

Dear Faculty and Student Colleagues,

Many of us have been thinking about how we can respond, individually and as a department, to concerns about the climate of the economics profession and in our department, and how best to affirm our mutual commitment to a supportive environment that empowers each of us to realize our full potential and contribute the best of our talents.

As one step in that ongoing effort, we are writing to share with you some guidance on seminar norms. These are not meant as rules written in stone. But we hope they will prompt each of us to reflect on how we can ensure – in seminars and in our departmental interactions more generally – that our department combines intellectual vitality with an inclusive and respectful environment in which to exchange ideas and advance knowledge.

We hope that each of you will join us in making sure that our department's seminar culture not only achieves our shared goals for seminars, but also serves as a role model for others. We welcome feedback as we continue our efforts to sustain a welcoming environment for all.

Thank you for your engagement on this important issue--

The Equity and Inclusion Committee (Jeff, Marco, Meredith)

### **Guidance for a Constructive Culture of Exchange in ARE Seminars**

Research seminars are one of the highlights of our department's academic life. They provide opportunities for participants to learn about and probe the boundaries of new research, for presenters to gain the benefit of constructive feedback, and for students to develop skills as participants in research discussions. All of these are best achieved when the seminar environment is respectful and inclusive, and when all participants keep these goals in mind.

Building on recent discussions at the AEA meetings and elsewhere on the culture of seminars in our profession, and informed by a number of conversations with our faculty and students, this memo shares some guidance for "best practices" to help ensure that department seminars promote an open and vibrant exchange of ideas within a positive environment for both presenters and participants. This document is based on a letter Nancy Rose, the chair of MIT Economics, sent to her department.

**1) Be civil and collegial.** Please remember that tone matters. (Smile when you say pardner!)

**2) Allow presenters time at the beginning to frame their talk without interruption and to conclude at the end.** A "10 minute rule" has been successfully implemented in several seminars. The speaker should have 10 uninterrupted minutes at the beginning and at the end of the seminar.

**3) Share the floor.** Please remember seminar time is a scarce resource. If you haven't had a chance to read the paper, please try to determine whether the paper addresses your question before you ask it. If you have already asked several questions, you might consider allowing a bit of time and space to see if others wish to contribute.

**4) Raise your hand to indicate that you wish to ask a question or contribute to the discussion.** This gives the presenter agency to mediate the discussion by calling on audience members, and avoids interrupting the presenter mid-thought, a courtesy that may be especially appreciated in job talks. If the presenter doesn't see someone's hand, the organizer can help by pointing that out. A question or comment often leads naturally to some back and forth exchange with the speaker. But if you continue to be dissatisfied with a response, please don't hold the talk hostage. Instead, allow the presenter to move on, and follow up after the seminar. Please make every effort not to interrupt or talk over the presenter or another participant.

**5) Avoid sidebar conversations with other participants.** Please do not talk to your neighbor. Make use of the skills you learned in third grade to pass notes. Anything more should be deferred or asked publicly; please raise your hand and share your question or concern for the benefit of all. Even quiet sidebar conversations between participants are often obtrusive and distract the speaker and others in the audience.

**6) Strive for fair and equal treatment.** Many studies suggest that women and underrepresented groups are likely to be interrupted more often than others in seminars. The same may be true for softer-spoken participants. Resist contributing to that disparity! We want to evaluate the quality of the presenters and not their forcefulness.

**7) Attribution.** When building on a comment previously made in the seminar it is kind to acknowledge the person who raised it first.

**8) Organizers:** Please be prepared to intervene in real time if necessary to call attention to someone whose raised hand has been overlooked, to return the floor to the presenter, or to remind participants of our norms of courtesy and respect.

Thank you!