



Puget Sound Community School  
**SENIOR HANDBOOK**  
*sample*

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### Seminar Calendar/Deadlines

WEEK OF	IN SEMINAR	SENIORS
Sept 13	Uncovering your personal values	
Sep 20	Credo: Initial credo	
Sep 27	Project: Initial idea*	
Oct 4	Credo: Text study 1*	
Oct 11	Credo: Text study 1*	
Oct 18	Project: Completed proposal & parent signoff*	
Oct 25	Project: Completed proposal & parent signoff*	
Nov 1	Project: Final proposal* (and present in seminar)	
TBD	Present final proposal to the whole school	
Nov 8	Credo: Practicum 1*	
Nov 15	Credo: Practicum 1*	
Nov 29	Credo: Conversation 1*	
Dec 6	Credo: Conversation 1*	
Dec 15	TBD	
Jan 3	Credo: Text study 2*	
Jan 10	Credo: Text study 2*	
Jan 17	Credo: Practicum 2*	
Jan 24	Credo: Practicum 2*	
Jan 31	Project: Progress update presentation	
Feb 7	Present project update to the whole school	
Feb 14	Credo: Conversation 2*	
Feb 28	Credo: Conversation 2*	
Mar 7	TBD	
Mar 14	Credo: Round 3A*	
Mar 21	Credo: Round 3A*	
Mar 28	Credo: Round 3B*	
Apr 6	Credo: Round 3B*	
Apr 18	TBD	
Apr 25	Project: Completed (and present in seminar)	
May 2	TBD	
May 9	Project: Public interaction session workshop*	
May 16	Senior Showcase (Thursday, May 19th)	
May 23	Credo: Completed version (and deliver in seminar)	
May 30	Reflection/Self-evaluation*	
Jun 6	Course evaluation/advice for next year	

*\*Assignments with an asterisk are those in which your work must be posted to your blog 48 hours in advance of the seminar. Likewise, all seminar participants must read posted material prior to the meeting.*

### GENERAL OVERVIEW

PSCS graduates demonstrate high levels of self-expression, intrinsic motivation, and commitment to the community. A student's senior year at PSCS is the crowning development and expression of these characteristics and is uniquely structured to showcase them.

During the final year, graduating students must:

- **Meet the principles of the school's presence requirement.** PSCS is at its best when members of the community are present. Graduating students are models of presence for younger students.
- **Participate in Senior Seminar.** Graduating students meet regularly with each other and members of the staff to reflect on their progress, learn and share wisdom. Students need to complete all assignments and be well prepared for these sessions.
- **Conceive of and complete a senior project.** Graduating students design and complete a large-scale project that challenges their capabilities, advances their personal passions, and practices the skills necessary to make things happen.
- **Present their credos to the community.** Graduating students engage in a year-long self-study that culminates with them standing before the school community at their graduation ceremony and making a detailed declaration of who they are.

Simple fulfillment of these conditions is not by itself sufficient to graduate from PSCS. In addition, graduating students are expected to promote and uphold the values of the school through a *distinctly elevated and mature* enactment of the core commitments. In your graduating year, you should:

- **Practice integrity.** Practice integrity at a particularly developed level: Do what you say you are going to do, when you say you are going to do it, and do it in the way it was meant to be done.
- **Engage the community.** Actively participate in the school so as to perpetuate a healthy community for everyone. Generously share your own talents and passions. Take part in community activities (e.g., participating in school meetings, contributing to dialogues, mentoring younger students) both for your own benefit and the benefit of others.
- **Act with courage.** Stand up for your beliefs. Be consistently willing to take risks and challenge yourself to accomplish things you're not sure you can accomplish.

## SENIOR SEMINAR

Senior Seminar is a year-long, staff-facilitated class that is required for graduating seniors. Seminar sessions are when you engage in dialogue with each other, giving and receiving feedback about the work you are doing. The seminar leaders will also occasionally invite discussion of larger leadership topics within the school. If you miss a session, you must figure out a way to make up what you missed.

### Blogs

To facilitate the sharing of your work with other seminar participants, you will maintain a blog that will be shared with the seminar leaders and other seniors. On the blog, you will post several of your assignments in advance of the seminar at which they will be

discussed, so the seminar leader and other seniors can read them in preparation for the discussion. Given the personal nature of your work, you may wish to limit access to your blog to only other seminar participants.

