MITOCW | mitres16-9960-success_at_conferences_captions

[Morse code beeps] [Whoosh]

[Helicopter rotor]

Hello.

Welcome to the Success at Conferences Workshop.

My name is Evan Kramer and I'm an AeroAstro Communication Lab Fellow, and I'll be your instructor today.

To kick things off, we'll get started with an introductory activity.

If you have been to a conference before, please reflect on what worked well and what didn't.

Is there anything you wish you knew ahead of time before going to the conference?

If you've not been to a conference before, what challenges do you anticipate?

Please take five minutes for this activity and feel free to write down your thoughts to reference as we go on throughout the workshop.

[Alien spaceship beeps]

Our lesson goals are as follows.

At the end of this workshop, you will be able to know how conferences fit into your academic journey and what to expect from them.

You will be able to systematically establish actionable conference goals and next steps to tailor your experience in order to achieve them.

And you'll be able to create a milestone timeline using a list of common conference logistics to help prioritize your efforts.

Let's first define what a conference is.

Conferences involve gathering to exchange ideas about a predefined set of topics.

This involves sharing your own ideas and engaging with others' similar and competing ideas.

Conference attendees include members of academia, industry, government, and the general public.

All of whom are working towards similar end goals.

Conferences can take place in locations that require a day or more of travel, or in your backyard, at your home institution.

In terms of your academic journey, conferences are a solid stepping stone towards sharing your work in more formal formats, such as a journal article.

With definitions established, what does finding success at a conference really look like?

Well, success at a conference looks different for different people.

It is common to have multiple questions milling around in your head leading up to a conference.

You could define success as achieving favorable answers to these questions, including; Will anyone come to my talk?

Will I make meaningful connections with future collaborators?

Will I attend sessions that inspire future research directions?

While different people might be looking for different things at a conference, one generalizable statement is true about finding success; you get out what you put in.

Finding success at conferences requires effort.

You might be asking, “So if conference success requires effort, what kinds of effort are worthwhile?” From a high level, we can break down worthwhile efforts into two categories, creating a goals list, and creating a chronological checklist and timeline.

Both of these efforts must be put in before the conference begins to maximize success.

Perhaps most important is the creation of a goals list.

This requires reflection on what your underlying motivations are for attending the conference in the first place.

Some examples might be to gain experience creating and delivering a technical presentation to experts, receiving feedback that identifies strengths and areas of improvement for your work, and understanding what the current state of the art is of a field.

The second category of worthwhile efforts has a more logistical focus to it.

Creating a conference checklist and conference timeline helps chronologically order major milestones and deadlines so that you are prepared and not feeling overwhelmed before, during, or after your conference.

In fact, creating a checklist and a high level timeline is the first thing you should do once you decide you'd like to attend a conference.

We'll go into more detail on these worthwhile efforts on the following slides.

Let's focus on setting conference goals.

In this activity, we ask you to define a list of conference goals that will help you approach the conference methodically.

The intended outcome is that this will hopefully make you feel more prepared and confident.

Please take five minutes to respond to the prompts in the Defining Conference Goals worksheet.

[Alien spaceship beeps]

Awesome!

Now you have some practice drafting your conference goals.

Ideally, drafting your goals should happen weeks to months before the conference.

Simultaneously, it is important that you handle some logistics in this time frame as well.

Most importantly, you'll want to figure out who is covering your conference travel expenses.

This will likely be your primary advisor, so make sure to bring up your interest in attending a conference early to get this on their radar.

Once you have funding sources sorted out, you'll want to register and book excursions as early as possible.

Most conference registration fees are cheaper the earlier you submit them.

You also want to.

Consider where to stay during the conference.

Check for accommodations recommended by the conference, as they typically offer discounts.

While the previous slide covered some high level logistics considerations, here we present some specific questions to consider.

In terms of getting to the conference, you'll want to check if you know anyone else in your lab or department who is also going, to coordinate.

If you're traveling internationally, check if you require a visa to travel.

Consider how close you want to stay to the conference venue and how you will get to the conference venue.

