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How to Plan and Run Online Seminars

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The Cognitive Science Society, with funding from the ONR, started an online seminar series in 2002. This seminar series was initiated by Art Markman, with the assistance of the authors, who had previously conducted a seminar series for a cognitive task analysis community of practice, CTAResource.com. The Cognitive Science Society seminar series has been successful at promoting the society and reaching a global audience who might not otherwise have the opportunity to hear well-known cognitive scientists speak. Through the archives, people who were not able to attend due to conflicts or time zone constraints are able to re-play the sessions at a more convenient time.

Online seminars are an increasingly common way to reach a broader audience, as exemplified by the Cognitive Science Society. This tutorial is designed to help people who wish to set up their own seminars to reach students outside of the classroom, to bring in the expertise of speakers who could not travel to their location, to promote innovative research from their labs, or for meetings of groups that cannot be physically together.

Offering a seminar online requires a number of steps, especially to achieve a flawless, professional presentation. The critical pieces are:
- Selecting the required features (audio, chat, slides, polling, archival, etc.) and technology for delivering and moderating the seminar
- Announcing and promoting the seminar (including registration and instruction web pages)
- Planning pre-seminar activities (forums, advance questions, pre-reading, technology tests)
- Preparing presentation materials
- Orchestrating a session (interactivity, Q&A, chat, polling, back-up plans/redundancy, etc.)
- Coaching a first-time online presenter (how presenting online is different from face-to-face)
- Running and moderating the actual seminar
- Creating an archive
- Developing, sending, and using post-seminar evaluations
- Planning post-seminar activities (archive of session and chat, further discussion or Q&A)

While not all of the above are needed for all types of seminars, many of them are essential for a successful seminar. The tutorial will cover each topic, some in more depth than others, so participants walk away with the knowledge to run their own seminars. The tutorial will also look at the differences in structuring and presenting an online seminar based on seminar purpose and group size, cohesion, and formality. Demos will be included (using archived seminars) and, if possible, participants will have a chance to experience presenting and participating online. Participants will be provided with a list of resources to pursue the social and technical aspects of online seminars in more depth.