**Tips for Presenting Your Thesis at Conferences (or, Why to Present Your Thesis Before You’ve Finished It)**

Third year MES student, Meara, recently presented at the Solid Waste Association of North America's Western Regional Symposium. Here are some of her tips and comments on why you might want to present your own work at a conference:

I presented my thesis at a conference in early April, even though a good chunk of it hadn’t been written yet. The call for presentations came in November, just as we were drafting our abstracts, and the timing of the conference was good, if a little scary. Although preparing for my presentation meant less time working on my first draft, and I presented my research without having final results, being at the conference energized me and enhanced my motivation to complete my thesis. What follows are my tips for presenting your research at a conference, even if your thesis is still in the works.

* Tell people you’re presenting your graduate thesis
* Use events before your presentation to recruit your audience
* Review the conference program to identify people you want to meet
* Talk to vendors and sponsors in the exhibit hall
* Work the receptions
* Apply for funding

**Tell people you’re presenting your graduate thesis**

This may seem obvious, but conference attendees displayed genuine excitement when I told them I would be presenting my thesis. I thought that leading with my job position in the industry would make for the best “in,” since it would show that we were peers, but responses to my job were tepid in comparison to the hearty enthusiasm I received when talking about my thesis. So be up front about why you’re there—presenting your thesis sets you apart and makes you interesting, so take advantage of it.

**Use events before your presentation to recruit your audience**

When you’re upfront about your presentation, people will want to know when and where you’re presenting. When I discussed my presentation with other conference attendees, several people asked me when and where I’d be presenting. Presentation titles often don’t do the presentations justice, so attendees who may be interested in your presentation may skip it if they aren’t told directly about your topic. At conference receptions and meals, consider the people you meet as possible audience members and get them interested in your work.

**Review the conference program to identify people you want to meet**

When you check in at the registration table, take some time to scan the badges of attendees. Most name tags list attendees’ agencies or employers, so make a mental note of the people you want to meet. Once you have a copy of the program, identify your co-presenters or presenters with topics similar to yours, and keep your eyes out for those people. Connecting with people you want to work with or learn from will help maximize your time.

**Talk to vendors and sponsors in the exhibit hall**

My unplanned conversations with two vendors introduced me to products I now plan to mention in my thesis. You never know what products or projects may intersect with your research, so engage with exhibitors—I doubt you’ll leave empty-handed.

**Work the receptions**

Conference receptions can be nerve-wracking for introverts like me, but the events are invaluable for networking. If the receptions intimidate you, set a goal: don’t let yourself leave until you’ve talked to at least three new people.

**Apply for funding**

Evergreen has funds for presenting at conferences, so use them. I applied for funding from MESA’s Professional Development Fund and Evergreen’s Student Travel Fund. While the funds didn’t cover all my expenses (conference registration—even for speakers—can be expensive), the funding certainly helped offset the costs.

Not convinced that presenting a draft of your thesis at a conference is a good idea? Here are some more reasons to consider taking the plunge:

* You can create a readership for your thesis, as attendees will be interesting in seeing the final product,
* Having something to present hones your focus while at the conference and helps you ask better questions,
* You may have more time at the conference to present your research than you will at Evergreen, and
* You may be offered a job!