

Dissertation Seminar, Fall 2020  
G. Rosen

The dissertation seminar this fall will be run as a professional development seminar. We will focus on work that is close to ready for submission to conferences and/or journals. The aim will be to provide the sort of feedback that is most useful at this stage, both substantive and stylistic. This will be tricky, since this stage in the development of a paper has two rather different goals: to get the philosophy right, and to package the philosophy in a way that will satisfy reviewers. The hope is that over the course of the term the group will develop a shared sense of the relevant norms and how to satisfy them.

The format will be as follows.

1. Each session will focus on one or two papers circulated two weeks in advance.
2. Each paper will be assigned a referee. The referee will write a report of the sort that one gets from a responsive journal referee (rubric below). Gideon will write a second such report (as Reviewer 2). The two reports will be circulated in advance.
3. Each paper will be assigned a commentator, as if the paper were to be presented at a read-ahead conference. At the class session, *the commentator will present the paper*, summarizing the main ideas and raising one or two questions (10 minutes). The author will then respond briefly (5 minutes) and we will discuss the substance of the paper, as at a conference.

The hope is that reviewers and commentators will provide the sort of blunt but constructive comments one gets when the journal/conference system functions properly. We don't normally speak to one another as strangers speak to us when they review our work. One aim of the seminar is to put participants in a position to deal effectively with this sort of feedback. (Dealing with meanspirited or misguided referees is another matter; we will *not* be aiming to simulate that aspect of the process.)

### **Rubric for Reports**

A referee report should address the following questions:

- a. What are the main claims of the paper? What problems does it address? What solutions does it offer? If it is not that sort of paper, say what it's about and what it aims to do.
- b. On the assumption that paper succeeds in its main aims, is the paper significant enough to merit publication/acceptance in
  - a generalist journal?
  - a suitable specialist journal?

- c. Does the paper show adequate familiarity with relevant literature?
- d. Is it clearly written and well-organized?
- e. Is the paper acceptable for publication

in its present form (accept)?

with minor revisions (conditional acceptance)?

with major revisions? (revise and resubmit)

Comments. Good reports include a focused engagement with the paper. In a positive report, the referee's main job is to explain to the editor why the paper should be published. But even a positive report will include questions or suggestions that the author may wish to consider in the final rewrite. Critical reports give substantive objections or point to significant omissions. If the problems are fixable, the referee may suggest a fix. If they are unfixable, the report should say so.

Length: A substantive report is normally a page or two. Longer reports are welcome, but not expected.