



Outreach and Education Committee

A Guide for Undergraduates and Graduate Students Attending Their First AES Conference

You are attending your first American Elasmobranch Society meeting! We are looking forward to meeting you. This document is intended to give you an idea of what to expect at the conference and some tips for having the best experience you can. Consider incorporating some of the suggestions for before, during, and after the meeting. Remember, this is your conference experience, and you can make some choices to have the kind of experience you want to.

What to Expect

Plenary sessions kick off the meeting. These are longer talks given by the leaders of the societies or local hosts, which can focus on history or the current state of the field or societies, overviews of research relevant to the region where the meeting is being held, and other broad themes.

Oral presentation sessions occur each day and are organized by field of research, based on inclusion of a symposium, or by student presentation award categories. You are welcome to ask questions when there is time at the end of presentations. Consider that presenters are usually grateful when the audience has questions about their work, that it takes courage for someone to stand in front of a crowd and share their research. You may want to attend presentations in multiple concurrent sessions. It is okay to leave the presentation room if you need to, just try not to be disruptive, and when possible, try to enter and exit during the applause between presentations. Refrain from having side conversations in the presentation sessions and from having conversations directly outside the meeting rooms, as sound easily carries into the room. These situations can be distracting for both the speaker and the audience. Help others remember this, too!

Poster presentation sessions are held on two afternoons, and there may be AES posters in one or both sessions. Poster sessions are great opportunities to ask presenters questions about their research, mingle, and chat. There are usually light refreshments available, and beverages available for purchase.

There is usually a *No Host Social* in the conference hotel the night before sessions begin (Wednesday). The bar area serves as a meeting place for attendees. No food or drinks are provided.

The JMIH reception is held on the first night of the conference (Thursday) and is included in your conference registration. This event is for all the societies (AES, ASIH, SSAR, HL) and includes food and some drinks.

The *SAC Student Workshop* occurs during a lunch break. The workshop theme varies year to year and typically includes short informal presentations from panelists and opportunities to ask



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questions. Lunch is provided. Check SAC announcements through the AES Secretary emails and follow the SAC Instagram (@elasmstudents) for details.

The *SAC Student Social* is held during an evening, usually at a location outside of the conference hotel. Food and/or drinks may be provided. Check SAC announcements for details.

The *AES Business Meeting* is when the membership listens to reports and updates from society leaders, receives the results from our elections, and votes on items such as conservation resolutions. All AES members are encouraged to attend and vote. Conservation resolutions are posted on bulletin boards in gathering areas outside meeting rooms, for you to read and think about in advance of the business meeting.

The *AES Banquet* is our time to celebrate award winners, raise money for student travel through a live auction and the finalization of the silent auction, and enjoy spending time together at the end of the meeting. Some society members enjoy dressing a bit fancier for the banquet, but this is not required. Tickets can be purchased in the AES Store. Your ticket includes dinner, and beverages are available for purchase. The Student Affairs Committee works very hard to put the auctions together; please support them and each other by being attentive and cheering the bidders on. Sometimes the banquet programming is followed by a dance party.

Other social events may be announced before or during the meeting. Listen for announcements in sessions, and keep an eye on your email, the AES social media pages, and bulletin boards to stay informed of these opportunities.

Both the AES and JMIH have a *Code of Conduct* that all members and attendees are expected to observe, to maintain a professional, productive, safe, and welcoming environment for everyone. Please read the AES [Code of Conduct](#) on the [AES website](#), and the [JMIH Code of Conduct and reporting guidelines](#) on the [annual meeting website](#). If you witness or experience a violation of the code of conduct, please write down the details of it as soon as possible and contact a member of the Equity & Diversity Committee, Executive Committee, or any Safety Officer. Onsite and offsite Safety Officer information can be found on the JMIH Code of Conduct page. If you are not sure if a situation you witnessed or experienced was a code of conduct violation, you may discuss it with any Safety Officer or society leader or ask them to help you find the anonymous reporting web portal.

Note that while alcohol is available and consumed by many people at conference events, you should not feel pressure to drink. There are lots of people who do not drink for many reasons. If you are of age and do consume alcohol, always be mindful of your limits, personal safety, and responsibility to uphold the Code of Conduct.



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Before AES

It can be helpful to do a little planning before the conference. You can refer to your plan to avoid missing something that is particularly important to you, and to give you direction when there are so many things going on at one time.

