



Academic Conferences: A Primer

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April 2008

[Why Go to Conferences?]

1. PRESENTING

- Getting noticed, getting feedback

2. ATTENDING SESSIONS

- Getting noticed, getting informed

3. WORKSHOPS/MINI-COURSES

- Getting skills, getting feedback

4. NETWORKING

- Getting noticed, getting known

[Where Should I Go?]

ASA Annual Meetings – DUH!

Beyond that? → It depends on . . .

- What your goals are
 - Presenting
 - attending sessions
 - networking

- What audience you want to reach
 - area/subfield
 - inside/outside sociology
 - research/teaching

[Getting Socialized]

■ ASA

- PRIORITY 1: find **YOUR** section and join in!
(Two is the limit!)
- PRIORITY 2: As a student, attend all section sponsored events at the conference!
 - Sessions, Symposiums, Roundtables, Business Meetings, Receptions, Section Dinners
- PRIORITY 3: Submit your research to your section every year (if possible).

[Where ELSE Should I Go?]

- Varies by subfield:
 1. Education
 - ASA -- Section
 - American Educational Research Association – Special Interest Group (SIG)
 - Pacific Sociology of Education Association

[Where Should I Go?]

2. Stratification

- ASA – several possible sections
- ISA – RC 28
- PAA

[Where should I go?]

TALK TO YOUR ADVISOR

See what people in your field do, and adapt accordingly → Follow your audience b/c they won't follow you

[Where Should I Go?]

- **AVOID THE ASA REGIONALS BECAUSE:**
 - Research is generally low quality, and not cutting edge
 - Sessions are often poorly attended (even by presenters!)
 - Not a research oriented audience; generally not the best teaching schools either
 - Lots of advocacy

[Use the regionals for Practice?]

- NO – just go to ASA and prepare to do the “real thing”

[Presenting]

PAPER SESSION (Woo-hoo!)

- Best Format because:
 - Reaches the widest audience
 - Highest quality papers generally end up in paper sessions
 - Discussants ensure good feedback

[Presenting]

- PAPER SESSION

- Use Power Point (Overheads or Projector)

- THREE ESSENTIALS:

1. SET-UP YOUR RESEARCH QUESTIONS
2. FILL IN BARE MINIMUM OF DETAILS
3. MAKE SURE TO GIVE THE PUNCHLINE TO THE STORY (Have a clear “take-away”)

[Presenting – PowerPoint]

DO' s

- DO: Have roughly as many slides as minutes in the presentation (12 minutes → 12 slides)
- DO: Use pictures rather than numbers (if possible)
- DO: spend a little time making the presentation look nice

DON' Ts

- Don' t load up your slides with text
- Don' t put up too many numbers
- Don' t read your slides verbatim
- Don' t use really small fonts (Use more slides with less information on each)
- Don' t get carried away with fanciness (distraction)

[Presenting – Tips]

- PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE
 - Rehearse exactly what you're going to say
 - Time yourself – be sure that you do not go long!
- BRING A SHORT HANDOUT
 - Title, contact info, abstract, results?
 - Don't hand it out too early

[Presenting – Tips]

- SPLITTING UP THE TIME FOR YOUR PRESENTATION
 - SET-UP → 3-5 minutes
 - DATA and METHODS → 2-3 minutes
 - FINDINGS → 5-7 minutes
 - WRAPPING UP → 2 minutes or less (be sure to hammer home the TAKE-AWAY!)

[Presenting – Tips]

- BE CLEAR ABOUT THE FORMAT
 - Ask about how much time you will, and other miscellaneous information
- GET THE PAPER TO THE DISCUSSANT ON TIME
 - It's your big chance to get feedback; make the most of it

[Presenting – the round table]

- DEFINITELY bring handouts!
- Follow the same guidelines for putting together a paper session

Presenting – the Poster Session

- Make one giant PowerPoint slide
- Craft an abridged version of the paper
- Make sure that you know how much space you have
- Have a one page prospectus with the title, contact info, and an abstract

[Attending Sessions]

- Why Go?
 - Sessions are where you are likely to see where the field is headed
 - Opportunity to get noticed
 - Ask good questions
 - Opportunity to network
 - Talk to people after the session about their work

[Attending Sessions]

- FOCUS heavily on the sessions in your sub-field
 - Remember – the experience is about much more than learning about people's research → It's about becoming part of a club
 - Go to lots and lots of sessions

[Workshops/Mini-courses]

- Having never been to one myself . . .

?????

[Networking at Conferences]

HOW TO:

- Be ubiquitous!
 - ATTEND: sessions, receptions, business meetings, dinners, after-hours events.
- Bring a friend
 - Going solo is tough; there is strength in numbers!
- Be realistic (and patient!)
 - Rome wasn't build in a day
 - Don't force it; take it as it comes

[Networking at Conferences]

■ HOW TO:

- Get to know graduate students from other departments
 - Often easier to talk with than faculty
 - Often leads to introductions to faculty
- Ask people about what projects they are working on
 - Follow-up with questions
- Be prepared to talk about your research
 - Rehearse what you say (a little)
 - Be brief – and try to get the other person to respond

[Networking at Conferences]

- HOW TO:

- Use your advisor to help you get to know people
 - Hang around him/her
 - Name-drop
- Don't just introduce yourself to people unless you have a really good reason to do so!

Does Networking really pay off?

YES -- it's like GOOD advertising

- You need more than a good product
- You also need people to know about it and how good it is

Should You Do Anything Differently When You are on the Job Market?

- Get your advisor to play a more active role in introducing you to faculty at other institutions
 - Remember how the process works:
 - Good jobs will be advertised (process is pretty open)
 - Jobs don't appear out of thin air
 - Search committees hire – impossible to expect to find these people and influence them
- ** Don't have unrealistic expectations about what you can accomplish via networking