

Megan Neely, Ph.D.

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To Speak English or To Not Speak English ...

[Details](#)

To: biostatistics-mbstudents-firstyear@duke.edu, [& 5 more](#)

Reply-To: Megan Neely, Ph.D.

Hi All,

I don't like being the language police, but I have gotten these comments enough times in the past few weeks that I feel like I should share them with you. The most recent report is from the Chair of the Department ...

Many faculty have noticed international students not speaking in English in the break rooms in the department. While I completely understand the desire to speak with friends in your native language, I wanted to provide a different viewpoint on why this might not be the best choice while you are in the department. Beyond the obvious opportunity to practice and perfect your English, speaking in your native language in the department may give faculty the impression that you are not trying to improve your English skills and that you are not taking this opportunity seriously. As a result, they may be more hesitant to hire or work with international students because communication is such an important part of what we do as biostatisticians. Bottom line: Continuing this practice may make it harder for you and future international students to get research opportunities while in the program.

Please keep these potential downstream effects in mind when you choose to or choose not to speak in English outside of the classroom. That being said, I have tremendous respect for what the international students are doing by enrolling in a graduate program in a foreign country – it is a tremendous undertaking.

These same faculty also mentioned that the talking in the break rooms is at times VERY loud. Regardless of the language being used, carrying on loudly during normal business hours is just plain rude. It is especially rude when you are in the main department kitchen that is so close to faculty and staff offices. When in a shared space, please be courteous of others around you. Also, I would be curious to know why students are choosing to eat in the main kitchen as opposed to the kitchen and lounge areas we have set up in the student space? If there is a reason that you prefer to eat in the main kitchen over the student areas, I would appreciate that feedback so we can help mitigate these issues moving forward.

Megan Neely

Assistant Professor

Director of Graduate Studies