

EHS Department Seminar Collective Norms

The mission of the Environmental Health Sciences (EHS) department is to understand, prevent and mitigate the impacts of environmental exposures and climate change on human health by leading cutting-edge research, training the next generation of public health professionals, partnering with impacted communities, and contributing to develop, implement and evaluate relevant policy and interventions. Our weekly EHS Department Seminar plays an integral part in us fulfilling that mission.

Establishing the norms of how a group will interact with each other can be an important way to facilitate meeting the group's goals. What are our shared commitments to how we spend our time together? How do we treat each other and expect to be treated?

These norms were developed in the Fall of 2024 by the EHS students, staff, and faculty. Over the course of a week, everyone had access to a shared document to suggest norms and refine and comment on norms that were posted. After that week, we had a group discussion of the norms during the department seminar to refine and approve the norms. These EHS Department Seminar norms will be a living document that we will revisit at the beginning of each semester and, if needed, other times during the semester.

Department Seminar Collective Norms

The goal of **EHS Department Seminar** is to join weekly for the presentation, discussion and constructive critique of ongoing EHS research and practice aimed at understanding, preventing and mitigating the impacts of environmental exposures and climate change on human health.

Norms:

Communication

- Be explicit about your assumptions to avoid miscommunication.
 - For example: When disagreeing or responding to people's comments, begin with a paraphrase of what you understood from their comment to show active listening and show everyone is on the same page.
- Practice empathy and compassion when approaching topics discussed in seminar (especially when not your lived experience).
- Start with an assumption that others are acting honestly and in good faith.
- Be respectful of the presenter.
- Engage in good faith discussion rather than rejection of an idea.
- Understand that we are all imperfect and may not always have the right words.
- Have self-awareness for your participation in a group setting in respect to internalized biases we may hold.
- Endeavour to refrain from commenting on people's appearances, including characteristics related to their body such as hair, skin tone, and ability.
- If an error was made in speaking, point this out and give the person a chance to rephrase/self-correct. If needed, call that person in (instead of calling them out), turning the moment into a learning opportunity.

Questions for Speakers

- When a speaker is invited from outside of the department, have whoever invited the speaker to present or faculty advisors serve as a moderator for questions/discussion.
- Ask questions in good faith. This can include asking for clarification or elaboration of something that was presented or stated and revisiting presented findings for additional interpretation.

- Provide opportunities for anybody else in the room to ask a question or provide a comment. Moderators/faculty advisors should be ready to ask a question if the room is silent to provide more time for others to think of their questions, but should also ensure students and trainees get the first chance to ask questions if they have some ready.

Expectations of Participants in the Room

- Participants in the room will actively listen to the presenter.
 - Challenge yourself to think of questions for the presenter, even if it is a topic outside of your expertise.
- Unless the speaker has said they will take questions during the presentation, wait to ask the speaker questions until the end of the presentation unless a question is needed to clarify for meaning something that the speaker presented.
- Do not be afraid to ask any questions. There are no silly questions. The simplest question can be the most relevant. Many others in the room might have similar questions. Everybody can learn.

Expectations of Participants in Attending Virtually

- The expectation is that participants attending remotely are doing so because they need to; everyone is encouraged to attend in-person for a more engaged seminar and community.
- Challenge yourself to think of questions for the presenter, even if the topic is outside of your expertise. Send questions in the chat, but similar to the expectations of those in the room, save questions for the end of the presentation unless the speaker has asked for questions throughout or a question is needed for clarity.
- Feel free to raise your voice and mention that you have a question. Sometimes the people in the room miss the chat and what is happening remotely. It is okay to remind the people in person that the people online are there too.
- Moderators, advisors, and speakers should remember to invite the people in Zoom to ask their questions and comments.

Expectations for Speakers

- The speaker will check if the room and virtual attendees can hear before starting the presentation.
- When asked questions, the speaker will repeat the question for clarity for the room and for virtual attendance.
- Provide the best possible answers to questions but do not feel obligated to know all the answers. This is a collective learning experience. It is okay to invite others to comment or to help with the answers.
- Critiques of the work or difficult questions made in good faith represent an opportunity to learn how to engage in difficult concepts and advance our collective knowledge. We should not be afraid of scientific debate.
- Be mindful that the level of expertise and knowledge may vary among participants, and avoid highly technical language or jargon. When necessary, provide clear explanations to ensure everyone is on the same page and can engage in further discussion.

Charged Conversations

- Avoid assumptions about any member of the class or generalizations about social groups.
- Acknowledge and be aware that race and ethnicity are social constructs.
- Ask that when presenting models that include race as a covariate to be explicit in what you are trying to capture when doing so.

- Keep in mind that science doesn't exist in a vacuum - it has implications for real people.
- Take the time to listen to different perspectives and ask if you are interpreting them correctly. Acknowledge difference of opinion.
- Provide opportunities for different people in the room to speak and provide their perspectives.
- Use "I" language when sharing perspectives to emphasize personal experience and avoid generalizations.
- When opinions differ, be mindful to address ideas, not individuals. Keep in mind that this is a learning process, not a "competitive debate."