

WELCOME

Thank you for your interest in serving as the host for a future annual meeting of the American Conference for Irish Studies. For more than forty years, these meetings have advanced excellence in Irish Studies and teaching, in numerous disciplines. They are the events without parallel in the United States, and are central to Irish Studies worldwide, routinely attracting scholars from Ireland and elsewhere.

This document provides an overview of the conference, and of what's involved in successfully planning and mounting such an event—though each conference necessarily reflects the individual stamp of its host and organizers.

GENERAL PRINCIPLES

- The annual international meeting is the flagship program of the ACIS. Academic panels constitute the backbone and *raison d'être* of the annual meeting. They are the organization's chief means of ensuring the collegial presentation and discussion of members' Irish Studies scholarship.
- An academic institution should host the meeting. (On one occasion when no institution stepped up, the meeting was booked into a hotel; on several occasions, the meeting has had the support of an academic institution, but was nonetheless held in hotel spaces.)
- The program should have a broad general theme that is neither prescriptive nor limiting.
- Program planning is largely decentralized. The president appoints a program committee, but in practice its role is largely advisory; most of the planning necessarily falls to the local organizers. The ACIS Executive, past conference hosts, and other ACIS members may be called upon for advice and assistance.
- Irish Studies is by definition interdisciplinary; a full range of disciplines needs to be represented in the program. This is discussed further below.
- ACIS has historically taken a welcoming attitude toward conference paper acceptance, and specifically strives to be supportive of graduate students. Organizers may, however, refuse papers that are not appropriate or do not meet academic standards (usually in consultation with the program committee). All persons who present papers must be paid-up members of the ACIS at the time of the conference. Session chairs are also usually members, but organizers may wish to invite non-members as an outreach gesture.

- Each program should also feature several plenary addresses by invited scholars of note. The conference host alone has the privilege of selecting the plenary speakers: that is a reward for taking on the task of organizing the event.
- ACIS values sociability and opportunities for informal professional contacts. Such events as receptions, coffee breaks, a closing banquet, etc., are essential to the success of the conference.

SUPPORT FOR THE ACIS CONFERENCE

The ACIS national treasury provides a grant of \$4,000 to the host institution. This money is part of the organization's annual budget and thus is issued only after the next year's budget is approved. ACIS asks for no accounting of these funds.

One of the best possible uses of this support is to fund a student assistant (or several) to help with deposits, mailings, web site creation and maintenance and so on.

In past years, the Cultural Relations Committee of the Department of Foreign Affairs and the British Council funded speakers from Ireland. The CRC is now defunct, succeeded by a much more ambitious "Culture Ireland" Program. Its web address is <http://www.cultureireland.gov.ie/>; it is a good idea to query the appropriate consular or embassy staff before applying.

Organizers are encouraged to seek additional support from their institution, local or regional Irish cultural organizations, and the like. Also, academics tend to overlook the resources available to them in their own university's development office: this event brings international recognition and visibility to the school, and it is certainly worthwhile an early conversation with the fundraising office of your institution to see if they might help.

THE HOST'S DUTIES

The host and his/her committee's primary duties are to

1. organize the conference committee
2. make all necessary arrangements and assure that publicity, CFPs, and other mailings are done in a timely manner

3. receive all proposals and give timely notice that they have been accepted or declined
4. supervise the financial aspects of the conference
5. set the broad schedule of the meeting (e.g., when plenary addresses will take place, start times, etc.)
6. liaise with your host committee and if necessary the ACIS executive's program committee concerning paper acceptance, scheduling, etc.
7. arrange to have a conference web site set up at the host school, which links to the ACIS website
8. attend the prior year's meeting to promote the event, answer questions, etc
9. be present throughout the conference to "troubleshoot" and deal with the involved university services

TIMETABLES

ACIS strongly prefers that its national meetings in the US be held in April, though it will consider later times. (Meetings abroad are held in June or July.) American meetings usually open with a reception on a Wednesday night, followed by three full days of sessions and a closing banquet.

To accommodate all papers, large conferences may need to run as many as seven or eight simultaneous sessions. Some conference hosts have scheduled sessions on a Sunday morning, but this is unpopular and should be avoided if at all possible.

