

## **NCPH Conference Frequently Asked Questions For Graduate Students**

### Dress Code/What to Pack

In general, the dress code for conference events is business casual. Although you will see people dressed very casually, most presenters and attendees look as if they want to make a good impression. However, for those about to enter the job market, you might want to consider dressing more formally at any events or sessions where you plan on directly contacting a potential interviewer and giving them your business card or resume. Many attendees are professors, so you will see a lot of khaki, elbow patches, and blazers.

Portland, like much of the Pacific Northwest, is known for its perpetual rain. The actual rainfall is similar to much of the country, as the city experiences more a constant misting rather than downpours. Locals typically eschew umbrellas, relying rather on raincoats. In March, expect grey skies and spitting rain, but relatively mild temperatures. The averages fall between a high of 55° and a low of 40°, with an estimated rainfall of three inches. Dress in warm layers and be sure to bring along a raincoat with a hood to combat the damp weather.

Make sure to wear comfortable shoes if you sign up for one of the off-site events.

By no means do you need to wear a suit!

Check the weather report shortly before you come to see if you need a raincoat, umbrella or boots.

The opening plenary and graduate student reception are a little dressier than the regular conference sessions.

### Room Shares

If you are interested in a room share, there are a couple of options for finding other registered graduate students.

One option, if you have Facebook, is to become of a fan of NCPH and post your query there. Another option is to post to the conference blog.

To join the Facebook group, search for NCPH in the Facebook status bar or go to:  
<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Indianapolis-IN/National-Council-on-Public-History-NCPH/37735617214?ref=search&sid=1020401557.3941554045..1>.

NCPH does not post a list of registered attendees before the conference starts, so in order to find roommate shares for the conference, you will have to go one of the two routes described above.

### What happens in a session?

There are basically four types of sessions at NCPH:

1) Panels

- 2) Working Groups
- 3) Field Trips
- 4) Workshops

Panels feature 3-4 speakers and a moderator. All topics and presenters are listed in the program. Panels generally have room for 30-40 seated attendees. You do not have to sign up ahead of time to attend a panel and you can leave for another session depending on your interest level. But please do be courteous as you leave the session by waiting till speakers change and disturbing as few people as possible.

Some panels feature scholars presenting a paper or a case study. Some panels are composed of practitioners in the field reflecting on a project or problem-solution they have encountered.

Ostensibly all panels leave time at the end for a questions-and-answers session, although this depends on the moderator's skill at checking presenters on time. If a speaker is an expert in a subject related to your field of study or research, please take this opportunity to meet them and set up a connection. Conferences are a great time to discuss with others on avenues of topics, and what better way to get advice on your topic than to speak with an expert for free.

Working groups are sessions that feature a group of approximately 10 - 15 professionals who come together to talk about a particular problem in their shared field. Each participant prepares a case statement to share with the group. These case statements are circulated and discussed among participants in advance, meaning that the conversation has already begun prior to the group's meeting at the conference. The general public is allowed to sit in on the working group discussions. Each group will post case statements on a public website beforehand that folks can read in order to be caught up on the topic of discussion. Most of the talking will still be by the working group participants, but some times the public may be able to interject.

Sessions are generally 75-90 minutes long, except for field trips. Field trips are organized by the local programming committee and take participants off site to points of interest. Field trips are usually organized as half-day or whole-day trips.

Workshops, which usually cost extra, feature outside presenters giving a "how-to" talk on a specific topic. Workshops usually last the length of more than one 75-minute session.

In addition to these sessions there are keynote speakers, dinners, and other special events in the mornings and evenings.

#### Do I have to attend each session?

No, you do not need to attend each session. There are no sign-in sheets or any formal tracking of attendance. Sessions are separated by 30-minute coffee breaks, but you may need a longer break! Panel and working group sessions do not entail any extra fees so pick and choose which ones are most interesting and useful to you! You may also find that schedules for sessions you are interested in are at the same time. Try to find colleagues, fellow students, or those you meet at the conference who can share their notes OR ask them to grab the contact information of the speakers so you can talk with them about their presentation.

It's also acceptable and encouraged to take some time to see cultural institutions in the host city.

Also, if you are volunteering in exchange for reduced or free registration, then you will definitely miss some sessions.

### Do I have to pay for each session?

Normal sessions, such as panels and working groups, are included with your conference registration. So is the highly recommended graduate student reception—you just have to reserve a space ahead of time when you register. Some other events require an extra fee. This includes field trips, the new member breakfast, the fundraiser, and closing dinner. (You can sit in on the closing dinner to hear the speaker without having to pay.) Some events, such as the Speed Networking (see below), are free but require you to sign up in advance of the conference.

Note: lurkers may be rewarded at the luncheon; if there are extra lunches because people didn't show up, they can be passed along to grad students.

### Networking & Business Cards

One of the most important aspects of attending the conference is the opportunity to network with academics, professionals in the field, and other graduate students. Having business cards is therefore really helpful. If your graduate program does not provide you with business cards, you may want to order some online in advance of the conference. Several graduate students have been pleased with the prices, speed, and selection of [www.123print.com](http://www.123print.com). Plan to have at least 50 for the conference. If you will graduate shortly after the March/April conference, make sure you use an email address that will work after May! Be sure to make your business cards professional looking, as this is not only your first impression to others, but your card may be passed along to a potential interviewer.

