with other formats like the Mac should ensure that their presentation will play on it by trying it out before the actual day of the presentation. It normally works, but one cannot be too careful about these things....

J. Audio/visual aids.

Vistas has its own computer and projector, as well as a screen if needed. We also have a mike and speaker. You will need to provide your own maps and other aids.

K. Library resources.

Santa Barbara has excellent library resources. In addition to the public library, there is UCSB, SBCC, and Westmont. Anyone can use the UCSB library, but to check out books, you have to be a member of the UCSB Affiliates or purchase a community card. In addition, parking at UCSB requires purchasing a parking permit. SBCC and Westmont have their own regulations. There are also specialized libraries. The Karpeles Manuscript Library is the world's largest private collection of manuscripts and documents. The Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History has the Gledhill Library on the history of Santa Barbara County, California history, and the history of the American West.

L. Costs and expenses.

Vistas will reimburse reasonable copying expenses in connection with your course, but you need to clear these with your liaison person, who in turn will ask others if there is any question about the expenditure.

M. Reproduction of course materials.

Vistas will normally reproduce small readings. Larger items can be sent out electronically or accessed by sending the URL to the course participants. Contact the business manager.

II. During the term.**A. Name tags.**

Most members have name tags. The office routinely asks people who do not to identify themselves so that new name tags can be provided to them.

B. Cancelling a class session.

This sometimes happens, although usually because for some reason (an infection, for example) the venue will be closed to outsiders. If you are notified of this, let the business manager and Ben Kehela, who handles venues, know. We were able to arrange a class that had this happen in recent years to meet at the Goleta Library. If you are sick, let the business manager know so that the students can be notified.

C. Classroom procedures.

Every class is different. Many instructors begin each class with a brief summary of the previous class and end each class with an overview of the session and where the class will go the next session. You can also begin each class by answering questions from the last class that may have required some research.

If there are handouts for a class, bring them to each subsequent class so that those who missed a class can receive them.

You can invite anyone who has difficulty hearing to sit in the front (although some of our rooms are equipped with devices that will synchronize with hearing aids).

D. Course session breaks.

This is an area where the audience seems to dictate what happens – Vistas audiences are used to one break after about an hour to an hour and a quarter. The break should last at least 20 minutes so that there is time for socializing and discussion. For most classes, Vistas members will supply snacks, and Vistas supplies coffee and tea. (At Valle Verde, the kitchen supplies coffee and cookies, for which we pay them.) An alternative: you could bring some cookies to the first session and then ask for volunteers to do so for subsequent sessions. Your class liaison will know the procedures for your particular class.

E. Classroom dynamics.

If you can maintain a warm and friendly atmosphere and an informal tone to your class, this seems to work well with the Vistas audience. You can and should provide ground rules at the outset, for example, at least announcing whether you want to take questions during the session or after, urge everyone to contribute, indicate whether class members should raise their hands to be called on, etc. If you want

only brief comments, let this be known too – usually this isn't an issue in Vistas classes. A light touch here is usually more than sufficient.

Don't worry if you don't know the answer to every question – jot it down or have someone do so and then you can discuss it at the next class or, if this happens during the last class, send an email to all class members (about 90% of Vistas members use email). Some of the most interesting interchanges happen during the next session when you offer an answer and perhaps some members who have thought about the issue offer their opinions.

Our policy is that everyone who wishes to should take part in discussions. However, some participants come primarily to listen, so you should not pressure anyone to speak. There are sometimes people who wish to monopolize the discussion. If your presentation of the ground rules has not sufficiently registered with them, you can speak with them individually or your liaison from the curriculum committee can do so. If the problem persists, you have the backup of the Vistas leadership and office staff in this matter.

Some nuts-and-bolts from previous instructors:

- Take off your watch and lay it down – don't leave it on your wrist and check the time.
- Print your notes in 14 or 16 point type, a large font, so that they will be easy to read if you need to refer to them. Turning the page is much easier than squinting.
- Don't apologize for mistakes or flub-ups. They happen. Just keep calm and carry on.
- One way to avoid cell phone interruptions is to have someone call you just as you are starting and then for you to conspicuously turn off your phone, advising others to please do the same.
- Be prepared with a joke or two; people like the release of a laugh.

F. Course evaluation forms.

We don't have a systematic evaluation form, although they have been used in the past. If you wish to use one, we can provide some examples and either draw one up for your use or assist you in drawing one up. They can be sent out after the class via email and compiled either by you or your course liaison.

G. Recruiting other instructors.

We are always seeking new instructors. If you think that someone in your course might be a good instructor, feel free to suggest that they propose a course or come to the annual Vistas course on how to present in Vistas sessions. They need not be an expert in any particular field; many of the best instructors simply got interested in a particular topic and developed the knowledge over time. Feel free to suggest any potential leaders to the Vistas business manager, the chair of the curriculum committee or any curriculum committee member.

H. Soliciting for organizations.

We don't allow soliciting for outside organizations at Vistas classes. We have from time to time, on a case by case basis, allowed instructors to sell their own books. Permission to do so must come from the curriculum committee; you should let them know when you propose your course that selling books is an element of the course sessions.

Appendix: Responsibilities of Course Liaisons

The Vistas Curriculum Committee appoints a liaison to each new course from among its members at the time that it approves the course. (When members of the committee teach or coordinate a course, liaisons are not appointed.) The responsibilities of the liaison are:

1. To be the principal contact person with the presenter/coordinator for all aspects of the course and to report back regularly to the curriculum committee.
2. To aid in developing the course, including guidance and research help if needed, determine what equipment will be needed and notify the Arrangements Committee, determine if handouts and other materials will be required and how they will be obtained.
3. To share the timeline for the course with the presenter/coordinator and see that it is followed as closely as possible. (Save-the-Date, Flyer Preparation and Approval, Flyer Mailing, Event Reminder, Enrollment Deadline, First Class Session)
4. To assist in assembling information for the Save-the-Date notice and course flyer.
5. To work with the presenter/coordinator on the course flyer. Since the flyer is our major marketing tool, it should have an attention-getting title and appealing description of the course.
6. To see that the flyer draft is submitted to the curriculum committee for comments and editing. (At present, 2015, the curriculum committee chair performs this function. Flyers are reviewed by the instructor, curriculum committee chair, business manager and arrangements chair for accuracy. They are not sent out until approved by the instructor.)
7. To attend the course if possible, to be a “gofer” if need be, to help with handouts, to take attendance if the business manager is not present, to help guest speakers, to troubleshoot, to note the class’s reaction to the course.
8. To see that thank you notes are sent to speakers, venue providers, etc. (At present, 2015, the curriculum committee chair and president are performing this function.)
9. To keep the curriculum committee and business manager informed about all important actions.

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