Role of the Chair

Thank you for serving as chair of a PAA session. The quality and tenor of the session depends greatly on your work. You can build a network among the presenters, set the tone for the session, make connections among the panelists, the participants and the topics, ensure fair allocation of the time available, and foster collegial and professional exchange. Should challenges arise, you will be looked to for guidance and leadership. Your role as chair includes both pre-conference preparation and facilitation at the conference. We offer these guidelines to you as the chair of a regular paper session or invited session:

Pre-conference: At least one month before the conference, please connect with all of your presenters, including discussants.

1. Set the ground rules for the session: Lay out the plan for the session and specify the time to be allocated for each presenter or discussant. Be sure to reserve time for audience questions at the end. ***Note: sessions are 90 minutes long this year!***

2. The PAA Meeting website posts the final deadline for participants to upload their papers, making them available to the session's discussant. However, some presenters forget to post their papers and others have not yet completed them by this deadline. If the discussant is willing to accept papers after the posted deadline, negotiate a later deadline. In any case, make it clear to participants that there is a firm deadline, that discussants are not required to discuss any paper received after the deadline, and that posting papers to the meeting website is *strongly* encouraged.

3. Encourage the presenters to share any materials available in advance of the session including presentations, papers, or resource links. This allows presenters to build upon one another's work, identify linkages in their presentations, and save time by not repeating the obvious from someone else's presentation.

4. It is your responsibility to assure that there is a laptop available for the session. Identify someone (ideally yourself) who has an appropriate computer for connecting to the projection equipment. Tell everyone to send their presentations to the person with the computer at least 24 hours before the session so that they can be loaded prior to the session. Follow up with any presenter who has not sent a presentation and make a plan to get the presentation on the laptop before the session begins. This saves time during the session. Prior to the session, check the room and check that the computer will connect with the projection equipment. (Note, for example, that Macs require a special connector that will enable it to plug into a standard VGA cable). In addition, notify Stephanie Dudley if any presentations have video clips that have sound because these need a special audio sound patch into the sound system.

At the session, as a chair you should:

1. Arrive early: Locate and welcome your speakers and attendees. Make sure you have the correct pronunciation of participants' names.

2. Start on time and end on time: This maximizes the time allocated and allows the next group the time they need to set up for an on-time start. If discussion is still lively when it is time to end your session, move the conversation into the halls.

3. Set the stage: Welcome the audience, introduce yourself (name and affiliation) as the chair, and identify the session topic. You may add a *brief* comment or two to prime the audience for the session, but limit this strictly to avoid impinging on presenters' time.

4. Introduce each presentation: Transition between presentations by thanking the previous presenter and introducing the next, noting the name and affiliation of the individual or group and the general topic. If you prefer, you may alternatively introduce them all at the start and let them come to the podium in turn. This saves a few minutes for presentations and discussion, but may slightly disadvantage audience members who join the session late.

5. Keep to the order listed in the program. Some people come to listen to one speaker and may be disappointed if the speakers are not in the published order.

6. *Watch the clock:* Warn your speakers as their time draws to a close using written notes indicating the time remaining (typically 5 minutes, 2 minutes, and stop). Be firm.

7. **It is imperative that you** stop any presenter **who has exceeded the allocated time**. Failing to do so is unfair to the other presenters, the discussant, and the audience. There are several ways to do this. You can signal to the speaker and the audience that the time is up by politely telling the speaker it is important to stop now. You may try initiating applause during the next pause, or simply walk to the front and stand next to the speaker, or finally get up and thank the presenter for the presentation but note that the session must move on to the next presenter. This will be far easier if you have laid the ground rules in advance of the session via email and reminded the presenters about your responsibility before the session starts.

8. Facilitate discussion. Audience discussion is a crucial element of every PAA session, and many audience members are disappointed if they don't have the opportunity to engage the panel. Audience discussion should wait until all presenters and discussants have had the opportunity to speak. As a general rule, you should be opening the floor for discussion at least 10 minutes prior to the scheduled end time. If you have ample time, you may want to ask the presenters if they want to briefly respond to discussant comments before allowing audience participation. However, do not let this interfere with the audience's opportunity to participate.

9. During discussion periods, scan the entire audience for raised hands and call on people in turn, trying to first select people who raised their hands early. Set an expectation for professional, courteous, discourse. Ask that questions be short and

targeted and encourage attendees to follow-up after the session as well. If there are many people with questions, avoid letting one person monopolize the discussion.

