

5th Graduate Student Conference

Innsbruck, Austria, 3 – 5 July 2014

The role of Panel Chairs and Discussants

How to be a Panel Chair

Rainbow Murray, experienced Section Chair and former member of the ECPR's Graduate Student Network, gives her advice on how to get the most out of chairing a Panel at the Graduate Conference.

- There is no need to introduce yourself or anyone else at length, unless they are a special invited guest from outside academia. At most, say people's names and institutional affiliations. Let them introduce their Papers themselves.
- Start the Panel on time wherever possible.
- Let the Paper-givers speak in the order of the programme unless they request differently – for technical reasons, for example.
- Keep each Paper-giver to time. This is the most important part of the role of Chair. Allow the final third of the session for questions and divide the remaining time evenly between the number of panellists. If one person goes over, they are eating directly out of the time of the other panellists, and that isn't fair. Give people a subtle warning when they are close to time (a raised eyebrow may suffice, otherwise passing them a piece of paper saying '2 minutes' in big letters will do the trick). Pass them another note saying 'please conclude' or similar once they are out of time. If they don't stop, you will need to be bold and ask them out loud to wrap up. Even if they are much more senior than you, it is your professional obligation as well as theirs to keep to time, and people will respect you more for being strict than being weak.
- Once all Papers have been given, take questions from the audience. If there are lots of questions, try to avoid asking any yourself, but try to think of some just in case the audience take a while to warm up (or go silent very quickly).

- If any of the audience goes off on a lengthy tangent, you may need to interrupt them to refocus the discussion.
- Make sure the session finishes on time. People want their cup of coffee/toilet break, etc and they can always continue the debate over coffee if they care that much.
- Always end the session by inviting the audience to thank the presenters (round of applause).

How to be a Discussant

As a Discussant, you serve two different needs.

Your first and most important responsibility is to help the audience understand the Papers better. You should have read the Papers carefully, taken time to understand their contributions, strengths and weaknesses, and what the audience needs to know about them.

Your second responsibility is to the authors.

What are your reactions to the Papers and why? What can the authors do to improve the Paper? Learning how to read other Papers with the critical eye of a good Discussant will help you to learn how to write Papers that appeal to the profession.

- Summarise briefly the Paper's main message and its contribution.
- Provide an assessment of the Paper: does it make its case convincingly?
- Suggest constructive ways to improve the Paper.
- Highlight the relevance of the Paper to academia and society.
- Stimulate conversation among the audience by posing questions for discussion.

Appendix 1

Suggested subject areas

1. **Governance and Leadership**
Panels focusing on political leadership and cabinet government
2. **Area Studies**
Panels focusing on specific regions (African, Asian, Latin American studies, the Middle East, etc)
3. **Comparative Politics**
(including African, Asian, American, European & Latin American Politics) – comparative papers within or across area studies, on any aspect of the political system
4. **Critical Approaches**
Panels focusing on critical theory, Marxism, feminism, post-structuralism, post-modernism, and other similar approaches
5. **Democracy and Democratisation**
Theoretical and empirical papers on democracy (and the quality of democracy) and the process of democratisation
6. **Development Studies**
Papers on the formation of political systems and the political aspects of economic development
7. **Electoral Politics**
Papers on electoral systems and reforms at whichever level of government
8. **Environmental Politics**
Panels focusing on green politics, green public policy and green parties
9. **EU Politics**
Papers on EU integration, institutionalisation, governance, widening, deepening, etc
10. **Foreign Policy Analysis**
Panels on foreign policy and foreign policy behaviour of nations and institutions in the EU
11. **Gender Politics**
Papers on the gendered aspect of politics and on gender policy
12. **Globalisation, Citizenship and Migration**
Papers on the impact of globalisation on migration flows and citizenship policies, at a theoretical and an empirical level
13. **International Relations**
Theoretical and applied papers in the field of IR
14. **Law and Politics**
Papers on the relationship between law and politics, and on more substantive issues, such as human rights protection and promotion
15. **Media and Politics**
Papers on the impact of public opinion and the media on the political process
16. **Party Politics**
Papers on political parties
17. **Peace and Conflict Studies**
Papers on processes of conflict resolution and peace-building
18. **Political Economy**
Theoretical and empirical papers on the governing of the economy
19. **Political Methodology**
Theoretical and applied papers with a clear methodological drive
20. **Political Psychology**
Panels addressing the interrelationships between psychological and political processes
21. **Political Sociology**
Papers on social movements, advocacy coalitions, contentious politics, the social roots of political parties, etc
22. **Political Theory**
Papers on empirically grounded political theorising and on political philosophy
23. **Politics and Human Rights**
Panels on the politics of personal integrity rights, cultural, economic and social rights
24. **Public Administration**
Papers on public administration and various forms of governance
25. **Public Policy**
All fields of public policy except economic and gender policies
26. **Regionalism & Federalism**
Papers on micro- (or sub-state) regionalism, decentralisation, devolution and local politics, as well as papers on federalism and intergovernmental relations at a theoretical and empirical level
27. **Religion & Politics**
The impact of religion on politics, and of politics on religion
28. **Security Studies**
Papers on security, broadly conceived (military, civilian, energy, environmental, etc)