

Tips for Attending Professional Conferences
Prepared for: Sociologists for Women in Society
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- I. Affording Graduate Student Travel
 a. Seek Different On-Campus Resources

<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Departmental Funding</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Your department may have funds 2. Usually must be presenting paper 3. Departments may have a pre-set list of conferences that they will provide funding for 	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Graduate Student Organizations</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Your activity fee may make you eligible for travel funds 2. Basis of more funding <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. National conference b. Ability to cost-share c. Solo-authored paper d. Multiple Activities e. Feasibility of Attending without support
<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Grant Funding</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ask faculty if there is any funding on their grants to provide you with travel. More likely if you're presenting on the grant material; not likely overall but worth asking. 	

- b. Different Off-Campus Resources and Strategies

<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Society Travel Scholarships</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. ASA: Student Travel Grants 2. Many society meetings have funding available for students; check months in advance because it is usually competitive and has an early deadline. 	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Volunteering at the Meeting</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Some organizations waive the registration fee for students who volunteer during the meeting. This also is a networking strategy. 2. Contact the society to see if there are any other volunteering opportunities to cut your costs.
<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Room Costs</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Share a room with other graduate students 2. Contact student listserves of society to ask other graduate students to share a room 3. Go to priceline if you cannot afford to stay on-site and have no room-sharing opportunities 	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Food</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Pack snacks and water for trip 2. Research area restaurants prior to trip 3. Hotel breakfasts are most expensive- the buffets are \$10-\$15; consider bagels or packing muffins 4. Take advantage of society-sponsored coffee and water breaks

- II. Planning Your Meeting
 - a. What is your “personal theme” for the meeting?
 - Finding out about cutting-edge research in your area of interest
 - Learning more about teaching interests, professional development
 - Networking

- I. Finding out about cutting-edge research in your area of interest
 - a. Study the meeting agenda prior to receiving the book at the conference
 - i. If you are interested in two research paper sessions that are meeting at the same time, consider emailing the author prior to the meeting to see if you can get their notes from the talk, or meet with them at the meeting during an alternative time.
 - 1. This also serves as a good networking experience
 - ii. Pay attention to “big names” in the field, but also be aware that some “smaller names” may provide you with opportunities. For example, a “big name” may have fifty people waiting for them after a session, while the “smaller name” may have nobody waiting to talk to them after a session. Use this time to introduce yourself.
 - 1. If you are GENUINELY interested in their research, consider asking them to get coffee directly after the session.
 - b. Do not go to a session just because your school’s faculty will be there
 - i. It will make a lasting impression if you go to a session to “support” faculty but actually fall asleep during their presentation because you don’t really care about it.
 - 1. Always carry water to keep you alert during presentations- some conference rooms are very hot!
 - ii. If you do go to their session, tell them prior to their presentation that you are going to it, and what you hope to get out of it. They will be better able to assist you that way instead of being surprised by your presence.
 - c. You will make a bad impression if you leave in the middle of a presentation. Wait until between sessions if you HAVE to leave, and remember that there are usually no overlapping activities; if you leave, it’s going to be interpreted that you did so because you were bored.
 - d. It’s good to ask questions at the end of presentations, or provide supportive comments. If you are going to criticize someone’s research, be sure that you know what you’re talking about, and do not attack the person.
 - e. Buying Books
 - i. Book exhibitors are at almost every conference. This is a good area to spend a lot of money in a quick time.
 - 1. Ask if you can review a book for a course
 - 2. Ask if there is a student discount
 - 3. Ask if the conference discount will apply to their website

