

## What to Expect at the Race & Pedagogy Conference

(developed by Professor Eric Orlin – adapt as needed)

The Race and Pedagogy National Conference (RPNC) is an incredible opportunity to be able to attend a national conference, for free, held right on our own campus. Most students have not had an opportunity to attend a conference so far, and most never get this opportunity. Each Puget Sound student has this opportunity, but only once in their four-year career, so this tip sheet is designed to help you make the most of it.

The Race and Pedagogy National Conference (RPNC) is part academic conference and part social activism. At many academic conferences – such as the Classics and Religion ones I attend – there are 2-3 hour sessions (“panels”) scheduled throughout the day, with 2-3 sessions per day for several days. At these panels which are organized around themes or topics, scholars read papers that they have written for roughly 20 minutes each (some conferences or sessions allow for longer or shorter presentations and different formats). Either after each presentation or after all of the presentations, there is usually time for the audience to ask questions of the speakers about their work and/or to engage in general discussion about the themes of the panel. There might also be a keynote address, where a famous scholar is invited to speak for an hour to allow them to develop their viewpoint more fully. Typically, free time is built into the schedule between sessions, so that people can carry on their conversation in less formal settings, or can catch up with old friends, make new ones, or just relax.

The RPNC will have some sessions along those lines, but also has more variety in presentational formats and types of presenters. The Race & Pedagogy Institute is deeply invested in working with the local community and schools. So where the audience at a typical academic conference is almost exclusively other academics in that discipline (for example, historians, biologists, or economists), the audience at RPNC will be more diverse and include teachers, parents, policy makers, and community organizers as well as students, staff, and faculty from both Puget Sound and other schools. And while some of the sessions will offer traditional academic scholarship, others will involve expertise from community settings, lessons in activism, or learning through artistic engagement that demonstrate the multiple ways in which we can learn.

At most academic conferences, professors and students will attend sessions related to their own specific interests. Sometimes that connects to research they are doing, or sometimes to classes they teach. Occasionally they might attend a session that looks interesting even though they are not an expert in that area: sometimes these prove to be the most worthwhile sessions, but sometimes even professors can find themselves in over their heads as the papers expect a level of expertise that they don't yet have. Again, the RPNC is different because of its interdisciplinary and activist component, and attendees at the conference, including many of your professors, will stretch themselves by attending sessions not in their fields of research, but that help them learn how to be better educators more generally or to learn how to make a difference in society.

## So, what are some tips for you as a student?

1. Organize your own path through the conference in the way that you feel best serves your learning goals. That's what professors do. Think about what you hope to gain by attending the conference, and make a schedule on the Guidebook app with sessions that might do that.
2. Don't get discouraged if you pick a session that doesn't work out. That happens to professors all the time: a session's description might look more interesting than it turns out to be, or a presenter may have a poor presentation style. Also note that some rooms are small, and seating will be on a first-come basis. If you get shut out of a session, there are also exhibits in the library and museum, and it can be exciting to simply "hang out" with diverse attendees of the conference in various areas around campus.
3. The question and answer part of a session is usually the most interesting part. That's where people in the audience try to figure out how the presentation connects to their own work or suggest new evidence that perhaps the presenter hasn't considered. So, try to stay for the Q&A if you can.
4. *Don't be afraid to ask questions yourself!* If you pay attention to the talk, you have the right to ask a question.
5. But if you do, make sure you ask a question, and try to be short and to the point. Almost all professors have seen people use their question time to make a long statement rather than ask a question, and some of us have even done it. But no one likes it.
6. If you are not comfortable asking a question in public, you can always go up to the speaker at the end of a session. Almost all speakers are delighted to find that their talk was well received by someone in the audience, and so are happy to talk about it afterward.
7. At most conferences it is rude to leave a session while someone is delivering a paper, but it is OK to leave between papers. But again, try not to miss the Q&A – think about leaving after the Q&A for a speaker has finished.
8. If you know in advance you are not staying until the end of the session, try to sit near the back and/or on an aisle so that you can leave without disturbing others.
9. It's generally OK to enter a session while someone is speaking, but obviously you should do so with as little disruption as possible. That means not banging the door, and perhaps standing at the back of the room, and then looking for a seat in between presentations.
10. This should go without saying, but **put your phone on silent mode!**