### **Split Deadlines**

Deadlines for many of the assignments are staggered so that only some of the students will present work at a given seminar. Complete details of which student has which assignment due and when can be found in the schedule at the start of this handbook.

For weeks in which you have an assignment due, **you are required to post your work no later than 48 hours before the seminar begins** to allow everyone else time to read your work in advance. Every week in which there is new work posted, **you are required to read everyone else's work prior to the seminar, and come to Seminar prepared to discuss it.**

## **A NOTE ABOUT QUALITY OF WORK**

While much of the work you do for Senior Seminar is reflective in nature and is posted on your blog (attributes that may suggest informal presentation), you are expected to present *thorough, polished work*. When writing, correct your spelling, maintain logic, organize your thoughts carefully, edit to eliminate grammatical errors, confusion, or ambiguity, and keep a consistent voice. When using another medium, video or audio for example, make sure to edit your material in a way that demonstrates pride in your work and thoughtfulness toward your audience.

**Before being posted to your blog, work for Seminar must be edited by an outside reader/editor.** This person should be someone other than one of your peers. Choose an editor who seriously knows their stuff and with whom you can work effectively. Staff can help connect you with resources if you're feeling stuck.

To facilitate the editing process, we suggest composing your material using software that is designed for collaboration (like Google Docs). Once the work has been edited and polished, copy it into your blog post.

Take time to produce good work. The more you put into it, the more you (and everyone in Seminar) will get out of it.

## **PROJECT**

A senior project is a year-long, large-scale undertaking that challenges your sense of what you are capable of, advances a personal passion, and gives you practice in the skills necessary to make things happen. You must be able to share the finished project with other people. If the result of the project is not itself able to be presented to other people (as artwork, writing, video, performance, etc.), the project must include some form of documentation that *can* be shared.

### **Conceive of the idea of your project.**

What excites you? What would you like to do, but you're afraid to do it, or maybe aren't sure if you *can* do it? What have you done already that you'd like to take to the next

level? Your project might involve mastering a new skill, working on an issue important to you, becoming an expert on a subject, or something completely different. The range of possible forms your project could take is infinite; don't limit yourself to variations on what other people have done. Develop the idea through conversations with trusted adults and friends. **Post a short statement (roughly 100-200 words) of the idea for your project in time for seminar the week of September 27.**

### **Create a detailed proposal for your project.**

After you invent the idea of your project, create a detailed proposal. The proposal must include a clear, general summary description of the project, and must address the following questions and requirements (please note that your proposal need not be structured in a "question and answer" format; in fact, it will likely be more readable if you can work the answers to these questions into a more flowing form):

- What personal passion does this project advance? What is your experience with that passion?
- How does this project challenge you? What risks will you take in completing this project? What will be your biggest obstacle and how will you overcome it?
- What resources (skills, knowledge, contacts, materials, money, etc.) do you already have that will be useful in completing the project? What other resources will you need, and how will you get them?
- What will your final result be? How will you measure and evaluate your results?
- How will you document your progress in completing the project?
- Describe the stage presentation of your project at the Senior Showcase.
- Describe the public interaction session (aka "table exhibit") of your project at the Senior Showcase.
- Include a schedule of the major milestones of your project and the deadlines by which you will reach them.

**Post a completed version of your proposal in time for seminar; see schedule for specific deadlines. By the same date, your parents must also indicate that they have "signed off" on your proposal by emailing your advisor with their approval.** At Seminar, seniors and the seminar leaders will offer suggestions on how to revise and improve the proposal. Incorporate any changes and **post the final version of your proposal in time for seminar the week of November 1st. In Seminar, give a presentation (5-10 minutes) of your project proposal. Then present your project proposal to the entire school the following week.**

You'll be giving the same presentation to both audiences. Give appropriate context and tailor the presentation to a whole-school audience.