10. Ask people who pose a question to stand up, identify him/herself turn towards the audience and speak up so that everyone can hear the question. If the audience cannot hear, ask the presenter to briefly restate the question before answering it.

11. Wrap-up and end: Clearly define the conclusion of the session by thanking the presenters and the audience and stating that the session has concluded. At the end of the session, if there is a session following, ask that everyone leave the room and continue the discussion in the foyers so that the next session will have time to set up.

12. Troubleshoot: As the chair, people will turn to you should problems arise and expect you to manage the session and respond to challenges.

13. Setting and room: Should the projector not work, the room be too hot or too cold, or something happen to the room itself (a spill, noise intrusion, etc.), contact the hotel or the PAA staff using the hotline number posted in the room (do not go yourself).

14. **Please complete the Attendance Record form noting the number of people in the session so that the PAA can keep track of sessions.** Note any no shows or concerns with the session or room. Thank you!

Role of the Discussant

Thank you for serving as a discussant of a PAA session. Your primary role is to provide the audience with perspective and insight about the substance and significance of the papers. Discussants should *briefly* summarize the individual contributions in the papers, but then move on to integrate them and relate them to the state of the science in the topic area addressed by the session. You can do this by highlighting key ideas, identifying key themes across the papers, posing challenging questions, and suggesting important directions for future work.

Synthesizing the contribution of a paper is difficult without reading it several times. Read each paper once jotting down notes about specific strengths and weaknesses. Read the paper a second time for themes.

In your analysis of individual papers, note the paper's contributions and strengths as well as its weaknesses. Critically analyze what the author has done and raise questions about assumptions, methods and interpretation of findings, but emphasize the constructive in your comments: advance the ideas in the paper by providing new ideas or perspectives to improve the paper.

Your oral discussion of each individual paper should highlight major issues only. Focus your critique on issues that members of the audience will need to understand in order to integrate, interpret, and reconcile the research that has been presented. Also highlight those issues most central to the further development of the science, rather than idiosyncratic problems. If you want to provide feedback about minor or idiosyncratic issues, give them to the authors in writing (see below).

Remember that the audience has seen only the presentations, not the full papers. If you are addressing a point that was not clearly presented by the author during the session, explain the context for your remarks to the audience. Allow yourself time to do this "on the fly" as you plan your comments on the papers.

It is especially helpful to provide the authors with written feedback. Authors appreciate receiving comments and critique that is presented in an organized and thoughtful manner, or even simply a marked-up copy of their manuscript. Often papers are presented at conferences to get feedback prior to submitting for publication and your thoughtful feedback will assist them in improving their work.

In presenting your discussion, stay within the allotted time. It is important for the audience to have the opportunity to ask questions. Be attentive to the chair, who is timing your comments.

Both experienced researchers as well as new professionals often find themselves struggling in their role as discussant. Below is a list of some common problems as well as helpful hints for addressing them.

1. Papers are late.

- Before the session, check the PAA meeting website to see if papers have been posted for the session. The PAA sets a deadline of approximately one month before the meetings for posting completed papers, but some session chairs or authors negotiate later deadlines with their discussants. If the deadline has passed and one or more papers has neither been posted nor sent to you, contact the author(s) and session chair. It is the presenter's responsibility to get the paper to you on a timely basis, but you and the chair can help by reminding authors of their responsibility.
  At the session, if a paper came in too late to permit you to integrate it thoroughly into your discussion, say that. This helps to reinforce the norm of providing papers on time.

2. Papers are of varying quality.

- It is appropriate to acknowledge that the papers are at different stages of progression. If you note this in a developmental way, it is encouraging to authors. When critiquing the papers, emphasize how the paper can be improved, not how it is weak.

3. You have specific questions about the paper or a paper is not strongly related to your research expertise.

- It is entirely appropriate to discuss a paper with the authors before the session. If something is not clear to you, get clarification from the author so that you can better fulfill your role as a discussant who provides value-added for the audience and authors.

- If you have a colleague who can read the paper and clarify issues for you, this can be very helpful. Otherwise, if you feel you do not have the appropriate expertise in specific areas, simply acknowledge this and discuss the paper as best you can. You have been asked to discuss the paper because of your knowledge; draw on it in the ways you feel are most productive.