

## How Best to Integrate Postgraduate Research into Academic Conferences?

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*As academic coordinator of the [European Union in International Affairs \(EUIA\)](#) conference that took place in Brussels this May, **Lisanne Groen** introduced Young Researchers' Masterclasses, which saw senior scholars give feedback on papers and presentations of early career researchers, and provided them with useful networking opportunities. In future, running the masterclasses before the conference, as a separate event, might enable postgraduates to get even more out of the conference as a whole.*

The aim of the EUIA 2016 masterclasses was to provide PhD and early postdoc researchers with feedback on both their papers and presentation (skills) from senior scholars in a friendly environment. Three masterclasses were included in the conference programme: on economic governance and the environment; migration; and foreign and security policy.

Each masterclass included three to four paper presentations and feedback from a senior scholar with expertise in the issue area. The masterclasses took place simultaneously on the first day of the conference, in the morning. The participating junior researchers were allowed to attend the rest of the conference, but not present in a non-masterclass panel, so as to allow a larger number of academics to take part in the conference.

The masterclasses were perceived as a success for several reasons. First, they provided an opportunity for postgraduates to interact with fellow early career researchers working in the same issue area and facing similar problems at the initial stages of their academic careers. This allowed them to share experiences and to stay in touch during and after the conference, and to continue to share best practice and broaden their networks.

Second, the postgraduates received detailed feedback from senior scholars who are experts in their field. They also had the opportunity to speak with their reviewer after the session and to stay in touch after the conference (in order to receive more feedback, with a view to preparing their conference paper for publication).

It was essential to the success of the masterclasses that the senior scholars had taken the time to prepare substantive feedback and were relatively familiar with the topics, so that the early career researchers would receive useful comments on their work. As a paper giver in a normal academic conference panel, by contrast, you can never be sure that your discussant has actually taken the time to read your work and prepare detailed feedback.

Third, the senior scholars commented on issues that are particularly relevant for early career researchers, such as how to present your conference paper in a convincing

manner. In one of the masterclasses, for example, the senior scholar advised the presenters to always face the audience while speaking, to put down only the key points of the paper on the slides and to practice the presentation at home beforehand to make sure it stays within the allowed time limit. The senior scholars were also prepared to answer career-related questions based on their own experience.

To improve the integration of postgraduates into a future edition of the conference, we might consider organising the masterclasses before the conference, as a separate event – for instance, on the day before (following the example of [EISA](#)). This would create space for the junior participants and senior scholars from all the masterclasses to interact with each other before the conference – for example, at a common reception or dinner.

If the masterclasses are billed as a separate event, the junior scholars will be able to take part both in a masterclass and in the normal conference as paper givers and can interact with more scholars. In that way, they get the best of both worlds.

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