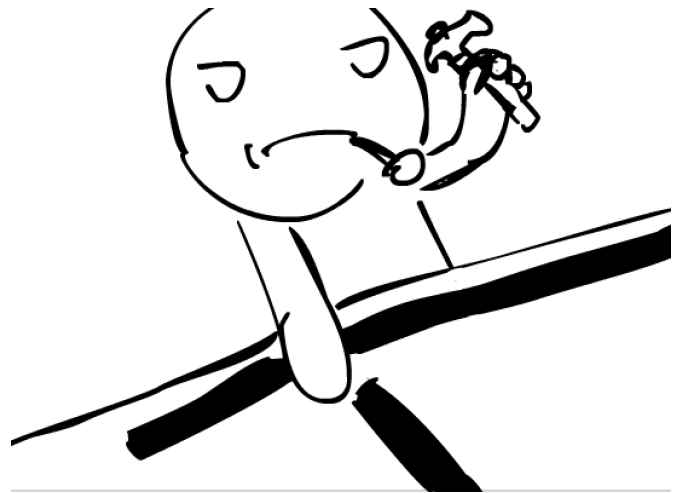
### **Progress reports**

As you work on your project, document your process. If you are working on a physical product, take periodic photographs of your work. Keep notes, emails, and any other relevant records. Consider keeping a journal in which you regularly reflect on your progress. What has worked? What hasn't worked? Are you being challenged and overcoming obstacles? What have you learned? What have been the turning points and highlights of the experience? Share any documentation and reflection with your advisor at your regular advising sessions.

**Give a detailed presentation of your progress in seminar the week of January 31. Then present your progress to the entire school the following week.** As with the project proposal, you'll be giving the same presentation to both audiences.

### **Complete your project.**

This should take you most of the year and you should work on your project until you, your advisor, and the seminar leader agree that it's complete. Completion must happen **before seminar the week of April 25th.**



### **Prepare for Senior Showcase**

Part of your responsibility as a member of the PSCS community is to share the results of your senior project with the broader community at the Senior Showcase. This is an opportunity for you to bask in your success at completing your project! In addition, it will inspire younger members of the community about what might be possible for them in their future at PSCS. This sharing at the Senior Showcase happens in two ways:

- **Stage presentation**

The senior project stage presentation at Senior Showcase is a formal, very concentrated, and effective presentation from the stage, lasting between five and ten minutes. Depending on the format of your presentation, you may need to coordinate additional resources (e.g., display stands, sound system, photocopies, etc.) Anticipate these needs and, with support from members of the staff, plan accordingly. **Deliver your Senior Showcase stage presentation at seminar the week of May 9.**

- **Public interaction session**

After the stage presentations at Senior Showcase, the audience is given an opportunity to directly interact with each senior and learn more about their project. Ways to participate in this session include a physical exhibit with visuals on a table, a circle of chairs to facilitate dialogue, or some other format that places you in contact with people who want to interact with you about your project. **Post a detailed plan of the format you will be using for the public interaction session, including sketches or other visuals as appropriate, on your blog in time for seminar on May 9th.**

### **Senior Showcase**

Though your project, stage presentation, and public interaction session plan should be polished and complete, your peers, seminar leaders, and advisor will critique your completed work and offer feedback on how it might be further revised and improved. Incorporating this feedback, and with the help of trusted adults and friends, fine-tune and produce your final project, stage presentation, and public interaction session. **Give the final stage presentation of your project to the community and conduct your public interaction session at the Senior Showcase on May 19th.**

## Reflection

At the end of the year, you will reflect on the process of completing your project. **In time for seminar the week of May 30th, post answers to the following questions:**

- What did you accomplish? How well did you achieve the results you planned for in your proposal? (You will best be able to answer this question if you re-read your proposal.)
- What obstacles/challenges did you overcome? Which of these were expected, and which unexpected?
- What were your highlights and turning points?
- What worked? What might you do differently if you gotta do it over again?

Note that you will also be posting answers to questions about your *credo* at the same time.

## CREDO

*Credo* is the Latin word for “I believe.”  
*What do you believe?*

What are your values? What matters to you? What principles guide you? What is right, what is wrong? What is the most important thing in life? What makes you tick? What do you stand for?

We all have personal answers to these questions, though we may not be able to quickly and concisely state those answers. During your final year at PSCS, you will develop and formulate *your* answers to these questions. At the end of the year, you will present your answers to these questions – your *credo* – to the community. Your *credo* is a declaration: This is what I believe.



## Write your initial credo

At an early seminar, you will participate in an exercise to help you begin to formulate and express the core values that are the most important to you. Based on what you discover in the exercise and what you already know about yourself, write your initial credo. What do you believe and why do you believe it? What are the personal *stories* that make your beliefs and values come alive for the reader? This doesn't have to (and probably shouldn't) be a philosophical treatise; it could even be a love letter to the things you care most about. Make this statement of belief as complete as you can, given the limited time.

