

### **To Present or not to Present: Why Go the Distance?**

There is debate among faculty about whether or not to encourage their doctoral students to present at annual and/or regional meetings. Some say that our attention should first and foremost always be the program. Others will say that it is important to fully understand what we are getting ourselves into by choosing this profession by presenting. I understand the validity of each perspective. However, I do not see these points as mutually exclusive. I have been told that the purpose of a Ph.D. is not to have one, but to use one. On the one hand, I should be focused primarily on the goal of every doctoral student, that is, to finish the program. On the other hand, with the looming reality of life after the program creeping closer and closer, I find myself more and more curious about the eventual expectations concerning my research and teaching on the job market. As any good doctoral student knows, the only way to figure anything out is to start researching your topic.

As the SBL On-Site Representative (OSR) for the Graduate Theological Union, SBL student liaison in GTU terms, I looked at the schedule and sections for the SBL 2012 regional meetings. I found that most regions have very generic section categories. Most sections are broadly categorized as New Testament, Early Christianity, Hebrew Bible/Old Testament, etc. There was very little to choose from that peaked my interests enough to devote time away from coursework, language exams, or teaching. My problem could have been that I was thinking too narrowly. I kept looking at the offerings for my region, to which I submitted, but anticipated that my proposal would be among dozens (if not more) in a section that was as broad as the canon itself. I eventually decided to investigate the other regional offerings. Maybe their section configurations would look different enough for me to find something for which my current research or teaching interests might fit. It did.

The Midwest Regional Meeting was offering a section on "Teaching the Bible." I was hesitant to submit because I had only taught one course, but the section wanted proposals about the ways in which research was being applied in the classroom and this was the purpose of my fall 2011 teaching fellowship. I gave it some quick thought and decided to submit because *when in the recent future was I going to be given the opportunity to talk about a course that I created from the ground up*. I am not faculty and I do not have years of higher education teaching under my belt. I felt this was a unique opportunity and wanted to make the most of it. Besides, the worst thing that could happen was that they rejected the proposal. As a doctoral student, I am used to rejection— applications, fellowships, and potential job opportunities. We are put through the fire and *if* we make it out we are refined. As it turned out, the conference was a wonderful experience.

The first thought that came to mind after I pressed the 'send' key was, "Even if I get in, I can't afford this!" My second thought was, "Who do I know that would also want to do this?" I made the decision to lower my chances, potentially, and email two other women in my program that I thought would also benefit from such an experience. One of the two excitedly emailed me back and agreed to submit to the section. We agreed that the only way to do this effectively would be to split the costs 50/50. We both got accepted to the section and on February 12, 2012 we both presented our experience of teaching aspects of our dissertation research in a classroom setting.

The Midwest Regional Meeting was in Bourbonnais, Illinois at Olivet Nazarene University the weekend of February 11-12. If you have never been to a regional meeting, they are a great place to meet faculty (those that attend). The atmosphere of a regional meeting is more relaxed than at the annual SBL meeting. The attendees are more accessible and, from my recent personal experience, more pleasant. I had the opportunity to learn about institutions that I did not previously know (both religious and secular) and even run into alumni from my present institution. From a strictly student perspective, the sessions seemed very gracious with their student presenters at all levels. I left Illinois with the feeling that I want to attend this and other regional meetings more regularly. As a credit to the Midwestern Regional Meeting organizers, I felt that they were glad to have me there.

Since returning from the meeting, I have recommended to my fellow doctoral students to consider submitting and traveling to smaller conferences. It was a worthy experience both professionally and personally. I also recommended submitting in groups. I would not have been able to shoulder the financial planning, cost, and pre-presentation jitters without my fellow doctoral student Andrea Sheaffer. The experiences were worth traveling the distance.

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