

“NOTES FROM THE ABOVE GROUND”

Society for Integrative and Comparative Biology 2012

1. TAKE SOME TIME TO READ THE MEETING PROGRAM

Because of the number of parallel sessions and symposia at the SICB meeting, take 10-15 minutes to read the program in advance. Better yet, spend the first part of each day planning which sessions to attend. Do the same for the poster session. As it can be quite crowded and even overwhelming, knowing which poster you want to see and when it is up will help you make the most of all sessions. Use the online database to search for terms related to your research and other interests. Utilize the online schedule builder to make planning even easier. Tag-team! Coordinate with other students attending the meeting. That way, they can fill you in on talks you may have missed because of time conflicts.

2. MIX-AND-MATCH TALKS

It is not necessary to stay for the entire slot of talks during a session. If you want to see one talk, simply (and politely) excuse yourself at the end of the talk and head to your next session (see above for planning ideas). Be mindful that symposia and talks are of different lengths, so plan accordingly. Also, attend a few talks outside of your discipline. You never know what you can learn from other fields if you don't check them out!

3. VENTURE FROM YOUR ADVISOR! DON'T BE SHY!

While you may feel most comfortable staying close to your advisor, venture out! Attending talks apart from your advisor is a good way to broaden the breadth of ideas gained from SICB. Meet other graduate students and postdoctoral fellows...and even other professors and investigators. Don't be afraid of introducing yourself to a scientist whose work you've cited many times. To do so: prepare a quick introduction, complete with your name, affiliation and research interest(s). SICB provides a great platform for establishing networks, collaborations and long-term friendships, so don't be afraid to get out and independently explore! As a student-friendly meeting, SICB is a great “first” conference for students. All the more reason not to be shy!

4. WELCOME QUESTIONS

Science is all about asking questions, so welcome inquiries and don't be afraid to pose your own questions! If you are giving a talk or a poster, remember that most people are genuinely interested in what you are doing if they ask questions. It's not that you were unclear or wrong. Albert Einstein once said, “If we know what it was we were doing, it wouldn't be called ‘research,’ would it?” Keep this in mind.

5. BE PROMPT AND BE MINDFUL OF TIME

Don't forget to show up on time to talks and poster sessions. If you are giving a talk, show up early and introduce yourself to the session chair. If you are giving a poster, ensure that you are available during the entirety of your allotted time. Persons may have made a personal commitment to attend your talk or poster. During the poster session, prepare a short verbal description of your work. There's no need to take every person through your entire poster. They likely will have questions and you will find that time is better spent in conversation.

6. DON'T FORGET ABOUT THE EXHIBITORS AND VENDORS!

Want free stuff? Check out the exhibitors and vendors! Publishers, societies and scientific vendors are always in the exhibitor hall and are more than willing to talk about your work and science in general. Many also have great SICB-specific discounts, so don't forget to pay them a visit during the conference.

7. CHECK OUT THE NOTICE BOARD

Next to the registration desk, you'll find a notice board. Investigators often post opening notices for graduate student opportunities, postdoctoral fellows and field-courses. Don't miss out!

8. ATTEND WORKSHOPS, DISCUSSION GROUPS AND BUSINESS MEETINGS

Workshops and discussion groups are great opportunities for learning and networking. As they often consist of smaller groups, meeting new people can be less daunting and intimidating. Business meetings are also a great opportunity to learn about what is going in your section of SICB. As always, you can meet new people, too!

9. MAKE TIME FOR YOURSELF!

Science can be tiring, so make sure you allot time for short walks, long lunches, coffee breaks and sightseeing. Take a new acquaintance along, too! Socialize after the days' events with new colleagues and friends. Don't be afraid to go out and have a social drink with people from your section or members of another laboratory.

10. COME BACK TO SICB 2013!

If you enjoyed SICB 2012, plan to attend next year. You will know more people, more people will know you and networking will be easier! If you plan on a career in science, networking and collaborations are critical to your success.