If you’ve been accepted to a conference, there are a few things you should be aware of in order to make the best possible use of your conference presentation, both professionally and academically. Remember that you represent your institution, Loyola University Chicago, and your behavior at the conference, and especially on your panel, will either positively or negatively reflect on your university and LUC professors.

1. Respond Promptly to your Panel Moderator:

Once you’ve been informed of your paper’s acceptance, your panel moderator will usually contact you to ask two things; firstly, you will be expected to email them a short bio that can be used to introduce you, and secondly, if you have any technological needs (i.e. a projector for PowerPoint slides, a computer with speakers for playing audio, etc.). Try to respond promptly and efficiently to this email, giving your panel moderator exactly what they request. “A short bio” means roughly 3-5 sentences summarizing what your name is, what academic or professional institution you belong to, research or academic interests you have, and any recent publications or activities you have participated in that may be of relevance to your paper topic. Here is a sample bio:

Maria Lopez is a Sophomore majoring in Philosophy and Biology at Loyola University Chicago. She studies the intersection between European concepts of human mortality and scientific interventions in the nineteenth century. This year, her essay “Doctor or Undertaker?: Physic Defying Providence in Physicians’ Journals” was published in *The Undergraduate Journal of Nineteenth Century Science*. This kind of bio tells the audience who you are, where you are from, and gives them a general idea of not only what you are interested in, but how they can find and read more about your work. If your bio is too long the audience will lose interest and you appear vain. Attach your bio in a separate word document (i.e. “Lopez – MMLA bio”) to your email. If you have a PowerPoint or other media, inform the panel moderator of your technological needs in the body of the email. Avoid using Prezi or other online presentation applications or websites, as they require Internet, which may not always be available.

2. Attendance Policy:

Remember, if you’re unable to attend the conference due to a scheduling conflict or other health, personal, or financial reasons, inform your panel moderator ASAP. “Ghosting” your panel moderator is both unprofessional and an insult to academics who considered your abstract to be a piece of excellent work that they would like to hear in an official, public setting. If you can attend the conference, don’t simply show up to your panel, give your paper, and then vanish. Pay other professionals the courtesy of listening to their work; otherwise, there is no reason why they should listen to yours. You’d be surprised how people remember the names of those who stay for the majority of a conference, whether a day conference, a 3-day conference with fifty attendees, or one thousand attendees at a 4-day conference. Fees for conference registration, travel, lodging, and food are steep, so use the professional opportunity you have paid for to network (i.e. meet other people, hear their ideas, and make academic connections).

3. What to Bring:

If you own a Mac it is a good idea to buy and bring your own MacBook adaptor cable to the conference, along with a clicker, extra clicker batteries (usually AAA), and a USB drive containing a backup copy of your PowerPoint presentation and paper. Adaptor cables and clickers...
are easily purchased at stores like Best Buy. Some conferences require you to upload a copy of your PowerPoint and/or conference paper to a shared Drive; even if you do so, bring a USB drive in case the Internet doesn’t work during your presentation. Running through your presentation on a school computer prior to the conference and showing up early to your conference panel to ensure that your presentation works, are both excellent ideas. Technological issues are the bane of most conferences, so make sure you have a backup (i.e. a paper you can simply and coherently read) in case the worst should happen. Print your paper before coming to the conference. Some presenters opt for reading their papers on a tablet or computer, a method which is becoming more acceptable in the digital age, but is not always reliable due to battery failure or a weak WiFi signal.

4. Be Brief and Stay Within Time Limits

Your paper will likely be delivered as part of a 3 or 4-person panel in a 1hr.15 mins or 1 hr. 30 mins panel slot (See “How to Present a Conference Paper”). Usually this means each speaker can speak for 20 or 15 minutes, respectively, leaving the remaining time for audience Q&A. While you are drafting your paper, it is important to make sure your paper can be spoken aloud, or delivered, in the time allowed. Your panel moderator will usually give you a 5 minute and 1 minute warning before stopping you so that your fellow panelists have enough time to present their work. It is considered extremely rude to go over your allotted time, or deliberately ignore your panel moderator’s attempts to stop you after doing so, which may result in your never being asked back to that particular conference. Your presentation should be memorable for the excellent quality of your work, not for your blatant disregard for the feelings and conference experience of your audience, panel moderator, and fellow panelists. Unfortunately, this is all too common.

5. Listen and Learn:

Pay others the courtesy of listening intently to their presentations. Silence your cell phone and avoid working or typing on other electronics, take notes in a notebook to benefit from the new ideas and concepts you encounter, and if you have a question for a particular speaker, save it for the Q&A. Keep your question clear and brief, allowing other members of the audience or panel time enough to ask their own questions. Follow the lead of the panel moderator; usually the audience can ask questions first, and if no hands are raised, then you may ask another panelist a question about their presentation. Don’t be offended if you don’t receive any questions from the audience about your own presentation, as this does not necessarily mean it was bad. Try not to interject yourself into the discussion unless the occasion calls for it or someone asks you a question.

6. Expenses and Budgeting:

Many conferences you present at will be held in other cities (i.e. not in Chicago), and will therefore be expensive even if you have funding. Try to arrange with other attendees to share the cost of hotel rooms, carpool, and eat at less expensive restaurants if your budget is tight. If you have funding, make sure that you save your receipts to submit along with your paperwork to get reimbursed from the university. While enjoying the experience of a new city along with your fellow conference attendees and/or your LUC peers also attending the conference, try to refrain from overspending or forcing others to go to shady establishments or expensive venues they cannot afford. Again, remember that your behavior throughout the conference reflects on your university and should therefore be respectful and law-abiding. Also, remember to have fun!