

## Staying safe at scholarly meetings and other events

Scholarly gatherings are a significant opportunity to share research, gain fresh perspectives, and network with students and faculty from other institutions. Occasionally mishaps occur that can cause harm, anguish, or loss. The following tips from senior, junior, and student women scholars are offered for those new to academic conferences and other travel to help increase the likelihood that your meeting will be both successful and safe.

### *Before you go*

- Review the website of the scholarly association sponsoring the meeting. Look for code of conduct documents that specify how harassment and safety matters are to be addressed at gatherings, including whom to contact for questions or concerns.
- Look at a map and familiarize yourself with the immediate area where the meeting will be held.
- Review the program and develop a plan for the sessions you will attend. Study the conference site map so that you know where the meeting rooms are and how to get there.
- If you know others who will be at the meeting, find out where they are staying. If you can't stay at the meeting hotel, choose one nearby that is a short walk. Plan to walk together if possible, especially in the evening.
- Have a meeting buddy, either someone you know who will be at the meeting or someone back home whom you can text if you leave the meeting site alone or with someone you don't know well.

### *At the meeting*

- Dress appropriately for a professional setting (allowing for religious and cultural differences). It is just one of those things that still matters, more for women. It also signals that you are present for professional reasons.
- Be aware of settings for meetings and gatherings. Identify ways to avoid getting trapped, such as sitting next to an aisle if possible. If the room is very crowded, be mindful of your safety.
- If you are presenting, arrive early to meet convener and other presenters, check out projection (if needed), and find out how questions and discussion will be handled.
- Be prepared for occasional off-topic or irritating questions. You can choose to answer, to defer by staying narrowly focused on your topic, to respond later if the question can be emailed to you (likely it won't), or simply acknowledge that you aren't going to comment on it.
- If a question is hostile, harassing, or makes you uncomfortable, find out the speaker's name. Also note the names of any others you might know who heard it. Express your concern to the convenor afterward. If it appeared intentional or was significant, report the incident to the designated intake person, program chair, or an executive officer.

- • Before a reception, make a note of who you would like to speak with, and try to find an opportunity to do so. This also can give you an exit tactic if you are in an uncomfortable conversation.
- • Also beforehand, plan two or three exit lines to use when you want to leave a conversation.
- • During receptions or happy hours, be mindful that it is still a professional meeting. If a conversation feels uncomfortable, excuse yourself and move on. Don't let yourself be cornered or stay in a conversation only to be nice if it becomes unpleasant.
- • If you are meeting with someone one-on-one, do so in a public space with others nearby or visible.
- • If you feel uneasy, or leave the meeting site with someone you don't know, send a brief text to your meeting buddy.
- • If you carry identification, credit cards, cash, cell phone, or other valuables in a purse, bag, or outside your clothing, think seriously about carrying what you need in pockets or on your person. Theft rings prey on conference attendees, including crowded areas and nearby eateries where attendees may be momentarily distracted.
- • Conference hotels have security but they are not entirely secure. Ask for a room in a main corridor, preferably closer to the elevators, so that there is less likelihood of being isolated.
- • When leaving your room, take valuables with you if possible. Make sure that door is firmly locked.

### *Following up*

- • During or at the end of each day, reflect and make notes on any interactions that made you feel uneasy or didn't feel quite appropriate, including who was involved and what occurred. If a pattern develops or it becomes clear that it was inappropriate, be prepared to report it.

### *A few extra tips for meeting success*

- • Think carefully about your expertise and strength, and those areas where you can (or want to) flex and stretch. This will help you stay focused and avoid getting sidetracked.
- • Be bold and meet people and mingle. Many connections are built that way.
- • Use the meeting as an opportunity to build and expand your scholarly network.
- • Don't over-promise. When a scholar is interested in your work, it can be easy to offer or promise more than you can do (or later might want to do).
- • Say no often. Especially as a new faculty, say no. A lot. It can be done both graciously and firmly.
- • If you will be interviewing for a job, have good references of scholars who support your application.