- II. Learning more about teaching interests, professional development
 - a. Most conferences have special sessions devoted to teaching interests and professional development interests
 - i. These workshops are usually more interactive than paper sessions
 - ii. Workshops provide you with an end-product to take home from the conference
 - b. Teaching Interests
 - i. There is usually at least one session on teaching introductory sociology, and then a few sessions on different topics within sociology, and sessions about specific teaching strategies (ex: teaching large classes).
 - ii. If you have taught before, consider bring into the conversation things that went well for you, as well as activities, etc. that did not work. Others will want to hear about your experiences.
 - iii. Encourage the organizer to create a small listserv of the attendees- it creates a welcome atmosphere to bounce ideas off of when you are teaching again
 - iv. ASA has a lot of general and course-specific teaching resources. Consider buying a few books on teaching while at the conference. They are inexpensive and high-quality.
 - c. Professional Development
 - i. Topics include (but are not limited to):
 1. How to write/publish a paper
 2. The Teaching Portfolio
 3. Navigating the Job Market
 4. How to Get Tenure
 - ii. Most of these career development workshops are very informative. If you cannot attend because of scheduling conflicts, consider emailing the presenters for a copy of their notes with an explanation of why you couldn't attend their session.
 - iii. Consider bringing a copy of your vitae or teaching portfolio with you in order to have it critiqued by the presenter. This would take place after the session, and I would recommend asking them a specific question on how to organize something. It will provide you with a different point of view than those from your own department.
 - iv. Consider going to an array of professional development sessions, not only ones that are relevant to your current stage. It will help you to prepare for your longer career. It helps to start keeping files on these various topics early on in your career.

III. Networking

- a. The larger point of a conference is to get to know people. This can be intimidating if your first conference is at a national one, for example, the American Sociological Association. Here are some strategies that have worked well for myself and others:
 - i. Have business cards made.
 1. Contact your school's copy center for this service. It usually costs less than \$20. It's much more professional to give out a business card than to tear out a sheet of paper, write your name down, and hope that they'll save it!
 - ii. Start with smaller conferences, and then re-meet with the people you've met at the larger conferences.
 1. Make sure that you always ask for contact information for others at a conference, even if they don't ask for your information. It will provide you with a means to contact them after the conference, and you can think of some things to say between then that will make your inquiry worthwhile.
 - iii. Join committees
 1. Every organization has committees available- it is worth joining these to get networking in. Because you are a graduate student, not much will be expected of you. To do this, contact the chair of the committee prior to the conference, and ask if you may join. Some are elected committees, so it is advisable to find out prior to just popping in on a meeting.
 - iv. Join sections, and attend their business meetings
 1. Business meetings may be boring, but the "key players" to your field may be at these meetings, and this is where several committees are formed, concerns are brought up, etc.
 - v. Do not rely on your friends/other graduate students as a crutch throughout the conference.
 1. Decide with your other attendees what times are designated for networking and what time will be personal/socializing with them time. For example, during session receptions at ASA or lunches, AVOID your friends and make yourself mingle.
 - vi. Contact graduates of your university who are listed on the conference agenda prior to the conference. It is worthwhile to record the names of those who defended dissertations to have as a resource. They will have advice for you about how to survive your graduate program, as well as advice on the first few years out.
 - vii. Plan with your faculty advisors prior to the meeting on strategies to network. They may or may not be willing to help you. Identifying

who and why you want to meet people ahead of time will allow your faculty advisor to help you more readily.

1. They can introduce you to others during parties, etc.
- viii. Ask people out for coffee between sessions
 1. This is a spontaneous way to meet others, and to discuss research with them at the conference.
- ix. Mentoring Programs
 1. If a society has a mentoring program available, take advantage of it! Usually this is a one-meal commitment with a professor from a different school.
- x. Student Committee Events
 1. Most schools will provide activities for graduate students. If they involve meeting professors, etc., than go to them. If they are solely for meeting graduate students at other schools, determine if this is a good use of your time. More useful earlier in your graduate career.
- xi. Conversation topics to avoid while networking
 1. personal relationships
 2. problems in your department
 - a. Do not stress how you dislike something about your department, for example. Aside from setting a bad first impression, they may be good friends with a faculty member from your school.
 3. gossip about faculty members
 - a. It is really easy to do this, especially if you are socializing with a group of students from your school and a few outside persons. Again, the walls have ears, and it sets off a bad first impression.
 4. gossip about other graduate students
 - a. Often, gossiping about other students in your program just sounds like sour grapes, and will not win you any networking points. It sends the signal that you do not work well with others.
- xii. Dinner Roundtables
 1. Some conferences have dinner roundtable sign-up sheets. This is an opportunity to go to dinner with others who you do not know, and most likely, do not know a lot of people at the conference, either. This is a good way to spend an evening, especially if you do not know many people at the conference. Consider signing up with one other student you know, not eight that you know.
- xiii. Planning ahead of time via listserves
 1. If the society has a listserve, consider posting to it that you'd like to get a group of people together to go out to a meal. If you are the organizer of such events, you will get to know people ahead of time.

