

Doing Applied Research

MIXTAPE TRACK



Section 6. Conferences and Networking

Conferences



- There are a lot of economics conferences! Which ones should I attend?
- I'll keep this to U.S. conferences...Dan can field questions about European conferences!
- As a grad student and junior professor, I went to many conferences
 - Was able to figure out which ones I liked early in my career
 - Too much travel, however, comes at a loss of productivity
- I think going to 3 or 4 a year is plenty
 - American Economic Association Annual Meeting
 - Regional conference (in order of quality: SEAs, WEAs, EEAs/MEAs)
 - A conference specific to your field. For instance...
 - Labor: Society of Labor Economics Annual Meeting (SOLEs)
 - Health: American Society of Health Economists Annual Meeting (ASHEcon)
 - Environmental/Resources: Association of Environmental and Resource Economists Annual Summer Conference (AERE)
- Interdisciplinary conferences that should be on your radar
 - Population Association of America Annual Meeting (PAAs)
 - Great place to get research ideas
 - Association for Education Finance and Policy (AEFP)
 - Association for Public Policy Analysis and Management Annual Meeting (APPAM)

Conferences

- I've settled on:

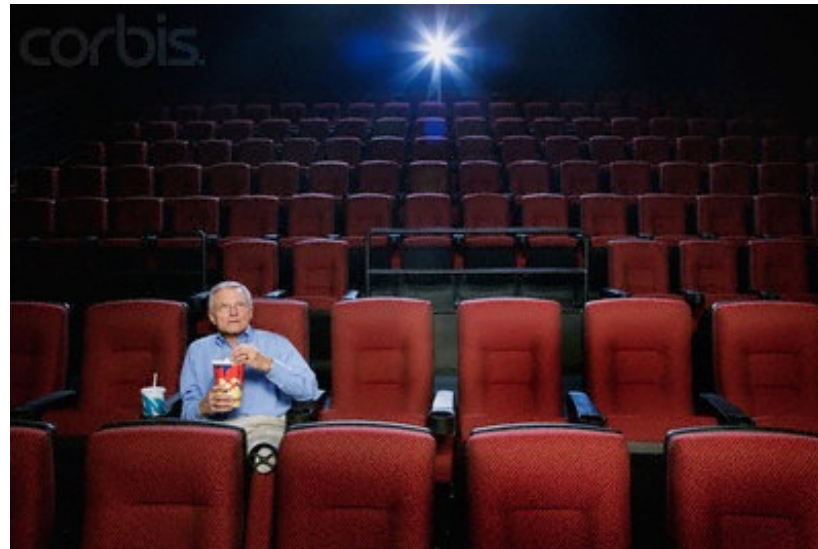
- American Economic Association Annual Meeting (aka ASSAs)
 - Tons of high-quality research
 - Great networking opportunities (everyone is there!)
 - If you can get a paper accepted, high likelihood some very good economists will see your work
- Southern Economic Association Annual Meeting (SEAs)
 - Lower quality if you attend non-organized sessions
 - Many high-quality organized sessions
 - Especially the case for applied micro
 - Low-pressure conference where one can present research in its earlier stages
- Economic History Association Annual Meeting (EHAs)
 - Field-specific
 - Smaller and more intimate conference
 - Generally very high quality
- NBER meetings
 - Many to choose from throughout the year (fall, spring, and summer meetings)
 - Summer institute is particularly good
 - Quality is always very high





Organized sessions vs. Single-paper submissions

- Starting in your 4th of 5th year of graduate school, try to organize at least one conference session per year.
 - Great networking opportunity
 - Potential to meet future coauthors
 - Shows you are active in your field
 - Hand-picking people who you want to read your work
 - It is really fun!
- Single-paper submissions can work out
 - Probably fine at a higher quality conference, such as the ASSAs.
 - But, if you submit to, say, the SEAs as a single-paper, there is some chance the room will look like this...



Template for a conference session submission



Public Health and U.S. Economic History

JEL Codes: I1, J1, N3

Session Organizer and Chair: D. Mark Anderson

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Paper #1: *Medical Technology and the Elite-Capture Hypothesis: Neonatal Intensive Care Units and the Black-White Neonatal Mortality Gap*

D. Mark Anderson (presenter)

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Daniel I. Rees

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Abstract. Whether health disparities are exacerbated or diminished by technological innovation is theoretically ambiguous. The introduction of inexpensive, portable technologies such as antibiotics can lead to dramatic improvements in the relative health of poor, underprivileged members of society. More expensive technologies may, however, be subject to “elite capture,” potentially widening existing health gaps. To directly test the elite-capture hypothesis, we construct a unique data set on the diffusion of neonatal intensive care units (NICUs) during the 1960s through 1980s in the United States. At this time, hundreds of NICUs were being built across the country, and the Black-White infant mortality ratio was growing rapidly. Exploiting the temporal and spatial variation in the rollout of NICUs, we estimate their effect on the Black-White neonatal mortality gap.

Discussant: Sophie Li (Boston University, ywl242@bu.edu)

Paper #2: *The Gift of a Lifetime: Mortality Effects of Hospital Funding and its Complementarities*

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Melissa Thomasson (presenter)

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Anthony Wray

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Abstract. Does access to hospital care affect infant and later-life mortality? We study this question in the context of a large-scale expansion in hospital care and resources in North Carolina facilitated by funding from the Duke Endowment starting in the mid-1920s. Estimates imply that counties exposed to Duke funding experienced reductions in infant mortality (12.5%) and mortality at older ages (8.8%). The infant mortality gains are twice as large for African Americans (20.1%) compared to Whites (8.7%). We find further evidence that Duke supported hospitals reduced maternal mortality, attracted higher quality physicians, and were better able to take advantage of technological innovations such as sulfa drugs.

