**Report on WREN Brainstorming Session on Seminar Culture**

**June 2022 AREUEA National Conference**

Background and format: This was motivated by the “[Gender and Dynamics of Economics Seminars](https://web.stanford.edu/~pdupas/Gender&SeminarDynamics.pdf)” paper. *Amanda Ross opened the discussion and encouraged tables to share issues they have encountered and identify approaches to encourage an inclusive seminar and conference session environment. Tables were assigned to provide a useful mix of senior and junior researchers. Each table was asked to record both the issues identified and the potential solutions using index cards provided. Amanda Ross then led the group in a discussion of the most common issues and most helpful suggestions from each table.*

WREN organized a brainstorming session on seminar culture at the WREN breakfast at the 2022 National AREUEA Meetings on June 2, 2022. The goal of the session was to survey the participants to identify problematic aspects of current seminar culture that have a disproportionally negative impact on women, minority, and non-binary economists, and to propose changes we can make to correct and/or mitigate these problematic aspects. The instructions provided to the participants are included in Appendix A and the raw responses in Appendix B. The bullets below provide a summary of key issues that were mentioned by multiple participants

* Improve seminar structure
  + Provide a period of time (5-10 minutes) at the beginning and end of seminars for the presenter to establish and then close their argument. Specifically, no questions are allowed during these time periods.
* Role of senior scholars
  + Senior scholars should establish clear expectations for a supportive and respectful seminar culture at their institutions
  + Senior scholars should check aggressive questions during the seminar
  + Senior scholars should encourage and support the engagement of junior scholars in seminar discussions
* Improved training, either by institutions or provided via AREUEA mentoring committee
  + Formal public speaking training
  + “Soft” skill training
  + Techniques for deflecting aggressive questions

**Appendix A – Session Instructions**

**Brainstorming Session on Seminar Culture**

The goal of this brainstorming session is to identify problematic aspects of current seminar culture that have a disproportionally negative impact on women, minority, and non-binary economists, and to propose changes we can make to correct and/or mitigate these problematic aspects.

Each table should collaborate on identify issues they have experienced and observed in seminars. Please use the notecards and the red pens on the tables to document these problems.

We also want each table to brainstorm solutions, in addition to identifying problems, in current seminar culture. These should not be limited to tactics women, minority, and non-binary economists can use to mitigate the negative aspects of seminar culture. Tables should also identify positive interventions allies can take to make seminar culture more inclusive and productive. Please use the notecards and the blue pens on the tables to document these solutions.

Once the tables have completed the brainstorming session, please pin the Problems and Solutions cards to the appropriate cork boards at the front of the room. We will then ask that each table select a representative to share one problem and one solution that they have identified. The problems and solutions identified in the brainstorming sessions will then be complied into a report that will be made available on the WREN section of the AREUEA website.

**Appendix B – Session Reponses**

The table below contains the raw responses provided by brainstorming session participants. The ordering of this table is completely random, reflecting the order in which the index cards were collected.

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| Problems |
| Conflating an “engaged” seminar culture with being aggressive |
| Womens’ responses in seminars often perceived as aggressive, in particular, if faced with aggressive questioning. |
| Tone of question matters |
| Patronizing questions |
| Losing control of presentation |
| Being rejected for conference, then asked to discuss |
| People having strong opinions/schools of thought |
| Too aggressive questions at seminars and job market interviews |
| Junior scholars have lower voice in seminars |
| People asking non-productive questions repeatedly |
| Aggressive responses are perceived very different if speaker is female |

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| Solutions |
| Senior members from the audience push back |
| No questions in the first/last 10 minutes |
| Senior people set the tone |
| Provide positive reinforcement in response to negative questions |
| Provide discussion comments to authors in advance |
| No question period at beginning/end |
| Provide training in public speaking |
| Prepare for specific seminar culture |
| Clearly set seminar culture, including encouraging participants to read paper in advance |
| Take advantage of opportunities, but keep lines (i.e. don’t agree to discuss multiple papers at a single conference) |
| Soft skill training |
| Deferring questions to later in presentation |
| 10 minute no question period |
| Make people aware of their behavior |
| Improve communications skills |
| Balance between different disciplines. Appreciate other fields, not only causal correlations matter |
| Limiting repeat questions (i.e. asking the same question/making the same comment repeatedly) |
| Chair and mentors should help junior scholars engage in seminars |
| Protected time at beginning of seminar |
| Intervention of senior faculty/economists |
| Start to talk about it more, make it a thing |
| Asking questions politely (respectfully) rather than making aggressive statements |
| Establish authority in first 10 minutes |
| Seniors must police other seniors |
| Simpler slides |
| AREUEA is much better than Econ, Finance |
| No questions in the first 10 minutes |
| No questions in the last 10 minutes |