**Present your initial credo at Seminar the week of September 20th. You will also post it to your blog *after* Seminar.**

This initial statement of belief will likely (but not necessarily) turn out to be the skeleton of the credo you present to the community in the spring. The rest of the year will be spent outfitting that skeleton with muscles, organs, and skin—these are the details of what you believe, the answers to hard questions about your core values, the wisdom

gained from others, and the stories that will make your beliefs come alive for other people. With the help of your advisor, you will develop this material during the school year through a process of inquiry. The formal inquiry process is made up of conversations, text studies, and practicums. The results of these exercises will form the raw material from which you sculpt your final credo.

### **Text Studies**

What does the world have to say about your core values? Deepen your inquiry by studying *texts* that address or embody your core values. A text can be almost anything – a novel, poem, play, film, short story, essay, lecture, work of art, etc.

The texts you choose *must* have some direct connection to your core values. When deciding which texts to study, choose ones that excite you, or that you've always wanted to study. Ask the other seniors and trusted adults and friends for recommendations. Share your core values with other people in your life and ask for *their* recommendations.

You are strongly encouraged to choose texts that you've never studied before. If you do choose a text with which you are already familiar, consider how you can engage it in a new and in-depth way. To get the most out of your chosen texts, engage them multiple times. After reading, viewing, or listening to your text for the first time, return to the text and read/view/listen to it a second time. Consider offering an activity for other students in which you lead them in engaging your text. After studying each text, create a reflection that addresses the following questions:

- How does the text illustrate or connect to your values and beliefs?
- How does the text push at the boundaries or edges of your values and beliefs? What "hard questions" does it raise?
- How were you reinforced in your values and beliefs, or how did your understanding of them change as a result of studying this text?
- What was your biggest takeaway that will influence your final credo?
- What are your core values? What do you believe?

**Post your reflections in time for Seminar; see schedule for specific deadlines.**

### **Practicums**

How do you put your beliefs and values into action in your daily life? Further your inquiry by identifying aspects of your beliefs and values to mindfully practice in your daily life. Think of this as the "lab" section of the credo process.

For each belief or value that you choose, spend at least a week living with particular attention to that value or belief. For example, if one of your values is generosity, you might choose to give a gift a day for a week, or clean the kitchen at home every day, or pay a stranger's bus fare. **Before the week begins, agree with your advisor on how you will practice your chosen belief or value.**

You might say, since you are to choose one of your fundamental beliefs or values, that you *already* practice that value every week. The practicum is a chance for you to experiment with taking that practice to a higher level and challenge yourself to practice it mindfully.



Keeping a journal of your experience during the week is strongly recommended. Whether or not you keep a journal, create a reflection that tells the story of your practicum, and addresses the following questions:

- What experiences have you had as a result of practicing this belief or value that you would not otherwise have had?
- What new insights do you have about the belief or value you've practiced?
- Is the level at which you're practicing sustainable in your life? Why or why not?
- What was your biggest takeaway that will influence your final credo?
- What are your core values? What do you believe?

**Post your reflections in time for Seminar; see schedule for specific deadlines.**

### **Conversations**

What do *other* people believe? As part of your inquiry, have conversations with adults about their beliefs and values. Listening to other people talk about their own values will help you when formulating your own credo.

When deciding with whom you will speak, choose people that you admire, look up to, or are drawn to. If possible, choose people who you believe might have a specific perspective on *your* core values. Choose a mix of people you already know (e.g., your grandmother, a friend of your family) and people you don't already know (e.g., a local elected official, an elder at your church, a musician you admire). You may wish to choose someone you're already comfortable with for your first conversation. Trusted adults and friends can help you brainstorm a list of people with whom you might want to chat about their beliefs, and can help you make contact with people you don't know how to reach.

Your conversations must be conducted face-to-face, unless circumstances (geography, etc.) make this unreasonable. You can conduct your conversations anywhere you like (on campus, in a café, at a home or office, etc.) as long as you both can remain relatively undistracted during the conversation.

Your advisor and the seminar leader can help you plan and practice questions to ask during the conversation. The conversations will go easier than you might expect; people are generally flattered and happy to be asked to talk about themselves!