Discussant: Tianyi Wang (University of Toronto, tw4746@princeton.edu)

Paper #3: *Germ Theory at Home: The Role of Private Action in Reducing Child Mortality during the Epidemiological Transition*

James Feigenbaum

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Lauren Hoehn-Velasco (presenter)

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Abstract. Did household health behavior and private actions play a role in lowering child mortality during the epidemiological transition? To measure household-level child mortality that spans this era, we link households between censuses and identify whether young children (under five) are present in the subsequent census. Using this (near) century-long measure of child mortality, we test whether households with access to knowledge of germ theory experienced abrupt changes in child mortality after its dissemination. Our results suggest that two groups experienced the clearest and most immediate reduction in mortality: the children of physicians (and other health service professionals) as well as children of mothers from high socioeconomic status. Neither wealth nor educational attainment alone was sufficient to effectively apply the insights from germ theory at home.

Discussant: Daniel Rees (Universidad Carlos III de Madrid, daniel.rees@uc3m.es)

Now go and do this!!!



Conferences cost money

- As a junior professor, hopefully this isn't an issue.
- As a graduate student, this can be a problem.
 - Departments and advisors may be able to fund some of your travel, but don't count on this.
 - Student travel grants at your university, however, likely exist
 - Application process is usually not too onerous
 - Can probably fund one or two trips a year this way
 - Look for funding from the various colleges at your university, but also from research centers
 - External travel grants also exist, but you have to search for them.
 - Some associations will fund grad student travel (e.g., Economic History Association, Agricultural and Applied Economics Association)
 - Centers at outside universities (e.g., Institute for Humane Studies, <https://www.theihs.org/funding-opportunities/>)
 - The AEA maintains a list of various funding opportunities for graduate students: <https://www.aeaweb.org/resources/students/grad-prep/funding>.



Virtual Conferences and Seminars

- Since COVID, a number of high-quality virtual-only seminar series have been established.
 - Examples include: Virtual Crime Economics (ViCE) seminar series (<http://jenniferdoleac.com/vice-seminar/>); Virtual Economic History seminar series (<https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/economics/staff/crei/vhs/>); Applied Machine Learning, Economics, and Data Science (AMLEDS) seminar series (<https://sites.google.com/view/amleds/home>)
 - AEA maintains a long list of online seminars: <https://www.aeaweb.org/resources/online-seminars>
- Great way to keep up with research in your field
 - But, keep in mind the productivity trade off associated with sitting in seminars all day long!
- Harder to connect with other economists virtually. Don't consider virtual conferences and seminars as a substitute for in-person meetings
 - I've met future co-authors at in-person conferences
 - I've never met a future co-author at a virtual conference

Networking



Identifying potential co-authors (or just future friends in your field)

- Conferences!
 - Avoid the “helicopter” approach
 - Don’t go into “hover mode” and look like a stalker!
 - Walk-up, introduce yourself, and be ready with a research-specific conversation starter.
 - Be approachable, circulate, look open and engaged
 - Don’t be a “fan-girl” or “fan-guy”
 - It is great to meet the big-names, VIPs, guest speakers, etc., but don’t spend your entire time trying to connect with them.
 - Spend your time listening, learning and connecting with others who have similar interests.
 - Dinners and “meet-ups” are a great way to network
- Your department’s seminar series
 - Don’t be shy...get on the speaker’s schedule!
 - Do not forgo these opportunities, especially as a graduate student.
 - These meetings probably won’t turn into co-authorships, but they can be extremely valuable
- Do not be afraid to “cold-call” someone via email
 - The worst thing they can do is ignore your email...that’s a pretty low-cost outcome
 - Send a draft of one of your working papers and *politely* ask for feedback.
 - This is how I met Dan!

Networking: FAQs



- Do I need to try and write with as many people in my field as possible?
 - I thought I needed to cast a broad co-author net early in my career
 - This might be the only way you can find a good “match”
 - But, once you’ve identified a few people who you work well with, do not feel like you need to write with everyone else
 - Working with people who you do not mesh well with (for whatever reason) can be a disaster
 - If you have a couple of great co-authors, just write lots of papers with them.
 - Dan and I have published 21 papers together!
- Should I cold-call someone and ask for their data?
 - If the data are publicly available, I (and others) view this as an annoying request.
 - If the data are not publicly available, and the author is free to share them, then the request is acceptable.
 - But, don’t come across as pushy or entitled because we live in a world where data sharing is encouraged
 - Be EXTREMELY appreciative
 - Remember, it could have taken the author an exceedingly long time to collect the data.

Networking: FAQs



- As a young professor, should I get involved with my department's seminar series?
 - YES!
 - Many departments try to protect their juniors from service-related duties.
 - It takes effort to run a seminar series, but as a junior professor this experience can be extremely valuable
 - Invite people in your area
 - Invite editors from journals
 - Even as a graduate student, if your department will let you help in organizing the seminar series, go for it!
 - If you are in department with a sparse seminar budget, try to find some grant \$ to help fund it.
 - If you are in a department with 5 seminars/week (or more!), get involved with the one specific to your field. Here is where you do not want to spread yourself too thin.



Q&A (≈ 10 minutes)
+
Break (≈ 5 minutes)