- IV. Presenting your work at a professional meeting
- a. What do you present?
 - i. Papers based on ideas developed from the literature review, or empirical findings from the research, are very suitable topics for conference presentations, which often, in turn, form the basis of individual chapters of the thesis and/or academic publications.
 - ii. Papers developed in class are appropriate for presenting at conferences; those without any data analysis are more appropriate for roundtables at conferences.
 - b. Know ahead of time what technology is available for your presentation. Some conferences do not have Power Point, but do have overhead projectors, for example.
 - c. Most conferences require a written paper for your presentation. Try to get this done prior to attending the conference. Optimally, you should have copies of the paper in case anyone asks for them. The session organizer will definitely want one. If you don't have a paper, have at least a detailed outline that you intend to turn into a paper after the conference.
 - d. A note on props
 - i. DO NOT read an entire paper- don't even bring up an entire paper to the podium. Have note cards, and be familiar enough with your study to not rely totally on reading.
 - ii. Use visual props- for example, structure your presentation in a Power Point format. However, do not use so many props that you appear disheveled or disorganized.
 - iii. If you are presenting small tables, consider copying them for audience members. They will glaze over if they cannot read the visuals that you provide them with.
 - iv. Put your name and contact information on any props that you give to the audience members.
 - e. Structure of your presentation
 - i. Six Parts
 1. INTRODUCTION: Introduce the audience to your research question(s). What process are you analyzing? Very briefly, what were your motivations for doing so?
 2. CONTEXT (LIT. REVIEW): Contextualize the worth of asking your question(s) with a brief, pointed, deductive specification of the theoretical and/or research foundation your research builds on (e.g., if your project is grounded in resource mobilization theory, it would probably be helpful to briefly introduce/overview the theory; if there is one major study that your project extends, a quick overview of the prior finding(s) would likely serve you well).
 3. DATA AND METHODS: Quickly describe your data and methods; whom did you speak with? where did you visit? why them? why there? How was the method chosen helpful

to you? What challenges of applying the method arose?
What strategy was helpful in dealing with the challenge(s)?

4. FINDINGS: State the 2-3 preliminary findings you can share. What are the partial answers to your research question(s) with which you began the presentation? How are the data supportive of the process you are investigating? What are the primary themes that have emerged from your data? Perhaps speculate on an additional emergent finding or two as well (e.g., something for which there is partial support, but a negative case challenges your confidence in the finding).
 5. CONCLUSIONS: Present any preliminary conclusions that you have drawn from these findings. What comments do these findings make on the theoretical and/or research foundation that provided the conceptual context for your project?
 6. CRITIQUE: Critique your project. Beyond a small subject pool and/or possible problems of respondent comparability which are prevailing problems of much qualitative pilot research, what are 1-2 flaws or problems with your project? How might they be corrected? What would you do differently if you were to move forward with the project?
 - ii. Contact the session presider ahead of time to determine how long your talk will be scheduled for. They will have an idea of how long they want to leave for comments, etc.
- f. Dressing, etc., for the Presentation
- i. Use the restroom prior to your presentation. You will be sitting up-front and center for 90 minutes, and cannot leave to go.
 - ii. Wear layers. A sports jacket with a cotton (not polyester) shirt is best. You can take off the jacket during the presentation, just be sure that your shirt underneath is presentable. Polyester doesn't breathe well, and you may feel uncomfortable in it.
 - iii. Bring tissues
 1. It is better to blow your nose or wipe your sweat with a tissue rather than the sleeve of your shirt.
 - iv. Do not eat while on the panel
 - v. Do not fall asleep during the other presentations! This happens a lot, and is very awkward for everyone in the room. Bring gum or hard candy if you have to.
 - vi. Take notes during other presentations- if you are in a small room, without a large audience, the presider may be looking to you to ask intelligent questions to the other panel presenters. It is always uncomfortable to be desperately trying to remember what the person spoke about, let alone try to come up with a question addressing their research.