Navigating the ASA-CSSA-SSSA Annual Meeting: Tips for First-Time Student Attendees

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The ASA, CSSA, and SSSA Annual Meeting can be a bit overwhelming for first-time student attendees. Here are some tips for preparing and navigating the meeting!

1. **Bring Business Cards** – As Golden Opportunity Scholars, you’re going to be introduced to a lot of people at the meeting, from leadership of the tri-societies to revered scientists to potential future employers. Be prepared to share your contact information by bringing along simple business cards, resumes, or having an easily accessible electronic copy that you are prepared to send out.

2. **Prepare Your Elevator Speech** – When you’re meeting new people, you may not have much time to chat. An elevator speech is a brief introduction of yourself, usually less than 30 seconds long. Your elevator speech might include your current position, major, undergraduate research experiences, and future plans. And don’t forget to mention that you’re a Golden Opportunity Scholar this year!

3. **Be Intentional** – Whether you’re planning to attend graduate school or look for jobs in industry after graduation, don’t be afraid to set up times to talk with potential future collaborators or employees. Though it might seem intimidating, reach out to professionals who you admire or respect - everyone is always happy to make time to network with emerging scientists.

4. **Dress for Success** – When you’re packing for the Annual Meeting, be sure to throw in a mix of business casual and business professional attire. Rarely are jeans appropriate during the official portions of the meeting. At events where you will be recognized as scholars, err on the side of dressing more professionally. When attending student events or scientific talks, business casual is often appropriate (except when competing in student contests). Remember that it’s always better to be overdressed than underdressed.

5. **Take Advantage of the Virtual Program** – Want to pave the road to great success at the Annual Meeting well in advance of the meeting? The essential app for mastering the meeting, the “MySci Mtgs” app, is available on both Apple and Android platforms. This app will allow you to create your own agenda; browse by session name, abstract key words, section/division, and more. The app will also list all of the sessions specifically geared towards undergraduate and graduate students and early career professionals. You can also use the app to see all of the exhibitors in the career center or exhibit hall and make a networking plan-of-action.

6. **Identify Your Meeting Goals** – What do you expect to learn from the meeting? Will you focus more on attending lecture and poster sessions or working to build your professional network? Does your school, advisor, or university club have any specific activities they’d like you to attend? Define two to three objectives that you want to accomplish during the meeting and use the MySci Mtgs app to map out your agenda.

7. **Attend a Variety of Sessions** – The Annual Meeting features sessions for scientific content, professional development, and networking, all of which occur simultaneously throughout the conference. Once you have decided on your objectives for the meeting, you can better identify which sessions will take priority in your schedule. But don’t be afraid to attend a variety of
sessions. Take a few hours in the evening to attend the mixer for your university. The annual meeting is not only a time to explore scientific topics, but also to make new contacts, keep in touch with former colleagues, and gain professional skills that aren’t offered at your university. And, mark your calendar for the Monday afternoon Career Fair to visit employers, attend mini-sessions, and talk to university representatives in the Grad School Forum.

8. **Don’t Be Afraid to Get Involved** – The Students of Agronomy, Soils, and Environmental Sciences (SASES) plans tons of contests and events that take place during the annual meeting, but did you know that all of these plans are coordinated by student volunteers? Each year, SASES elects new officers and appoints committee leadership. If you’re interested in planning and helping with the behind-the-scenes details of the annual meeting, consider running for an elected SASES Officer position. If you’re headed to graduate school, you can also get involved in the ASA, CSSA, and SSSA Graduate Student Committee who provide similar programming and resources for graduate students.

   Hopefully this list helps you feel better prepared to attend the ASA, CSSA, and SSSA Annual Meeting in St. Louis. Don’t worry, you will still feel overwhelmed at times. If all else fails, take an hour to explore the city or grab a cup of coffee before returning to the hustle and bustle of the meeting. And remember – have fun!