In addition to meeting rooms for sessions, organizers will need to schedule a meeting room for the Executive Committee on the afternoon of the first full day of the conference, and for the new Executive Committee on the last full day of the conference.

The statutory General Business Meeting should take place on the Friday or Saturday, over the lunch hour. (The cost of a lunch for this should be built into the conference fees. Usually, only about half of the attendees go to this meeting.)

A PLANNING TIMETABLE

At least two years to eighteen months BEFORE the conference:

- confirm availability of space and administrative support/budgeting at host institution

- confirm availability of hotel rooms. (Hotels will not usually be able to give a group rate more than a year out)
- formally propose to host the meeting in a letter to the ACIS vice-president and/or executive
- establish a local committee, set tentative theme, approach possible plenary speakers
- if realistic, request a course release with your institution during the semester in which the conference will occur
- Establish a web presence for the conference. For ease of management, it's best to have a page on the host institution's site, to which the ACIS site links

One year before the conference:

- The conference host should attend the National ACIS meeting and speak briefly at the general meeting and executive committee meeting.
- Confirm plenary speakers
- Arrange with the organizer of the meeting preceding yours to include a collateral piece announcing the next year's conference in every conference packet.
- Extend courtesy invitations to the president of the host university, the Irish Ambassador to the United States, other dignitaries
- Ask the national treasurer to issue you a check for support of the conference. This can be issued immediately after the meeting preceding yours.
- Establish a conference account number to which expenses can be charged and revenue deposited
- Estimate your space needs and reserve rooms with the facilities scheduling office at your school.
 - Contact the Irish consul in your region about hosting a reception.

By August 1 of the year before the conference:

- Distribute the call for papers to ACIS membership through the web site, the ACIS *Newsletter*, and such outlets as IASIL, CAIS, and the various list serves.

Five to six months before the start of the conference:

- Close paper acceptances. Begin setting out a preliminary schedule for the conference (how many simultaneous sessions/ meeting rooms will you need, which plenary speakers on which days, etc)
- Notify proposers that their paper has been accepted or declined. It is generally easier to do this in a bolus, rather than on a rolling basis.
- You will receive considerable pressure from some attendees to be told exactly when a paper is scheduled. The general rule is to do so the sooner the better—but realistically, you may not be able to give a time until about two months before the opening date.

One month before the conference

- Provide the ACIS secretary/treasurer with list of expected attendees, so that they can go through and note those who are not paid-up members. The ACIS executive, and not the conference host, takes the responsibility for enforcing the membership requirement.
- Post the preliminary program on the website. Send the conference program to the printer

THE PROGRAM FORMAT

Most sessions at ACIS will comprise three to four papers, presented orally, of no more than 20 minutes. Sessions should always include time for discussion and Q & A

Other formats are welcome—e.g., roundtable discussions on a focused topic; “living book reviews” in which speakers comment on a book and the author replies; and discussions of pre-circulated papers.

Creative writing sessions, in which ACIS members read their work, have also become a feature of ACIS meetings.

A three-paper session is preferable. It is advisable to schedule four-person sessions in the morning; the audience’s stamina fades after lunch.

Each session should also have a chair, who does not present. The chair has three chief responsibilities: A) To briefly introduce each presenter, including a few facts about his/her career and research interests; B) To assure that speakers stay within their allotted time, and if necessary, courteously cut them off should they run long; C) to conduct the discussion period after the papers—ideally, assuring that each presenter gets at least one question.

Chairs should be established figures in Irish Studies. (Graduate students are rarely asked to chair sessions.)

PLENARIES

Traditionally, a few scholars of recognized merit are allowed a solo session, during which other panels are not scheduled. The plenary events play an important part in giving the conference coherence and shared experience.

"Recognized merit" may be defined in consultation with discipline representatives, but it is important to note that the host committee has the sole privilege of selecting the plenary speakers.

Plenary speakers should be formally introduced by a figure of some stature within ACIS or the host institution.

The best time for a plenary address is probably before the lunch hour (though as the conference has grown in numbers, this has become harder to do). Such events as poetry readings and concerts draw well if scheduled in the evening; academic lectures rarely do. We advise against scheduling a serious address at the closing banquet; at that point, conferees' minds are usually elsewhere.