You may also want to have a few copies of your resume on hand.

### Speed Networking

Speed networking is a fun, easy, and low-pressure way to meet with fellow public historians and exchange ideas and experiences. The event is set up a bit like speed dating, but with different ends. Each participant will have a chance to talk and network with five established public history practitioners. These seasoned professionals remain seated at the same table during the duration of the event while a pair of participants rotates in fifteen-minute intervals from one table to the next. The event provides graduate students with the opportunity to connect with public history professionals and to learn about the variety of careers available to public historians. Speed networking is a great way to share your research, bounce ideas off peers, and maybe even pull together a panel for a future conference. Prepare some questions in advance, bring your business cards, and expect to talk and listen a lot!

This year NCPH will help keep the networking going by hosting a reception after the event for all speed networking participants. This reception will also serve as the Mentor/Mentee Meet-and-Greet. Advance registration is required, so if you are interested in participating, be sure to sign up when you register for the 2010 conference in Portland!

### Tips for Presenting Posters

Poster sessions are a great way to present your research without the stress of giving a formal panel presentation in front of a large group of people. Poster sessions allow for an informal discussion of your work; there is an emphasis on casual conversation (coffee and tea included), and visitors can choose to spend as much or as little time as they like looking at the various posters in the exhibit hall. As such, it is particularly useful format for generating feedback on works in progress and for projects that have visual, tangible, or digital media components.

(1) One option is to create a poster template in PowerPoint. A quick Google search for “poster session template” will bring up many examples that you can work off of. You can choose to have the poster printed professionally (which is by no means required), or go the do-it-yourself route. When you arrive at the conference, all you have to do is attach the poster you’ve created to the board. Bring glue or tape for these purposes.

(2) Avoid making your poster too text-heavy. While this is certainly tempting, you will quickly find that people would much rather gather the main idea of your project from the poster and then ask you to speak directly to the finer details.

(3) If you have other components to your project that you would like to share, bring them along. Each presenter will have enough table space to accommodate materials related to their poster. If you have a website you would like to promote, a particular book you would like to draw attention to, or audio of an oral history interview, feel free to include them in your presentation. These additions can be a great complement to your work.

If you need an electrical hookup, or have specific audiovisual needs, be sure to request these for your presentation in advance of your arrival.

(4) Take a few moments to check out other graduate student posters – this is a great way to meet other students (and your future colleagues) and to see what kinds of research and projects they are working on.

(5) Dress professionally. Even though the poster session is a less formal way of presenting your work, it is still important to make a good impression. Be sure to bring business cards, and if entering the job market soon, your resume. Potential employers and other professionals walk the presentation and it is a great way to network for employment or future research assistance.

(6) Relax, and have fun! Above all, poster sessions are conversational. People will be genuinely interested in what you are working on, and will want to ask you questions about your work. This is a great opportunity to test particular questions that you have been grappling with and see how people respond to your research.

#### How can I present next year?

Deadlines for conference presentations are usually due in August-September and the deadline for poster presentations is usually early December-January. A typical timeline to create a conference session, which will improve your chances of being chosen, is about one year. The paper does not have to be completed before you submit your session proposal, but it will assist you in creating the session and participants if it is. Finding session participants can be done either through networking or by putting a call out through a listserv. If you are interested in presenting a paper next year, make the most of the conference by making contacts with potential presenters through the various social events and by contacting this years speakers and moderators.

#### What is there to do in the evening?

Some evenings have scheduled events. Definitely plan to attend the graduate student reception. Most conference events end by around 9 pm, though, so you have plenty of time to get out and explore the city.

For local events, check out the calendar section of Portland Monthly (<http://www.portlandmonthlymag.com/>) or Portland's alternative newspaper, the Mercury: <http://www.portlandmercury.com/portland/Home>

The Local Arrangements Committee has compiled a fantastic list of restaurants, coffee shops, and bars to check out, as well as information about public transportation in the city. It's available on the [conference site](#) ("Where to Eat"). But here are a few extra sites to check out:

- Food Carts Portland - a nationally known site that provides information for all of the city's numerous food carts. <http://foodcartsportland.com/>
- Portland Beer Blog - focuses on one of the city's favorite topics, with reviews of breweries, specific beers and general news on the subject <http://pdxbeer.blogspot.com/>
- Breakfast in Bridgetown - Portland's favorite meal, with restaurant suggestions from a writer who dedicated an entire book to the subject <http://www.breakfastinbridgetown.com/>

As for the feel of the city, downtown is a well-organized grid. The city is divided into quadrants - Southwest (downtown and business district, conference location); Northwest (shopping, residential - the Pearl District, Nob Hill); Northeast (airport, residential); and Southeast (residential). The Willamette River divides the city east and west and Burnside Street divides it north and south. The east side of the city has fantastic restaurants and shops but is mainly reachable by car or bus. Streetcar allows easy access around downtown and throughout Northwest. The MAX light rail serves destinations of further distances.

*Compiled by the NCPH Ad Hoc Graduate Student Committee  
Revised November 25, 2009*