

"ExchangeMeet: Cross Lab Social Meet": Building Bridges, One Slice At A Time

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1 Introduction

You're at a conference, surrounded by people you don't know. How do you approach someone, particularly someone working in a different domain, and start a conversation about research?

As a PhD student, much of your early years are spent focused on your own work and lab, with **limited interaction** with researchers outside your field (at least that's been my experience!).

This is the inspiration behind **ExchangeMeet**—a casual meetup for students from different labs, each working in diverse domains such as systems, machine learning, signal processing, or even a different field such as physics or mathematics. The more diverse, the better! Limiting the discussion to just two labs keeps the conversation intimate and focused.

The goal of this meetup is simple: get some food (usually pizza), have a relaxed discussion about your research, and get feedback on how other people perceive your research and learn to explain better. More importantly, have fun! There is no preset expectation from you. Just showing up.

In my opinion, harnessing skills over a long time makes you more confident and open for spontaneous interaction than memorizing or practicing a few times. **This document is just a lighthearted attempt to mimic the style of a research paper. My idea of fun writing!** 😊

2 Alternatives

Graduate schools offer various avenues to promote social interaction, communication skills, and idea exchange, but these options often fall short in creating a relaxed and effective environment for skill-building:

Department Social Hours Social hours hosted by departments are intended to foster interaction, but they often present challenges. Approaching someone in a group requires confidence, and the natural clustering of people into separate conversations can make newcomers feel excluded or hesitant to join.

Technical Seminars Seminars are excellent for gaining insights from experienced researchers and staying updated on current advancements in a field. However, the limited time allocated for Q&A sessions can be intimidating. Asking a question in front of an audience requires courage, and the fear of sounding uninformed or misunderstanding the presentation often holds people back.

Reading Groups Reading groups provide intimate settings for in-depth discussions on specific research topics. However, these are often akin to mini-conferences, requiring prior preparation and familiarity with the material. This setup limits spontaneity and interaction to a select group of participants.

In contrast, **ExchangeMeet** prioritizes fostering social ease while transitioning participants toward technical discussions. It eliminates the need for preparation, allowing participants to enjoy informal, fun conversations about research in a low-pressure environment.

ExchangeMeet is pretty straightforward, not a novel thing, and I am sure I'm not the only one who think this is important and has a place somewhere in graduate schools along with social hours, technical seminars and reading groups.

3 Potential Outcomes

- Practice pitching your research in a casual and safe setting (no judgments) to people with diverse backgrounds.
 - Network with other researchers.
 - Learn about each other's research and gain insights into what's happening in their domains.
 - Develop skills to answer and ask questions during presentations or interviews.
 - Explore potential intersections in research or opportunities for collaboration.
 - Make learning fun—no slides, no preparation required!
- Work On Progress !!!**