

ACADEMIC CONFERENCE GUIDE

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WHAT IS AN ACADEMIC CONFERENCE?

Have you completed a research project and want to share your results? Do you want to build or extend your professional network? Would you like to see the newest research about your field of interest?

These are all amazing reasons to attend an academic conference! Academic conferences are events where all the above occur. They may vary in length, going from a day to a week. Depending on the conference there are post-doctoral, graduate student, and undergraduate student presenters alongside established researchers! Some can have thousands of attendees with hundreds of talks. Which is exciting but also overwhelming. If you are thinking about attending an academic conference, I have put together some advice that may help you navigate and prepare. There might some pictures of me at my first conferece as an undergraduate. Read on to find out!

PICKING A CONFERENCE

There are so many different conferences that you can attend relating to biological research! It is best to find a conference that is interesting to you, relevant to your field of research, and allows you to learn new information in your topic of interest. Keep in mind the reasons you would like to attend a conference and make sure that the conference(s) you pick are in line with these. You could also ask a trusted PI, faculty member, graduate student, or experienced peer for advice about what conference may be best to choose.

Some conferences you might consider are:

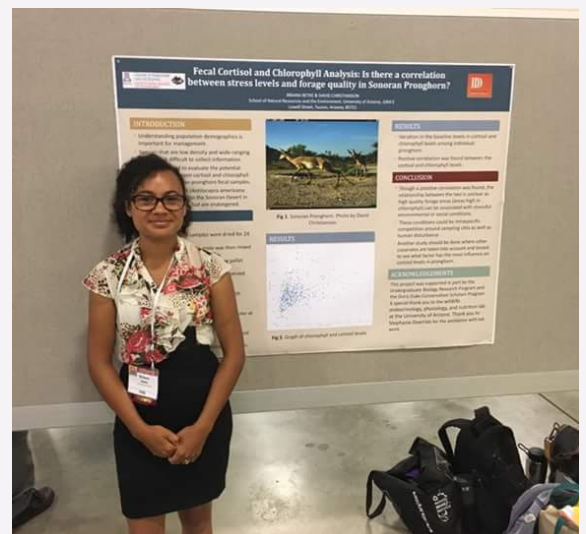
- The Society for Integrative Biology and Comparative Biology (SICB) Annual conference
- The Annual Biomedical Research Conference for Minority Students (ABRCMS)
- The Ecological Society of America (ESA) Annual Meeting
- The Annual meeting of the Society for Advancement of Chicanos/Hispanics and Native Americans in Science (SACNAS)

This is by no means an exhaustive list. There are many other national and international conferences that happen all throughout the year!

Last day of ESA 2019 in Louisville



"IT IS BEST TO FIND A CONFERENCE THAT IS INTERESTING TO YOU, RELEVANT TO YOUR FIELD OF RESEARCH, AND ALLOWS YOU TO LEARN NEW INFORMATION IN YOUR TOPIC OF INTEREST."



ESA 2016 in Fort Lauderdale

PREPARING A PRESENTATION

Abstract Submission

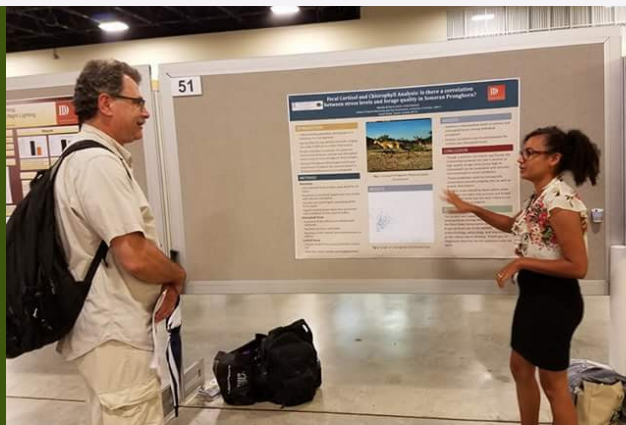
Prior to presenting at a conference, you may need to provide an abstract and relevant title for your presentation. Abstracts are typically a short summary of the work you would like to present at a conference. They help you decide what talks and posters you would like to see. Just like when you are reading academic articles, the abstract is what gives you an idea of what the project was about and from there, you decide if you want to know more. For example, the typical ESA abstract will prompt you to provide a summary of your work including brief background, methods, and results. What is required for abstract submission varies, so it is important to view the guidelines for the meeting you are applying to. After submission, your abstract will be reviewed, and you will be notified of its acceptance. Then you are all signed up to present!

Tips for Making a Presentation

- **Give yourself time to prepare** – Give yourself an appropriate amount of time to make and revise your presentation. Check the guidelines early so you know what format your presentation materials should be in. Make a game plan to have your poster printed if you are required to have one.
- **Know your time limit** – This especially important for oral presentations where you give a talk for a certain amount of time. Make sure you understand the format and how much time you are allotted to talk.
- **Practice!** – Just like with any presentation, take some time to practice your talk even if it is a poster. I found that the more I practiced my poster spiel, the smoother it was and the more it developed into a nice story. Find peers to practice with or give a talk in your lab.
- **Pick an effective poster format** – Look for examples of poster styles and check the requirements for your poster. The conference you apply to should have information about the orientation and dimensions. If this is a virtual conference, there may be a list of measurements that your slide should fit.
- **Have up to date contact information to share!** – Have a way for people to contact you for networking purposes. Some presenters provide business cards for in-person poster sessions or attach a folder next to their posters containing copies of their resume. I am starting to see QR codes on posters as well that link to an online CV/Resume/Professional website.

Funding

Conferences can be expensive! There are registration fees, cost of traveling to in-person meetings, and any additional events like workshops may have additional fees. Be sure to check on the conference website for student support! Often there are travel scholarships and registration fee waivers/scholarships. If you are in a lab, consider talking to your advisor about available funding for attending conferences.



This is me presenting at a conference for the first time at ESA in 2016 as an undergraduate!
Photo Credit: Fred Abbot

MAXIMIZING YOUR CONFERENCE EXPERIENCE

- Look at information ahead of time - Learn what the general structure for each day of the conference is. Look into the catalogue of presentations and mark what you want to see. Planning ahead can help reduce feeling overwhelmed when the conference begins.
- Contact people you are interested in talking to ahead of time – Is there someone you want to meet with at the conference? Perhaps try to contact them before the conference to see if they could make time to talk with you.
- Know your schedule - Block time in your schedule for your presentation and important events so you don't over commit. Plan everything else around this and allow flexibility.
- Take advantage of recorded talks - One of the benefits of virtual conferences is that you may be able to see recordings of talks you don't get to. For ESA 2020, recordings presentations could be accessed several months after the event ended.
- Divvy up talks between your peers – If you are attending the conference with other people or meet some new people at the conference, divide up talks to attend. Then you can share the main points with one another over lunch or coffee! This is an awesome way to practice summarizing science.
- Make room for self-care - Make sure that you have snacks, you are taking time to use the restroom, and drinking water. Step out of the room between talks if you need to. Find somewhere quiet if you are overstimulated. Take a moment away from your computer screen if you are going to a virtual event.
- Go to events that aren't research talks - There are mixers, professional development workshops, and field trips. Take advantage of virtual mixers where there are randomized breakout rooms. Hang out with people outside of conferences in ways that are comfortable for you.