Will you rent a car or get reimbursed for taxis or Ubers?

Once you're at the conference, what are your go to ways of connecting with people?

Will you have business cards?

Will you scan LinkedIn QR codes?

Making sure you cover all these bases will reduce your stress leading up to and at the conference.

As we approach the 1 to 2 week pre-conference mark, you'll want to consider a few logistics.

First, you'll want to create a more granular schedule.

Download the conference mobile app and identify keynote speakers and session topics of interest.

Identify individuals you would like to speak with and attempt to arrange meetings via email or LinkedIn, keeping in mind that most leading scholars typically attend conferences to share their own work.

With the conference mobile app handy, and a list of potential meetings you might have during the conference, you can create your own granular conference schedule that accounts for, not only professional events, but also meals, exploring exhibit halls, and free time.

Lastly, prepare for your presentation if you'll be giving one.

Prepare and practice your presentation in the assigned format.

Be sure to pay close attention to all formatting requirements for oral and poster presentations.

In addition to preparing for your presentation, you'll want to also practice a concise elevator pitch of your work and interests.

This will be really useful when meeting new connections.

Okay, we've covered goal setting and logistics considerations for conferences.

Let's take this time to do an activity on creating action items.

Action items set concrete objectives for achieving goals.

Please take five.

Minutes to complete the action items.

worksheet.

[Alien spaceship beeps]

Now you're there.

So how should we approach it?

Well, first and foremost, take advantage of your efforts.

Attend conference keynote presentations and technical sessions based on your curated schedule.

While following your curated schedule, be sure to be an active conference goer.

What this means is to be diligent about taking notes and asking questions during Q&As.

Stick around after sessions to talk to presenters of interest.

And lastly, make sure to be flexible.

Conferences are dynamic.

And while you may have curated an extremely detailed schedule ahead of time, it's okay for your schedule to be dynamic too.

Welcome unforeseen invitations to networking sessions and impromptu lunch invitations from people you meet.

While the conference might end, your work shouldn't immediately stop too.

There are few remaining important activities for you to do to ensure that you get the most out of your conference experience.

First, take some time to summarize your experience.

Write down or create slides about what you learned, who you spoke with, and what actions you'd like to take next.

Also, be sure to download conference proceedings you'd like to reference, since these often go behind paywalls shortly after the conference concludes.

Next, you'll want to follow up with people you've met by sending emails or LinkedIn messages.

Schedule future meetings with collaborators you'd like to pursue.

Finally, reflect and plan for next time.

Did you achieve your goals?

What went well and what can be improved for next time?

We've talked a lot about logistics and strategically organizing your efforts during this workshop.

A tool to help You handle these efforts is a conference timeline.

Conference timelines visually present major milestones before, during, and after the conference.

They're useful resources for strategically directing your efforts throughout your conference experience.

Note that a more granular week-of-conference timeline should be created using the aid of the conference app.

Furthermore, important sources of information for creating your timeline are the conference social media pages, as they often post updates to the technical program and extracurricular activities as the organizing committee finalizes them.

We invite you to check out the conference timeline activity to create your own draft conference timeline.

In this activity, you're provided a reference list of milestones in a checklist format on one side and a blank timeline on the other side.

As a first pass effort, create a milestone timeline by filling in the blank timeline with the items from the reference checklist and durations along the top bar.

If you have a particular conference in mind, try to write absolute, rather than relative, dates in the top bar.

[Alien spaceship beeps]

That concludes this workshop on finding success at conferences.

You should now be able to know how conferences fit into your academic journey and what to expect from them.

Systematically establish actionable conference goals and next steps to tailor your experience in order to achieve them.

And create a milestone timeline using a list of conference logistics to help prioritize your efforts.

I hope you find the presented tools and resources useful in your upcoming conferences.

This workshop was created and presented by Fellows of the MIT AeroAstro Communication Lab.

You can find other workshops related to technical communication in the MIT OpenCourseWare repository.

Thank you.

[Morse code beeps]