

How to get involved in conferences - a short guide for undergraduate students:

While at university, you may feel you have enough lectures and tutorials to keep you busy and intellectually stimulated... however you may also be seeking out more information about the health promotion field and what exactly it means to be a health promotion professional.

There are a number of ways you can learn more about health promotion outside of your university commitments including (but not limited to) volunteer placements, casual project or research assistant work, association memberships and attendance at conferences.

Conferences are a particularly inspiring and stimulating way to learn about what is at the cutting edge of a field. They may be quite specific (for instance, the *Men's Shed Conference* held in Lakes Entrance in 2005), or more broad (*Spirituality and Health Conference* in Adelaide 2005, *Promoting Mental Health and Wellbeing Conference* in Perth 2007 or the *5th World Conference to Promote Mental Health* to be held in Melbourne 2008). They can be focussed upon theoretical frameworks or on practical issues in a field or can cover a range of perspectives.

Generally, a conference includes a number of key note speakers who each offer a broad perspective on a theme, then delegates can choose from a variety of parallel sessions on more specific topics (such as ways of working, specific populations, interventions).

Conferences are advertised in a number of ways, but often through professional associations (PHAA or AHPA for health promotion and public health). It's good to keep up to date with noticeboards at university and email messages from your networks. While conference registrations can be expensive, there are often 'early bird' deals that can be arranged and student registrations, the PHSA may also help you out through their conference grant scheme.

It would be great to see a larger student presence at local conferences. There may be opportunities to help with organisation or volunteering at the conference. Students might take the initiative and approach conference organisers about holding student-specific symposiums based on their placement projects for instance. Wherever you can, get involved in larger projects with established researchers or health promotion professionals and put up your hand to write and submit abstracts to conference organisers... you may end up presenting before long!

Above all else, the conference is a wonderful opportunity to meet with people who are working in the field already. You can chat about their position and how they got there, and share your aspirations and interests with others. You can potentially get to know your future employers. Also, having conference attendances listed in your CV shows your commitment to, and passion for, health promotion and public health.

I have been to a few conferences during my university time and have learned a lot from each one of them. I hope you are inspired to attend a conference that interests you soon!

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