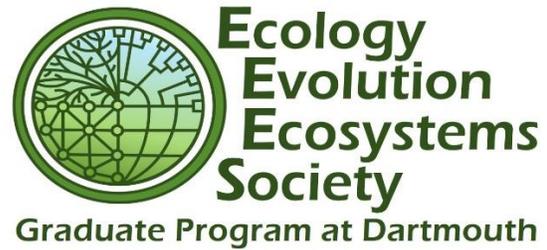


EEES Lunches (EEESLs) are a weekly venue for scientific interactions among all members of the Ecology, Evolution, Ecosystems, and Society graduate program.



OVERVIEW

EEESLs are intended primarily to benefit research programs that are in progress – when hypotheses, experiments, analyses, and interpretations remain malleable. EEESLs can also be a place for presenting final answers and finished products, but this is not its primary goal. Thus, a measure of success for an EEESL is the extent to which a research project evolves into something better than it was as a result of dynamic interactions with the EEES group. Informality is encouraged at EEESLs (e.g., bring your lunch), but do not confuse a comfortable venue among friends with an invitation to “wing it” or to present a slideshow. Note that slick PowerPoint presentations can also be counterproductive, especially if they stifle audience input and subtract from your thinking time before the EEESL.

Some general strategies for presenters

- Consider ahead of time how in particular your **research could most benefit from the group** (e.g., what are possible explanations that you have not thought of for a surprising pattern? What would be a creative alternative for analyzing a data set? What are parallels in other systems that you do not know as well? Are your interpretations as broad as they could be, within the bounds of your study questions and data?).
- Plan things so that **input is specifically invited and received** on points that you identify ahead of time.
- Be receptive of **feedback that is unexpected** (indeed, the unexpected is generally the most valuable feedback of all).
- Throughout, **strive to invite input** with frequent pauses and lots of eye contact. Make it clear that you want their most beneficial comments, which may not always be ones you want to hear or ones you have answers for. Remember that it is better to get “tough” comments and questions at an informal presentation at Dartmouth than in a grant, manuscript review or a presentation at a national meeting.
- Have a bit **more material than you expect to present**, and have a plan for what could be left out. This gives flexibility for allowing constructive discussions to mature.
- Remain in **command of the discussion**. It is up to the speaker to focus the audience and use the time well. Don't be afraid to say “we can talk about that individually afterwards” if you feel that a particular line of questioning is dominating the discussion.
- Remember that EEESLs are an appropriate place for taking some **intellectual risks**. Deliberately push the boundaries a bit on how general your questions are, how strong your inferences are, and how broad are the implications. If you do not get pruned back (i.e., questioned for overreaching with your questions or data) a bit in EEESL then you are probably being too conservative and narrowly focused.
- **Take notes** when people ask questions, or better yet, ask a colleague to do on your behalf.
- **Make your own notes afterwards**. What were the questions and comments? What were the hardest questions? What would have been the perfect response, keeping in mind that what a questioner needs to hear is frequently other than the literal answer to their question? In the future, how can you prevent distracting questions from arising in the first place,? What worked well (no questions,

lots of nodding)? What did not work well even if there were not questions (puzzled looks, impatient colleagues, dozing faculty)? What could be added or changed to make a challenging part of the presentation go easier?

- Actively **pursue further discussions** with your colleagues on points of the EEESL. The best EEESLs are those that keep on giving after the hour is up. Find comfortable situations to ask colleagues direct questions about your style as well as the content. Make it clear that you want to hear about any distracting quirks, too soft a voice, weird color choices in slides, frenetic laser pointing, etc.

THE LISTENERS

The other key priority of EEESLs is to cultivate our skills in being active and constructive listeners. Asking good questions is an art that your colleagues will cherish in you – so ask questions! Also, consider it your responsibility to help your presenting colleague improve their research program. Help them identify the cool stuff. Suggest unexplored angles for them to consider. Be frank with them about the parts that were less interesting from your perspective. Most importantly, ask them the hardest, most critical, constructive questions that you can. Asking critical, but constructive, questions is a sign of respect, especially when they occur early enough in your career so that appropriate responses can be made. Friends don't let friends hear hard questions for the first time from a stranger at a defense, meeting talk, or job interview.

Some general strategies for listeners

- Carefully **follow** what is being presented, but also notice what is not there.
- Look for **parallels with other systems** (yours for example) that the presenter may not be aware of. Look for ways that the questions could be broadened and the implications be extended. Help your colleague see how it could become a paper for broad journal like Science or Nature, or how it could be strengthened for Ecology, Evolution, the American Naturalist, Global Environmental Change, Ecology & Society, Ecological Economics or Climatic Change.
- Think about **other ways the data could be analyzed and presented**.
- **Look for logic faults and disconnects**. Does A really follow from B? Did they return to question that they began with?
- Given what the presenter did, could she/he have possibly refuted the favored hypothesis? Would she/he really be saying anything different if their results had been otherwise?
- Try to identify at least one **alternative hypothesis** that your colleague might be ignoring.
- Is there **something simple** that they could do to fill a chink in their story?
- Look for the places where your colleague is **pushing too hard to be cosmic** ("Sorry, this doesn't really help us understand wobbles in the Earth's axis of rotation.")
- **Make a note** (to share later) of the little things that were logical and relevant but presented in an awkward, confusing, or too lengthy manner.
- Be aware of your **social tendencies and modulate accordingly**. If you seldom speak in such group settings, force yourself to do so at least once per EEESL. If you commonly speak in such group settings, filter your thoughts before speaking and restrict yourself to one useful comment per EEESL. If you are inclined to be blunt, try asking your hard question with a smile and a disarming manner. For example, start by saying I really like X component of your research but I have problems with Y for these reasons, and state the reasons. Similar to reviewing a manuscript, antagonistic comments and a negative tone will be less likely to be considered seriously because they will be perceived as being biased or, worse, personal.
- **Save at least one thoughtful question or comment** that will be fun to discuss with the presenter sometime after the EEESL.

- **Notice the aspects of presentation style and content** that are particularly effective and those that are not so effective. Bring what you learn to expand and polish your own repertoire. If you notice something stylistically substantive, positive or negative, pass it on to your colleague later.
- **Learn to be a better listener** by observing your colleagues. Notice what works well and not so well in helping the presenter benefit from their chance to do an EEESL.

It is impossible to overstate the professional value of the skills that EEESL is meant to cultivate. People get job interviews by doing cool research that gets published in top journals. Candidates become finalists by giving a compelling and engaging seminar, and get the job by being the one who asked creative, insightful questions about the research programs of soon-to-be colleagues.

OTHER EEESL ACTIVITIES

When EEESLs are not filled with presentations, they could be devoted to anything that is in the spirit of improving ourselves as professionals. These commonly include discussions of the recruiting weekend, provocative new papers, or difficult classics. It could be about how to write, collaborate, derive a Bayesian estimator, or to discuss the options for an experimental design that has you stumped. What do you want to learn that the program isn't teaching you? Talk about a potential topic over coffee or beer. Think creatively about how one or more EEESLs could be structured differently to help us become better professionals faster. Develop at least one topic for an interesting EEESL that could be implemented on short notice.