- Browse the meeting website, schedule, and abstracts, and check out the conference app ([Whova](#)).
 - Note which individual talks and posters you most want to see. This could be based on the topic or the presenter, whether they are someone whose papers you have read or a lab mate you want to support.
 - Note which overall sessions are most interesting to you.
- Set some goals and make them as specific as you can. Even if your goal is to get a feel for the field of elasmobranch research, you can make this more specific, for example, by setting your goal to attend at least one talk or poster from each subdiscipline and write notes on your impressions. Here are some prompts to help you think about your goals:
 - Why are you attending the meeting?
 - What do you hope to learn?
 - What do you hope to share?
 - Who do you hope to meet?
 - What do you need to do to take good care of your physical and mental health while you're at the conference?
- Think about how you want to present yourself, practice it, and own it. This is sometimes called an elevator pitch. Your elevator pitch can be as simple as stating who you are, your home institution, what you are researching, and when you are presenting. If you are not involved in research yet that is okay; instead, talk about what you are interested in learning or researching.
- If you have a mentor, talk to them before the meeting. Find out if they have any expectations of you and ask them any questions you have about what you should expect at the meeting. Let them know your goals for your conference – maybe they can help you achieve them! If they are not attending the conference, ask if there are other ways they can help you make connections.
- Connect with your roommates or friends who are attending, and chat with them about your goals. You can help support each other and hold each other accountable.
- Plan your budget for your daily expenses at the meeting.



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During AES

These are some tips for feeling comfortable, working on your goals, taking care of yourself, and enjoying the spontaneity of a big conference.

- Find the registration desk soon after you arrive and do a walk-through of the meeting space, so you know where to go for presentations.
- Refer to the plans you made, and recognize that it's okay to change those plans, or throw them out the window and go with the flow. Forgive yourself if you miss a talk you wanted to see because you were practicing your presentation, having a great conversation with a new connection, doing something to take care of yourself.
- Be prepared to take notes, but not like you're in class. There is no test, and you will consume so much more information than you can remember. Write down the key points that made you excited, curious, inspired, or confused. Write down any questions you'd like to ask during the Q&A portion of the presentation, when you get a chance to chat with the presenter later, or via email after the meeting. Write down any papers you want to look up and read later.
- Find a few minutes each day to reflect on what you learned and make some notes indicating which talks and posters you attended. It can be hard to remember as the week goes on, and even harder after the meeting is over!
- Meet new people. The AES Store is run by students, so you can always find other students there! It is also a great place to meet other society members, chat, and find a group to join for a meal.
- The hotel lobby is another good place to join up with a group headed out for a meal. Try not to latch on to any one person or group. There are many people to meet, and the folks you are meeting are also trying to meet new people and catch up with colleagues and old friends.
- Don't forget to take good care of yourself! Eat well, stay hydrated, and get some sleep. If you are a person who needs to exercise, nap, or otherwise have quiet time throughout the day, that doesn't change just because you're at a conference. It is okay to take time for these things.
- Consider having a conference buddy so neither of you ever feel alone in the crowd, but do not let this stop you from introducing yourselves to other people.
- Be curious and kind in your interactions with others.



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After AES

Most attendees feel some sense of renewed inspiration and focus while attending a conference. These are some tips for holding onto that energy when you return to your regular daily life, schedule, and responsibilities.

- Organize and submit your receipts to your home institution if you are eligible for reimbursement.
- Review your notes and your record of what you intended. Write down any of the questions or inspiration you want to pursue.
- Revisit your pre-conference goals. Which did you stick to, and which did you let go of? Why? What would you do the same or differently next time? Don't be hard on yourself if you didn't meet all (or any) of your goals!
- Did you make a connection you want to follow up with after the meeting? Make sure to follow through.
- Talk to someone about your conference experience. This could be a colleague, mentor, or friend, and it could be someone who went to AES, someone who went to a different conference, or someone who has not been to a conference yet. The conversation can help jog your memory, reinforce any inspiration you felt while you were there, could help you understand aspects of the conference that someone else experienced, but you didn't, or could help someone else think about their upcoming conference.

This guide is a living document. Please send updates to the AES Outreach and Education Committee.

References and Further Reading:

<https://www.chronicle.com/article/how-to-make-the-most-of-an-academic-conference>
<https://smallpondscience.com/2016/01/11/who-you-know-really-matters/>
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