Planetary Makerspace Student Work Travel Policies and Recommendations

Conference and Other Work Travel

Traveling for academic work is typically necessary and often a perk of the job. It lets us meet with distant colleagues, present our work, learn about theirs, and usually experience some new part of the world. I will often suggest possible conferences or other work travel opportunities, but generally won’t insist. You can also suggest ideas to me. Either way, travel must be mutually agreed upon in advance, preferably many months to a year.

It will almost always be a requirement that you present your work when you travel. This also means that you will need to have made sufficient progress since your last conference presentation to justify the expense of additional conference attendance. If you are not sure, then you should consult with me. For these reasons, we often set conference attendance as a medium-term goal to strive towards when we do our goal setting.

Travel Authorization

Prior to any work travel, you must obtain express permission from me. Please approach me as early as possible about potential travel. I will also approach you when I think there is a potential meeting, conference, or workshop that is appropriate for you.

Prior to making any purchases, you must submit a travel request through the SAP Concur website (<https://www.concursolutions.com/home.asp>). Fill out the form as best you can. Come to me or an administrator in the front office for any needed help, then submit it. This must be done first.

If the travel is international, then you should register your trip with the MSU Global Travel Registry (<https://globalsafety.isp.msu.edu/faculty-and-staff/travel-registry/>). You will need to also submit a student internal travel COVID-19 waiver request (<https://globalsafety.isp.msu.edu/travel-during-covid-19-pandemic/international-travel-waiver-process/>). You no longer need to submit the MAU form, but the waiver request is still needed.

Travel Budget Policies

Stretching travel budgets so that everyone can attend more conferences is one of the reasons why we want to have careful policies and practices. We do also need to balance a desire to reduce costs with a need to make sure travel is kept safe and inconvenience is limited, although inconvenience will probably not be fully eliminated. Naturally, students must follow all MSU and EES department travel policies and procedures as well.

I have a purchase card (pcard) for use in the planetary makerspace, so it is not necessary to put hotels, airfare, car rentals, etc. on your personal credit cards. In fact, you should book airfare and car rentals through the MSU Concur website unless you can find a better deal—I can always find better lodging deals outside of the MSU Concur website, but you should do what you find most convenient. Either way, you can use the pcard to make all advance.

Typical expenses on a trip include conference registration, poster printing, airfare, accommodation, ground transportation, and per diem. Below are some guidelines on making those purchases. In all cases with these policies, there can be necessary exceptions so just let me know in advance.

1. Purchase your air tickets about 2-3 months prior to the trip so that you get the best fares.
2. Try to find an economical place to stay. Consider half the cost of a normal two queen-mattress bedroom at the conference hotel to be the maximum nightly hotel budget. In other words, you can stay in the conference hotel sharing the room with a roommate or you can stay elsewhere with your own private space if its equivalent or less in price. Sometimes, there is more than one conference hotel, use the most affordable option to set the budget.
3. Keep track of your per diem expenses. MSU does not require an itemized per diem, however the per diem budget is meant to reimburse you for actually incurred expenses. The per diem rates can be very high especially for international travel, and so you should use Concur’s per diem reduction expense type to limit the per diem to what you actually spent. The goal of per diem reimbursement is to cover the added pocket costs due to travel, i.e. you probably don’t eat out every meal but on work travel you probably will. It is not intended to cover bar bills or be a take-home cash bonus.
4. Try to use public or shared transportation, if possible. Often ground transportation is necessary to get to and from the airport, potentially at both ends of the trip. Please consider using the Michigan Flyer to get to the Detroit airport. At the destination, consider SuperShuttle or an equivalent before a private cab. When booking your accommodation, consider how you will get to and from the airport, lodging, and the conference venue.

Conference Attendance Recommendations

1. Wear comfortable shoes.
2. Look at the program beforehand and plan your time at the conference. There are usually multiple things going on simultaneously, so you want to have a sense of the options beforehand. Also make sure to look at the venue floorplan in advance since new spaces can often be confusing.
3. If you want to meet someone for the first time, then a common strategy is to search for their presentation or the presentations of their students. This will give you something to talk about with them when you approach them.
4. Dress business casual. I’ll wear slacks and a button up shirt each day. Full suits and fancy dresses will stand out. Ties and heels are rare but present. T-shirts are generally too informal. You can dress to stand out or blend in, but most importantly be comfortable.
5. Wear your name tag. If the lanyard is too long, you can tie it off so that it's higher on your chest.
6. Introduce yourself to people. It's not weird. This is expected. Conversation starters can be questions about what their presentations are/were about. It's ok if you didn't see it, just say you were in a different session.
7. Go to lunch with newly met colleagues is common, especially at your first meetings. Ask and people will usually let you join unless they have a specific lunch meeting agenda.
8. Practice your presentation.
9. Approach speakers with questions after the sessions. Most will be happy to talk to you.
10. Be at your poster for your entire session. Exceptions to this rule should be rare.
11. Prepare an elevator pitch of your research so that you can answer the question, "What do you work on?" Three sentences max. Practice it out loud.
12. Try to pack for carry-on only. The poster tube is usually admitted as a third extra item with no problem. The other items can be your carry-on suitcase and a backpack/large purse. If you check your luggage, then put at least one spare set of clothes in your carry-on.
13. Layer your clothing, especially on the first day. Conference halls can be hot or freezing. After the first day, you'll have a better sense of what the rooms are like.
14. If you're a snacker, then bring some snacks because you won't always know what to expect in terms of snacks, especially on the first day. Typically, I grab a very light breakfast then have a big lunch and a bigger dinner.
15. Have fun and feel free to explore the host city in the evenings and shoulder travel days.
16. No amount of a good time the night before should hamper your ability to attend the first session in the morning. If you can’t make the earliest morning session, then you need to be getting to bed earlier.
17. Print your poster locally and travel with it since that will allow you to check it over beforehand.
18. Bring a hard copy of your talk with you on your laptop but also save a copy to the cloud so that you can retrieve it in case something was to happen to your laptop.