

# Applying to Speak at Conferences



For MA and Junior PhD students

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# Why Apply to Speak at a Conference?

- Advantages of Attending a Conference:
  - Gain insight into academia outside of university
  - Network with other graduate students, professors
  - “Interview” prospective programs, potential advisors (for those preparing grad school applications)
  - Get an idea of what types of presentations you’ll be doing in the future
  - Ability to connect with others working on similar work as you (academia can be very isolating)
  - Occasionally there will be resources for graduate students as well as early career/junior scholars
- Advantages of Speaking at a Conference:
  - Share your research with the academic community
  - Work with fellow panel members to explore topics from a variety of approaches
  - Often fun parties, dinners, drinking, coffee meetups for networking
  - Demonstrate seriousness of purpose to potential programs, professors, employers
  - Line on the CV
  - Get feedback from scholars outside of your department on your work
  - Many job searches do initial stage interviews at national conferences

# Conference Types (not comprehensive)

- National/International Academic Associations:
  - Association for Asian Studies (AAS)
  - American Academy of Religion (AAR)
  - American Historical Association (AHA)
  - American Anthropological Association (AAA)
- Smaller, discipline-specific
  - Association for Japanese Literary Society (AJLS) - papers will be published
  - Asian Studies Conference Japan (ASCJ)
- Regional conferences (often subgroups of national conferences)
- Graduate-student conferences (aka GradCons)
- University conferences (often for members of that community & invited speakers)
- Research institute conferences

# Selecting Conference to Apply to

- Many conferences are open to the public or open to all members (or you may need to become a member by the time of the conference or application deadline)
- Choose based upon your experience, comfort, and goals:
  - Why are you applying?
  - What do you want to gain from the experience?
  - Have you attended before? If not, do you want to get a feeling for it first?
- Balance panel vs. independent paper
  - Panels automatically have an advantage for selection, because they are already assembled around a theme
  - Some organizers may not accept many, if any, independent papers
- Focus on regional conferences and graduate student conferences for low-stakes experience
- Aim to present at a national conference prior to and while you are on the job market

# How to Apply to a Conference

- Look for the Call for Papers (CFP)
- See if there is an annual theme, thematic units, or subthemes that meet your research
- If it's an open call, develop a paper to your strengths and purposes
  - Option 1: present past research (undergrad thesis)
  - Option 2: present recent research (MA thesis, term paper)
  - Option 3: present current research (still developing, often seeking input)
- If developing a panel, consider who you want on it:
  - Other graduate students - good for a grad student or regional conference, bad if you're on the job market
  - Professors, postdocs, researchers - good for getting more people to see your research and view you as on par with established scholars (best for those on the job market)

# Resources:

- How to Write a Paper or Conference Proposal Abstract:  
<https://theprofessorisin.com/2011/07/12/how-today-how-to-write-a-paper-abstract/>
- How to Organize a Panel for a Conference:  
<https://theprofessorisin.com/2013/03/15/how-to-organize-a-panel-for-a-conference/>
  - “...the ‘graduate student panel’ is a kiss of death conference-wise—I’m not saying you won’t get accepted; you might. But your audience will be miniscule. And that is demoralizing, for you and for the audience”
- How To Work the Conference, Part One of Three  
<https://theprofessorisin.com/2011/08/17/how-to-work-the-conference-part-one-of-two/>

# Answers from AAR Administration to Questions I Sent:

**1. Beyond professors and PhD students, who is the call open to? Can undergraduates, MA students, independent practitioners, professionals, or scholars outside the field of religion apply to speak at the AAR?**

*The Call is open to all. So everyone listed can submit proposals.*

**2. How important is it for a panel or paper to address the conference theme? Is there an advantage to developing a panel that directly speaks to that topic?**

*It is more important to have your proposal answer the Program Unit's Call that you are responding to. Each Program Unit's Call provides the topics/themes they are planning to include in their sessions. The proposals do not have to answer the Call of the Unit you are applying to, but your chances of getting your proposal accepted are higher if you do.*

**3. What makes for a successful proposal? Or, is there anything that can easily disqualify a paper or panel from consideration?**

*Here is a helpful link.*

*<https://aarweb.org/AARMBR/Publications-and-News-/Guides-and-Best-Practices-/AAR-Annual-Meeting-/Writing-a-Successful-Annual-Meeting-Paper-Proposal.aspx>. As far as what can easily disqualify a paper or session from consideration: do not include identifying information since the reviewing process is anonymous, and make sure your proposal is acceptable by academic standards, ie. structural integrity, grammatical.*

# Answers from AAR Administration

**4. How adaptable is a panel after the proposal has been submitted? Can a theme, a paper, or participants be changed after the proposal's submission? How about after acceptance?**

*Once a proposal is submitted, it is submitted. You can save and come back to the proposal, as long as you don't submit. Once a proposal is accepted, it is accepted. If the content needs to be adapted to better fit in a session, the organizer or the Unit may ask for a slight adaptation.*

**5. If a paper fits within multiple Program Units (or is applicable to more than one proposed panel), is it possible to apply to more than one with the anticipation that only one may be accepted?**

*Yes, you can submit the same proposal to two Units. Each person can submit a total of two proposals, meaning one proposal to two Units or two different proposals to a Unit each.*

**6. Is there any way for someone to become involved with a panel or in some other capacity after the submission deadline has passed?**

*After the submission deadline, Program Unit Chairs will start accepting and creating new sessions. For the new sessions, they will be adding presiders and respondents. It's up to the Chairs to select these participants and how they do that is really up to them. So you may want to reach out to them. Some may be open to people reaching out to them using their emails on the CFPs, but others may not.*

# Places to find conferences

- Academic Associations (national, regional)
- Mailing lists (H-Net, PMJS, Facebook)
- EALAC Department newsletter
- Research centers/institutes on campus
- Senior students (especially PhD students)
- Other departments with overlapping disciplines
- Professors' CVs
  - see where they presented and at what stage of their careers
- Book Acknowledgements and Introduction
  - some books are a result of conference papers

**Many national/regional fellowships offer funding to offset cost of participating in an academic conference for graduate students**