Suggestions for Presentations at Professional Meetings

NAISA welcomes presentations from a diverse range of scholars, at all career stages, and in a variety of formats. Our goal is that all participants have an equal opportunity to present their work and to benefit from the comments of discussants and audience members. We offer the following suggestions:

I. PRESENTERS:
   a. Giving a paper:
      i. Respect for colleagues motivates respect for time constraints. A one hour and forty-five minute NAISA session with papers and a comment should include at least a few minutes for introductions, at least five minutes for a comment, and at least fifteen minutes for questions from the audience. That leaves about 70-80 minutes for all the papers, and ideally more time for comments and questions will make for a better session. Thus, a session with three or four papers will be served well by papers that are no more than twenty minutes. This can be adjusted given particular circumstances (no formal comments and three papers, for instance, lends itself to 25 minute papers). Staying on time allows your colleagues equal time.
      ii. It takes two minutes to read a double-spaced page at a speed that is comprehensible to most audience members: twenty minute paper=ten pages, no more.
      iii. Prepare your paper to be slightly shorter than your time slot to allow time for brief introductory or concluding thoughts. (E.G. “I would like to acknowledge…”)
      iv. Practicing a conversational delivery is well worth the gratefulness of your audience for not having to listen to a monotone “reading.”
      v. A lively delivery should be paired with a full written version, not just ad-libbed, because: (1) you will be able to judge presentation time more exactly (2) Presenters must send papers (or summaries of other kinds of presentations, such as films) to discussants and chairs a month before the meeting, so that … (3) Chairs can monitor the length of presentations before the session (and avoid possible embarrassment) (4) written presentations more easily become dissertation/book chapters or articles than a loose set of notes, and (4) MOST IMPORTANT! discussants can thoughtfully read, think, and write useful comments.

   b. Roundtable presenters
      i. What justifies including sessions without formal papers on our program is the idea that rigorous scholarly interaction can occur through several people engaging the same topic interactively. In agreeing to take part, you should consider your obligation one to be well-prepared, focused, and thoughtful. Off the cuff discussions are best left to the corridors and other extra-session venues.
ii. If you are asked to provide initial comments, these should be as carefully prepared as a formal paper and follow closely whatever time limits are provided. Most people will, in fact, benefit greatly from formally drafting such remarks.

c. All presenters
   i. Presenters should send copies of their vitae, or at least a short biographical paragraph, to the chair a month before the session so chairs can prepare introductions. Program organizers do not have the time or staff to do this.
   ii. At the meeting, presenters should make sure any equipment needed for their presentations is in place and works before the session. Because rooms are in constant use during the day, stop by in late afternoon or early morning when no sessions are scheduled. And be prepared for malfunctions—have a backup plan if you can’t show your Powerpoint slides.
   iii. If presenters are not able to attend, they should contact their session chair and discussant as well as the meeting organizers as soon as possible.

II. DISCUSSANTS:
   a. Discussants should write their comments and give copies to presenters. The discussant can provide very useful suggestions and critiques, but it is difficult for presenters to remember or jot down oral comments.
   b. Discussants should also try to make time during the meeting (perhaps over a cup of coffee after the session) to review their comments with presenters. This can be most helpful when presenters are at early stages in their careers.

III. SESSION CHAIRS:
   a. Chairs should communicate with session participants 2 or 3 months prior to the meeting to communicate time and date of the session, and necessary contact information.
   b. Chairs should check that equipment requests have been made and that the equipment is in place and works before the session. Because rooms are in constant use during the day, stop by in late afternoon or early morning when no sessions are scheduled. You can prepare for malfunctions by asking ahead of time how to locate an emergency contact.
   c. Chairs should communicate again with session participants 30 days before the session to insure that papers are being circulated to discussants, CVs have been submitted to facilitate introductions, etc. Chairs should urge anyone who is not able to attend to let everyone know as soon as possible.
   d. If possible, participants might gather 15 minutes prior to the session to meet one another, review the sequence of papers, etc.
   e. Do not change the sequence of papers. Audience members often move between sessions to catch particular presentations, following the program.