
Information for Students and Other First Time Attendees

Adrienne Rowe created this document based on information from the LPL Grad Student Handbook on Conferences for the 2007 Fall DPS meeting in Orlando, FL. It was then generalized for all meetings.

Presentation Types

There are three kinds of presentations at the meeting: invited talks and lectures, contributed talks (oral presentations) and contributed posters.

Invited talks and lectures are larger sessions presented by a speaker specifically engaged for the meeting (meaning that the presentation was requested versus offered). Plan to attend these.

The majority of meeting content is contributed by members of the scientific community, and takes one of two formats. Oral presentations last from 5 to 15 minutes, depending on the meeting format, and related talks are grouped in sessions. Posters display research information on large boards or on poster-printouts, which people can inspect at their leisure, typically during coffee breaks between sessions and after the day's sessions. Poster presenters are available to discuss their posters during specific times that are listed in the meeting's schedule, but often also informally at other times between sessions.

Attire

Dress for comfort. You will be moving around a lot, often with an armful of stuff. An empty tote bag brought to a meeting will almost certainly be full for the trip home. DPS meetings are held all over the world, so be sure to check the weather, and be prepared for the climate both out of doors, and in the meeting rooms. Attire at the meeting is generally between business casual and casual (e.g. jeans are usually OK, and there is likely no need for you to wear a tie). Remember, though that you will be among your colleagues, so look presentable. Comfortable shoes are highly recommended, because you will be doing a lot of standing around. Wear your badge to all meeting events, including receptions and banquets.

What else should I bring?

Again, an empty tote bag will be useful, as will a notebook and pen. Depending on location, a swimsuit and sunscreen may be useful. Sunglasses are always in season. Add a camera if you will be sightseeing.

Most meeting venues provide several public-use computers with Internet access, so you could probably get away without a laptop.

Of course, if you are presenting a poster, bring your poster, (thumbtacks are usually provided, but check) and any notes you need for answering questions.

Planning for the meeting

Plan each day in advance. With so many interesting talks, it can be overwhelming to decide where to start each morning. Study the program ahead of time and decide in advance what sessions you want to attend and where to start each morning.

If you decide to attend talks at simultaneous sessions (e.g., the first half of one session and the second half of another), choose a seat in the back of the room so you can exit discreetly.

If you are presenting a poster or talk, be sure to build in time to prepare. You'll be surprised how quickly the days pass.

While it's not a universal law, some people can feel burnt-out by having gone to too many talks by the third or fourth day of the meeting. Pace yourself.

Almost everyone in our field is friendly. Don't be shy about going up to somebody and asking them about their poster or their talk. However, don't be deflated if somebody you've met before doesn't remember you. Many people have trouble remembering faces and/or names.

If you are giving a poster presentation, be sure to stand by your poster at your scheduled time. Note though that while many people will walk by and gaze at your poster, only some small subset will actually want to interact with you and discuss it. Again, don't be deflated by this—it's normal. There is no need to start your poster spiel with everyone that drifts by your poster.

Speaking of the poster itself, because of the social dynamic of the poster session, it is highly recommended that your abstract and conclusions/summary be readily findable and readable to someone standing a few feet away. A large fraction of the people that see your poster will only want to spend 15 seconds getting the upshot of your results. This is not because your work is poor or because you're new, it's because there are just lots and lots of posters to see! Also, you want these drifters to be able to see your results even if you are at that moment with a cluster of two or three people engaged in deep discussion right in front of the poster.

For many attendees, the meeting means that they get to see old friends that they see normally only once or twice a year. For this reason, it can be difficult to break into a social group. Don't worry, this is normal. An obvious manifestation of this phenomenon happens right before lunch and right before dinner, when people sort themselves into groups to go get food. Don't feel slighted if the person you're speaking with tells you that they have other food plans with somebody else (and that implicitly you're not invited). It simply takes time to integrate one's self into the society.

Footer

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