Many seniors in prior years have found it valuable to make an audio recording of the conversation for later reference.

After each conversation, create a reflection that answers the following questions about the conversation:

- What are your conversation partner's core values? What do they believe?
- What is a story and/or a metaphor that your conversation partner used to illustrate their values and beliefs?
- What are the "hard questions" about your conversation partner's values and beliefs? How might they respond to those questions?

(Note that you don't have to ask these questions word-for-word during your conversation! In fact, your conversation will probably be more successful if you can gather the information in a more natural way.)

In addition, your reflection should also substantially answer the following questions about you and your credo process:

- How has your perspective on your own beliefs and values changed as a result of the conversation?
- What was your biggest takeaway that will influence your final credo?

Please also include a photograph of your conversation partner in your blog post.

**Post your reflections in time for Seminar; see schedule for specific deadlines.**

### **“Round 3” of Inquiries**

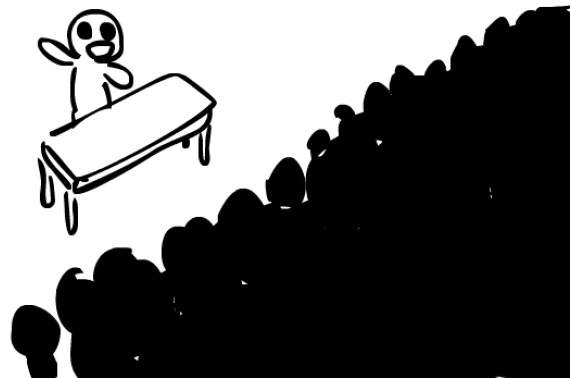
Between September and March, you will complete two text studies, two practicums, and two conversations, according to the schedule. In March and April, before you write your final credo, you will conduct two more of these inquiries into your own beliefs and values. By this point, having used each of the three methods twice, you will have a sense of which of them will be the most valuable for you to repeat going forward. You get to choose what form your two final inquiries take: one practicum and one conversation? Two text studies? Consider carefully what is likely to serve you best. Take this opportunity to design inquiries that engage “hard questions” about your beliefs and values.

You will complete and post reflections for these two final inquiries, just like the first six.

**Post your reflections in time for Seminar; see schedule for specific deadlines.**

### **First Draft of Your Credo**

Having started by writing an initial credo, then having further explored your beliefs and values through the inquiry process, you are now ready to put together your completed credo – a statement of your personal beliefs and values. This statement must be both written (so that a copy can be preserved in the school archives) and presented in front of the PSCS community. Your credo, presented publicly, will stimulate and inspire others, and will reinforce your own sense of who you are.



The following suggestions may help you begin to write your credo:

- Tell stories of how you arrived at your beliefs, moments when they've been tested, seminal days or events that changed your outlook, and what has made your beliefs change and grow. Ground your beliefs in the events of your life. Sharing your stories will help your beliefs “come alive” for your audience.
- Help the audience understand *why* you believe what you believe.

- Anticipate and address the “hard questions” or objections others might have about your beliefs. The hardest questions you encountered in your texts, conversations, and practicums may be the best prompts for where to begin your credo.
- Discuss what you *do* believe, not what you don’t believe.

There is no restriction on length. Make your written credo and presentation as long or as short as is appropriate to make your beliefs come alive for other people.

**Present your completed credo in Seminar—in exactly the same manner you plan to deliver it at Graduation—the week of May 23rd.** *Note that this deadline comes right before Senior Showcase; plan ahead!*

Your Seminar peers will offer feedback on how your credo might be revised and improved. Incorporating this feedback, and with the help of others, fine-tune your final credo. You’ll **present your credo in front of the extended PSCS community at graduation in June.**

**Reflect on your process.**

At the end of the year, you will reflect on the process of inquiring into your beliefs and values and writing your credo. **In time for seminar the week of May 30th, post answers the following questions:**

- In which parts of the credo process did you excel?
- If one of the inquiry methods (text study, conversation, practicum) worked particularly well for you, speculate as to why that might be.
- Which parts of the process were difficult for you? Why were they difficult?
- What might you do differently if you got to do it over again?

Note that you will also be posting answers to questions about your *project* at the same time.

Read through “Advice from prior seniors.”