

**Guidance for Conduct in Graduate Seminars**  
Department of Political Science  
Pennsylvania State University

*This document provides actionable steps that faculty and students can take to implement the Department of Political Science's core values in graduate seminars.*

*Value Diversity*

- **Monitor the Classroom Climate.** Faculty should manage the classroom climate and intervene immediately to keep class discussion on track and to ensure that all seminar participants are treated with respect. Both faculty and students should respectfully acknowledge viewpoints that differ from their own.

*Foster an Inclusive Collaborative Environment*

- **Provide Constructive Criticism.** Students should limit “low quality” contributions to seminar discussion, such as questions that aren’t actually questions, questions intended to tear someone down or to show off, or questions intended to lead the seminar away from the topic of discussion. Both students and faculty should try to provide actionable critiques and comments that help all seminar participants to learn. Outside of the seminar room, all participants should be open to constructive feedback about the dynamics and content of the seminar.
- **Don’t Dominate the Conversation.** Both faculty and students should give other participants space to form their thoughts and to contribute to the discussion. Faculty should do their best to give students time to answer a question before they jump in and close off discussion. All participants should let everyone get a chance to speak before speaking again. Consciously try to mitigate power dynamics that might limit the ability of other seminar participants to participate fully in the seminar discussion; for example, amplify the comments of participants whose comments have been overlooked.

*Communicate Respectfully*

- **Treat Others with Respect.** Seminar participants should critique ideas, not people. There is no need to call other people’s ideas “dumb” or “stupid.” Remember that nonverbal communication transmits messages as powerfully as verbal comments; seminar participants should speak and act in ways that treat their colleagues with courtesy.
- **Don’t interrupt.** All participants should let others finish speaking before you begin to talk. Do not speak over others. When you see that another seminar participant is formulating their thoughts, leave space in the conversation for that person’s participation.

This document draws heavily upon the American Economic Association’s [“Best Practices for Economists”](#) and the MIT Economics Department’s [“Guidance for a Constructive Culture of Exchange in MIT Economics Seminars”](#)

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