

Getting the Most out of Professional Conferences and Meetings: An Unofficial Guide

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10 Strategies for getting the most (for least cost) from professional meetings and conferences

1. Look for and participate in events for students

- ▶ Many conferences hold sessions especially for graduate students
 - Meet-n-greet sessions
 - Receptions
 - Professional development workshops
 - Student officer meetings
 - Student research sessions (platform & poster)
 - Student awards luncheon
 - ▶ Student attendees are welcome volunteers for conference duties (registration or information desks, job boards, copying, guides for presenters, etc.)
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2. Present your work... alone or with collaborators

- ▶ Prepare a poster or oral presentation
 - Your thesis or project work
 - Collaborative projects done with other students or faculty
 - Works in progress (methodology or literature reviews)
 - ▶ Great opportunity to get feedback and practice
 - Presentation skills
 - Responding to questions and comments
 - Networking with others interested in your work
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3. Participate in student presentation awards competitions

- ▶ It doesn't matter if you win an award; participation brings...
 - Experienced professionals to view your work
 - Objective evaluation and feedback
 - Constructive suggestions for improvement
- ▶ Who knows, you just might win!
 - Either way you can add the experience to your resume or CV

4. Ask questions following presentations

- ▶ You paid your fee to attend, so stretch yourself by asking a question or making a relevant comment
 - You'll be noticed by the speaker and the audience
 - You'll learn and retain more information
 - You'll set yourself up for some conversation between sessions or during breaks
 - Attendees appreciate student participation
 - Be brave, provide some student insight

5. Introduce yourself to speakers (even the famous ones)

- ▶ Don't be shy... practice composure by introducing yourself
 - Tell the speaker why you enjoyed the presentation
 - Tell the speaker what you learned and will take away
 - Offer a comment or ask a follow-up question
 - Thank them for attending the meeting and contributing to your education or professional development

6. Introduce yourself to those you meet in sessions

- ▶ Before, between, or following sessions, chat with those around you
- ▶ Introduce yourself
- ▶ Share pleasantries
- ▶ Ask questions about the session(s)
- ▶ Ask about their work


You never know who you're sitting next to and what he/she could do for you!

7. Invite new acquaintances for a quick coffee, drink, or meal... or ask if you can join a group

- ▶ Avoid hanging out with folks you already know
- ▶ Circulate; meet someone new every session



8. Enjoy social events that are associated with the conference

- ▶ Welcome mixers
 - ▶ 5K runs or exercise outings
 - ▶ Cultural events (museums, etc.)
 - ▶ Vendor receptions
 - ▶ University receptions (meet other students/faculty)
 - ▶ Most conferences have informal activities for participants, so mingle... have fun!
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9. Join a group sightseeing or going out for a social evening

- ▶ These events are more spontaneous
 - “Hey, anyone interested in...”
- ▶ Most conferences are in interesting places with lots of attractions
- ▶ Avoid resting inertia and the state of overload
- ▶ Refreshing change, rejuvenating
- ▶ Bonding experience for productive networking



10. Get travel support

- ▶ Travel grants and awards are often available
 - Your department/program
 - Your college
 - Office of Graduate Studies (if you're presenting)
 - Student organizations
 - Alumni associations
 - Professional organizations
- ▶ Add these to your resume or CV

Things to Avoid

- ▶ ‘Cocooning’ in your room/hotel
 - ▶ Too much alcohol
 - ▶ Hanging out exclusively with students you already know
 - ▶ Hanging out exclusively with faculty you already know
 - ▶ Not allowing yourself to have a good time
 - ▶ Having too much of a good time (remember why you’re attending the meeting)
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