



Transforming professional performance through the power of human interaction

First-time ASPE attendee? Helpful tips and reflections

Attending your first ASPE conference can be a daunting experience given the wide variety of activities, workshops, and learning sessions. We provide below a reprint of a 2010 article by **Angela Blood** that lists a number of tips for game-planning your first meeting. Angela's tips were so well-received that we provide them again for your benefit. The second article was submitted by **Nicola Ngiam, Chuen-Yee Hor, and Joanne Wang**, who traveled from Singapore to attend ASPE 2014 in Indianapolis. Their summary of the experience demonstrates very nicely how first-time attendees can not only benefit from conference events, but can thrive while maneuvering a very busy meeting agenda. We hope you enjoy reading what they have to say.

10 tips to help make the most of your first ASPE conference

By Angela Blood

Based on my experience as a first-time attendee at the 2010 ASPE conference in Baltimore...

- 1. Get excited!** You'll be with a huge group of people who all have the same interests, knowledge and experiential background, and enthusiasm that you do. You'll have a chance to express your ideas and concerns, and look to others for collaboration and problem-solving.
- 2. Don't worry; it's easy to make friends.** You may feel uncertain if you are the only person from your institution, but you're about to walk into the most welcoming and

inclusive environment you can imagine. You will not need to actively think about “networking” (to me, one of the scariest words). Just be yourself and target what interests you - you’ll find kindred spirits.

3. Prioritize. Look over the conference schedule ahead of time. There are more great presentations and workshops than you can possibly attend, so start mapping out your priorities. Think about what you’d like to get out of the conference, what your expectations for yourself are, and what will best suit your needs when you return home. If you are traveling with colleagues, try to spread out to cover more territory.

4. Sign up for an ASPE mentor. An ASPE mentor will meet you on the first day of the conference and offer guidance, make introductions, and generally be a friend. You’ll be in a small group of other first-time attendees, so you’ll be in good company. If you’re from an area with other institutions, ASPE will make an effort to assign you to someone in your region so you can easily get in touch with your mentor even after the conference.

5. Attend a pre-conference workshop. These are more in-depth and hands on sessions for covering major topics and especially useful for first time exposure. For example, there may be a pre-conference workshop on the use of moulage, or the art of applying mock injuries and illnesses with makeup. A word of warning: if you are excited about your work with moulage and decide to email photos of your bruises, cuts, and burns, think about including a disclaimer for family and friends. I speak from personal experience.

6. What to do about information overload? From posters to plenary speakers, ASPE Scholars workshops to vendor demonstrations, be aware that you will be exposed to more good ideas than you’ll know what to do with. The “inspiration high” will last throughout the weekend, but you need to make sure you capture all that information to use later. Find a way to keep track of where you’ve been, where you’re going, and what you plan to do with the information you have thus far. Be prepared to take notes, and make time for mini-debrief sessions at least once a day with friends or colleagues.

7. Go with the flow. Try not to feel pressured to see everything. There are so many interesting and innovative projects and research ideas, but you need to set some realistic goals. If something happens to upset your plan, adapt and adjust. Clever solutions and flexibility are part of our jobs every day, so use those skills now.

8. For the next conference... Think about what you’d like to do next year. Are you interested in presenting? Did you make a great contact from another institution you can collaborate with? Are you interested in joining a committee? The goal of the organization is not to re-invent the wheel, but to build upon what others have contributed and then share with the group to help build our collective knowledge base.

9. After the conference... Give yourself time to decompress, assimilate all the information you have, and then have a debrief session. If you attended with a colleague or have contacts from other institutions, schedule time to sit and think about everything you experienced. Go through your conference booklet and strategize about implementing some of the great ideas you had.

10. Keep the momentum. Try to keep in touch with your new contacts and the organization through the year. Even if you do not have “face time” with your fellow ASPE members, you can stay in touch through ASPE’s social media sites including Facebook and LinkedIn, posts and responses to the SP listserv, attending or hosting webinars, becoming a member of an ASPE committee, etc. Keep that enthusiasm alive, until we meet again next year!