You should expect to pay the plenary speaker's travel (including transportation to/from the airport), lodging, and meal expenses, and to waive registration fees. The complimentary rooms that you negotiate with the hotel are usually used for the plenary speakers.

The matter of speaker fees varies widely. For many years, ACIS did not offer an honorarium to plenary speakers, believing that the honor of being invited to the conference was sufficient in itself. That is no longer standard practice. However, not all hosts have equal funding available to them, and we discourage offering high speaker fees.

There is a persistent thread of comment within ACIS that plenary speakers at a national meeting should include at least one scholar resident in North America. (This is particularly noticeable when the group travels to Ireland.) ACIS takes no position on this matter.

THE CALL FOR PAPERS

The CFP for the annual meeting should be distributed by August 1 of the year before the conference. Specify the information you require--(format, title, length of proposal,

contact details, etc. The CFP should note that you welcome papers in the Irish language; the language representative on the executive will be happy to help you.

It is imperative that the CFP (along with other conference details) appear in the Autumn issue of the ACIS Newsletter, which mails on September 15 of each year.

It has become standard to conduct the proposal process by e-mail. You will probably receive no more than a handful of mailed proposals.

You should expect 150-200 presenters. Rough figures for recent national meetings in the US: 2007, at the CUNY Graduate Center, 250 presenters; 2006, at the University of Missouri-St Louis, 200 presenters; 2005, at University of Notre Dame, 200 presenters

We recommended a closing date of five to six months before the national conference. This often strikes members as too early, but the reality is that travel funding often needs to be requested at least that early-- say, November 1 for a mid-April conference. It's to the host's benefit to be able to make an early estimate of attendance. It is certainly not uncommon for hosts to accept papers after the posted closing date. The corollary to this is that your CFP should state when proposers will be notified that their proposal has been accepted or declined, within a reasonable time after the closing date. You should issue at least a preliminary acceptance by mid-January.

The conference host's life is made much simpler when attendees propose a full panel. Unfortunately, that does not happen often; probably three-quarters of the papers proposed will need to be slotted into a session with other papers. This is one of the host committee's most important functions. Finding affinities between paper topics and cobbling together sessions can be simultaneously exasperating, challenging, and creative. You often need to stretch a session title to encompass varied proposals.

COMMENTS ON ACCEPTING/DECLINING PAPERS AND SCHEDULING

A paper title is not a proposal. Do not hesitate to say that you need more information or you won't be able to consider the proposal.

Upon accepting a proposal, remind the person that he or she must be a paid-up member to present.

The program committee named by the ACIS president should, at a minimum, also look over the proposals received before the acceptances go out, and may wish to have some input in the process. Their help might be especially welcome if you have doubts about a particular proposal or presenter.

Don't hesitate to set firm deadlines for notifying you about technology requests. Proposers need to tell you of their AV needs, and you should make that cut-off date for requesting tech equipment and support very early. Dealing with last-minute AV and technical needs can be a major and avoidable headache.

If possible, try not to put similar panels head-to-head, e.g., two panels on Heaney, or even two panels similar in genre and approach, at the same time—though sometimes it simply can't be helped.

The no-show or cancellation rate may run as high as 10 percent. The least courteous will simply not show up.

INTERDISCIPLINARITY

Although ACIS has always sought to be an interdisciplinary group, in recent history, literary studies have dominated our proceedings. Interdisciplinary panels are always encouraged, but they are not common. You can expect literature papers to outnumber papers from all other disciplines by at least three to one, or more.

Often, interdisciplinarity can be highlighted by selecting plenary speakers from disciplines that are less commonly heard from in Irish Studies

Other ways to encourage interdisciplinarity at the conference are collateral events (such as photo displays, art exhibits, and films), and sending the CFP to professional organizations for disciplines that are not commonly heard from in Irish Studies.

Also, the president will encourage all the disciplinary representatives to organize a panel in their field, and encourage all of the regional representatives to organize an interdisciplinary panel.

RECEPTIONS

Traditionally, the Irish consulate or embassy hosts a reception on the opening evening. Their preferred means of doing this is to provide quantities of alcoholic beverages; they do not usually fund catering. Check with your school's food service about the regulations concerning donated beverages.

