



Tips for First Time Attendees at PAA

Compiled by the Carolina Population Center Training Program With Help from #AcademicTwitter

LOGISTICS AND GENERAL TIPS

- ✓ There is a Welcome Mixer on Wednesday evening that is typically very well attended, although it can seem sparse right at the start. Ask your preceptor or fellow trainees if they are going and plan to meet there or walk in together. The mixer is a great space for networking. There is usually lots of free food (as well as one free drink ticket and a cash bar), so no need to buy dinner that night.
- ✓ Make sure to follow [@PopAssocAmerica](https://twitter.com/PopAssocAmerica) on Twitter for updates on-site. And join the conversation with [#PAA2022](https://twitter.com/hashtag/PAA2022).
- ✓ Look for cheap and quick places to get breakfast and lunch near the hotel.
- ✓ Make coffee in your room if possible; the line in the lobby coffee bar will always be awful. Or, look for a place a few blocks away a little farther away from the conference hotel. You'll get your coffee faster, and you'll get a little walk in, too.
- ✓ Attend the awards ceremony and presidential address on Friday. These are always very well-attended, and the talks provide interesting perspectives on major questions in population science.

GOING TO CONFERENCE SESSIONS: PLAN AHEAD – BUT BE FLEXIBLE!

- ✓ If you have time on Wednesday, walk around the hotel so you know where the presentation rooms are.
- ✓ There will be a registration area somewhere in the conference area of the hotel. When you arrive, check in and collect your badge, program materials, and free drink ticket for the mixer. If it is closed when you arrive, leave time to visit registration prior to the first session you plan to attend. The line can sometimes be long on Thursday morning before the first session.
- ✓ Plan your schedule ahead of time, so that you aren't scrambling to figure out which sessions to go to. Use the conference app if there is one available.

- ✓ Sessions where researchers present papers will have a discussant at the end. Stay for this part! A good discussant adds enormous value to a session.
- ✓ Bring a sweater or jacket! Conference rooms can get cold.
- ✓ Attend as many sessions as you can; they're an opportunity to observe presentation skills and strategies as much as research findings. At the same time, recognize that conferences can be exhausting and overwhelming! Build in some down-time for yourself, even if that means skipping a session.
- ✓ It can take practice and knowledge of the field to find the interesting sessions. If you find yourself in a session that doesn't catch your interest, don't despair! You can always use the time to think about how the talk could be improved.
- ✓ It is acceptable to move in and out of sessions to catch specific papers that might be scheduled in the same time block but listed in a different spot in the order of presentations. Try to sit near the door and/or wait for a break between papers to exit a session. When entering, do so quietly as the door is typically closed, so you will not know when a transition between papers is happening.

NETWORKING: MEET PEOPLE FROM OTHER INSTITUTIONS AND BUILD YOUR PROFESSIONAL NETWORK

- ✓ Have an elevator pitch ready. You can find [lots](#) of [tips](#) for creating [elevator pitches online](#).
- ✓ If you're meeting someone for the first time, you can never go wrong with the standard opening question: "Are you having a good conference?"
- ✓ Visit the NICHD booth in the exhibit hall! It's a great opportunity to meet a program officer from the Institute that funds CPC and much of our research.
- ✓ Explore other booths in the exhibit hall. You might learn about a new data source or find some interesting books.
- ✓ Befriend grad students and postdocs from other institutions; they could be your future co-authors or collaborators! Attending posters sessions is a great way to do this.
- ✓ If you have friends or colleagues attending from other institutions, make plans ahead of time to meet for coffee or a meal.
- ✓ During breaks, consider seeking out people whose presentations you really liked. Conference break chit-chat can be more informal and less intimidating than asking a question during a session. Most people appreciate being asked to talk more about their research! If you're approaching a senior or "famous" scholar, consider the tips in [this article](#) (log-in required).
- ✓ If you made new contacts you want to stay in touch with, the flight back is a great opportunity to connect on social media or send a quick email.

For more good advice, see <https://www.chronicle.com/article/how-to-make-the-most-of-an-academic-conference>