Crossing the Atlantic for our first ASPE experience

By Nicola Ngiam, Chuen-Yee Hor, and Joanne Wang, Centre for Healthcare Simulation, Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine, National University of Singapore

Attending an ASPE conference has been something that we have wanted to do for a long time. We had learned initially about ASPE through **Gayle Gliva-McConvey**, who we had the distinct pleasure of working with through our institution, the National University of Singapore. In 2012, Gayle and her team from Eastern Virginia Medical School (EVMS) came to Singapore to share their experience and train our standardized patients (SPs) in giving feedback on communication skills. This began a lasting collaboration which equipped our SPs with feedback skills on communication and physical examination.

When our schedules finally allowed us to travel, we undertook the long-haul journey to Indianapolis for the 2014 ASPE Annual Meeting. We also seized the opportunity to make the most of our travels to the US to visit EVMS en route to Indianapolis. We thank Gayle and her team for their expert guidance and hospitality.

In Indianapolis, the 13th ASPE conference offered a wide range of themes that resonated with our objective of improving the quality of delivery of our program in Singapore. The wide variety of presentations made it necessary for efficient organization and division of roles among us so that we could get the most out of the sessions and to ensure that we attended the breadth of topics offered at the conference in order to learn from as many experts as possible.

Two sessions stood out for Nicola. The first was a pre-conference workshop on “How to establish defensible passing standards for local performance tests.” Reliability of test scores and the interpretation of the results have great implications for students. The workshop shed light on the development of justifiable standards for generating a pass mark using various techniques. The presenters **Rachel Yudkowsky**, **Jim Blatt**, and **Yoon Soo Park** also shared their own experiences with these techniques, providing valuable insights.

The second session from which Nicola benefitted was the presentation on “Review of literature: Application of SP methodology in 2014” by **Karen Szauter**. Karen did a great job navigating the audience through the sea of current literature on SP methodology, pointing out important and novel publications that merit more detailed readings. The session also served as inspiration for research ideas that we may be able to pursue in our own institutions. This must have been a huge time investment by **Karen** and I am truly grateful to have benefitted from her work and knowledge.

For **Joanne**, the pre-conference workshops provided her with an opportunity to draw from the experience of many different people from diverse backgrounds and different levels of experience. It was refreshing for her to hear their perspectives and she learned important lessons in building networks and sharing ideas.

Chuen-Yee built on her experience from the 11th ASPE conference in San Diego in 2012. She remembers the sense of wonder and inspiration that she returned home with, so she looked forward to attending conference with great anticipation. Learning to turn everyday SP educator work into scholarship and training SPs to be peer administrators struck a chord with her. Seeing and hearing in person great names that have been only been read about in books, such as **Peggy Wallace**, was a treat. The video tribute to **Howard Barrows** was inspirational.

Both **Joanne** and **Chuen-Yee** enjoyed the “How to expect the unexpected” workshop on improvisation technique. It was packed with information, tips, and tricks which allowed the participants to learn how to maximize their observational skills and improvisation techniques. The unique activities on how focusing on behavior, etiquette, style, and talk can enhance SP training were eye-opening. They learned how important it is to keep safety in mind while still meeting learning objectives, which can be very challenging. **Joanne** and **Chuen-Yee** feel more empowered through the skills and knowledge gained from the workshop.

Aside from intellectual stimulation, perhaps the most memorable occurrence was the surprise tornado that hit Indianapolis during the meeting. This tornado caused the conference to come to a standstill and attendees were moved to a ballroom for more than an hour. Coming from a country sheltered from natural disasters, we listened for updates while visions of scenes from the movie “Twister” ran through our minds. We were thankful for our calm and reassuring American friends who remained nonchalant about the news. Thankfully, the tornado passed without causing damage to our location.

After a long but rewarding trip to the US, we were grateful to return home armed with new experiences and ideas for our program. We are looking forward to our next opportunity to attend the ASPE annual conference!