It is routine for area pubs/brewers to donate beer and wine for receptions as a promotional consideration. Don't be shy about asking.

Be advised that state universities usually do not allow for alcoholic beverages to be paid for out of a university account unless the event is catered by the university.

Funders who have hosted or partially funded receptions in the past include book publishers; the Irish Tourist Board; local or regional Irish cultural organizations; private individuals; and the president or deans' offices of the host school.

If the host is to address the group, do so early in the event. It's simply not realistic to expect a courteous and attentive crowd after the bar has been open for a while.

Be forewarned that you are likely to be besieged by local, very persistent, Irish musicians trying to get a gig at the conference!

FEES

It is up to you to set the registration fee.

Usually, students are given a discounted rate. For political or professional reasons, you may also need to give reduced fees to emeritus faculty, to members of sponsoring organizations and the like.

Your university can probably take credit cards. This will greatly increase the number of advance and prompt registrations you receive.

We don't advise that you prorate the registration fee for persons who are attending only one or two days. First, surprisingly few people request such considerations, and second, this would open the door to bookkeeping nightmares.

HOTELS

As far ahead as possible, identify the most convenient hotels for conference attendees, and negotiate a conference rate with their group sales department for a blocked number of rooms. Be sure to get a commitment from the hotel about how many rooms must be booked to get a free room—usually used for a plenary speaker.

Attendees must book their own rooms. Sometimes there is only one hotel identified as the conference hotel, but you may want to suggest alternatives

It's not fair, but you will be judged by the hotels you choose. Attendees will remember a bad hotel long after they have forgotten disappointments with the conference itself.

BOOK SALES AND OTHER DISPLAYS

The presence of book displays and sale tables enhances any program. In addition, acquisitions editors from university presses and elsewhere often attend the ACIS meeting. Ask the previous hosts or the ACIS executive for the names of regular exhibitors.

Note: there may be a legal or institutional requirement that the vendors have a permit to sell during the meeting.

Book vendors will have three major concerns:

- 1 The sales area must be secure. You must guarantee that the room will be locked when the conference is not in session or otherwise unattended.
- 2 The sales area needs to have good foot traffic, which means it should adjoin the area where coffee breaks, etc, happen. Do not put vendors in an isolated room.
- 3 The vendors will want shipping and loading to be as easy as possible. They will be prepared to move their own boxes, but it is good to have two-wheelers, carts, etc available to them.

Many long-time exhibitors have lately found it unprofitable to attend ACIS. We need to be as generous as possible in supporting their participation. Vendors may be expected to register for the conference like any other attendee. However, in a time of tight margins, few university or specialty presses will pay table rents; we strongly recommend offering free table space.

Previous hosts will be happy to provide lists and contact information for vendors who've exhibited at earlier meetings,

Advertisements for appropriate items or venues may be placed in the conference folder. The conference program may feature sponsors but should generally not include advertising.

VOLUNTEERS

Organizers should make sure that they enlist the help of enough volunteers (students, affiliated faculty, etc.) to deal with registration, equipment, transportation, etc. during the conference. Your school might also make an in-kind contribution of a van, etc.

OTHER NICETIES

If the designated conference hotels are some distance away from the conference venue, transportation should be provided in the morning and after the last event of the day. Transportation should also be provided to and from events (such as receptions) in

locations other than the main conference venue. School buses are affordable and can usually be booked by the hour.

Provide a central message board during the conference to announce room changes, no-shows, personal messages, etc. It is always appreciated.

Identify Irish speakers to help with pronunciations of Irish-language words, and let attendees know who they are

One of the host's unending, essential duties is to assure that sessions start on time. Conferees tend to linger at coffee breaks. The host or an assigned committee member should alert attendees of the start time. (Conference hosts have used bells, triangles and kazoos to signal start times.)

Attendees vastly prefer the sort of name tags that are worn around the neck, rather than pinned or sticky ones.

The local tourism office or convention bureau will gladly provide materials listing area restaurants, etc, for the conference packet.

The preferred term for the event is the national or annual meeting or conference (rather than "convention").