

# What to Expect at an Academic Conference



## What is an Academic Conference?

- Meeting of researchers around a particular topic or theme of focus
- Smaller conferences may have a narrow topic and/or draw from a small geographic region of researchers, while larger conferences may have very broad topics and/or draw from a large geographic region of researchers
- Typically, researchers (and/or students) submit an abstract outlining their presentation and the conference will either accept or reject the presentation for inclusion in the conference program
- There may be oral or poster presentations (more traditional in STEM fields) or research discussion panels (more common in social sciences) or performances (more common in performance arts) or a combination of these types – undergraduate students most typically give poster presentations

## Benefits of Presenting at a Conference

- Builds communication skills – written and/ or oral presentations, sharing your research ideas one-on-one, etc.
- Resume builder – presenting your research at a conference as an undergraduate student will set you apart
- Networking opportunities – UWF students have been offered jobs and graduate school positions during conferences or by people they met at conferences and followed up with

## Types of Conferences

- Campus Events, such as the campus-wide UWF Student Scholars Symposium held in April each year
- Undergraduate-focused research conferences, such as the National Conference on Undergraduate Research
- Discipline-specific research conferences that are hosted by professional organizations, such as the American Chemical Society, the American Choral Directors Association, and the Society of Applied Anthropology

## To Make the Most of a Conference

- If possible, travel with a faculty member to help you navigate the conference, introduce you to colleagues, etc.
- Ask your faculty mentor about conference or discipline-specific etiquette, for example:
  - It is perfectly acceptable to quietly come/go during oral presentations at Ocean Sciences - not at all acceptable to do this at NCUR
  - The typical dress might be different for different disciplines/conferences– make sure you are comfortable, but appropriate for conference
- Take full advantage of the conference
  - Go to the entire conference and participate in all sessions
  - Engage in social aspects of the conference – talk to speakers, join groups for dinner, go on student field trips, etc. – networking happens in social settings
  - Participate in conference programs geared toward students, such as field trips, networking events, etc.

## How to Pay for Travel to Conferences

- Check the conference website for:
  - Student travel awards
  - Discounts for students who volunteer
  - Student roommate boards to reduce cost (added benefit of meeting someone)
- OUR Travel Awards (support up to \$1,000 in conference travel expenses for presenting students)
- Council on Undergraduate Research student travel awards – several discipline divisions of CUR offer these

### Do's and Don'ts of Attending an Academic Conference:

- Do go through the agenda and create an itinerary
- Do properly represent yourself and UWF
- Do ask for business cards and follow up
- Do ask thoughtful questions of presenters
- Do talk with people you don't know – network!
- Do attend the social events
- Do take notes during presentations of researchers you want to look up or connect with
- Do dress professionally
- Don't wear uncomfortable shoes
- Don't be disruptive during a presentation