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A Newcomer's Guide to CCCC

2/10/2020

By Kris Purzycki

The crowds. The presentations. The schedules. The events. The city. The scholarship. The posters. The vendors. The swag...

Without a doubt, CCCC is a lot to take in. A conference which draws in thousands of attendees from across the globe challenges the newcomer to navigate a lot of emotions, responsibilities, and intense experiences. All of which can be exhausting when packed into a few short days. Fortunately, the CCCC community is a welcoming one, eager to ensure that a newcomer's first conference experience is incredible. Before arriving in Milwaukee, here is a sketch of what the newcomer can expect and some general advice for anyone looking forward to their first "Cs."



Members of the Council for Plan and Game Studies Gathering in Portland, 2017

Don't go it alone.

If you're unsure if anyone else is attending from your institution, you might be surprised what a departmental email or social media post turns up. With a cohort, the newcomer can exchange travel info and share other information. Anyone need a roommate? If you're close enough, can you drive out together? This is where having friends and colleagues to collaborate with comes in handy.

"To combat fatigue and expand the content I take away," describes Megan Mize, "I like to create a Google Doc so that I can divide and conquer with willing colleagues; they get my notes from panels, I

get theirs, all in one place. This way, I leave with more information and a diversity of topics since they may hit up panels I might not have thought to, but I don't burn out trying to make it to every single thing." Twitter feeds can also be good when catching up after the conference itself.

There are a couple of events the newcomer should try and make time for. Be sure to attend the Opening Session and Chair's address. "It sets the tone for the conference," shares Lauren Woolbright, "and it often makes a good conversation starter." Last year's provocative address by [Asao Inoue](#), for example, has become a touchstone for discussion ever since.

One of the great opportunities provided to the first-timer is also the [Newcomer's Breakfast](#). Typically held on Thursday morning, this event is a must for the first-time attendee. "Go get free food and coffee," Woolbright suggests. "The breakfast highlights a number of things happening at the conference and key people." It's also where you can learn about Cs the Day.

You should also not feel guilty for taking breaks or otherwise not doing what you're "supposed to do" at Cs. It's a long conference. If you have to travel to make the Wednesday workshops and

are committed to staying for the entire conference, you might be looking at five or six jam-packed days! Take a break. Explore the city! Once there, prioritize a gathering at one of the publisher parties or elsewhere. As busy as we are, it can be difficult to get to know those in our department. One of the surprisingly unspoken qualities of a conference is that it is a retreat away from those responsibilities that seem to wander past your office door. Plan a meetup then relish setting up that automated email response: "I will be out of town to attend a conference..."

Admittedly, this is so much easier to type and say than it is to actually do. If you wrestle with introductions and small talk, the networking experience can be a challenge of wills: Will I say something inane? Will there be coffee available? Will anyone attend my workshop? If there's a way to soothe those inner voices, I haven't found that salve. One way to get around this is to find established organizations and activities.

There are currently [three dozen standing groups and caucuses](#), for example, where one can not only get involved with the CCCC community but also meet others with similar interests. Most of these organizations hold their annual meetings at the conference and are an excellent way to get involved with a group dedicated to the betterment of the field.

Scheduling and What to Attend

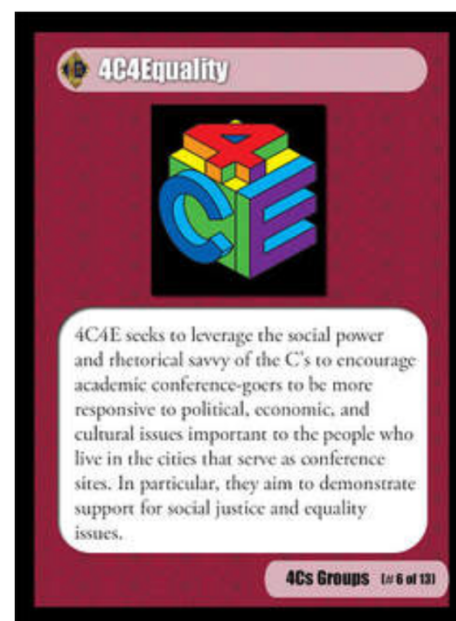
Like I hinted at above, people get pretty burnt out at Cs when trying to do too much. There's this strange notion that we can check out all of our colleagues' panels, prepare our own work, put in a few volunteer hours, check out an interesting standing group. Maybe it's possible for some people but not all of us, myself included.

Prioritize two or three panels that look interesting followed by a couple friends' panels. For the whole conference.

Play Cs the Day

Okay - shameless plug time. "Cs the Day" is the (now official!) conference game where attendees complete "quests" in exchange for cards featuring various conference events, organizations, sites, and people, as well as various concepts and issues that are important to the field. Quests range from the simple ("Attend the Opening Session and Chair's Address") to the challenging ("Pay for no food and drink for a 24-hour period" - it can be done!). Once you've completed some quests (such as "Attend the Newcomer's Coffee Hour"), head over to the Cs the Day table and get your booklet stamped.

Chances are, there'll be other newcomers there as well! [After a few quests, you've earned yourself the coveted sparkle pony!](#) Designed as a low-barrier way to get involved in the conference, Cs the Day is aimed at CCCC newcomers but has attracted a large crowd of



A card from the Cs the Day game.

players who regularly attend Cs. Many players become volunteers for the game as it's become one of the better ways to meet others.

Finally...the Swag

Whether you're on a budget or not, the vendor room at CCCC cannot be denied. When packing for CCCC, you should make sure to leave plenty of empty space in your luggage for all the books, bags, and tchotchkes. Sarah McGinley suggests to, "bring an extra suitcase for the books you'll buy. Or that are free!" To be sure, unless you have impenetrable willpower, you'll be going home with an additional 50 pounds of textbooks, collections, and works of fiction.



Four books from recent CCCC vendors.

Be sure to check out the vendor area early to get a sense of who's in attendance and what's available. If there's a book you can't leave without, be sure to pick it up early as there are limited quantities. Some publishers offer books at a discount on the final day of the conference, but the selection can be extremely limited. Nevertheless, there are a lot of fantastic deals that are worth checking out.

Most representatives are happy to talk about their offerings. Many will offer a free instructor copy of the book either at the conference or will mail it to you at a later date. A few things that they'll likely want to know: what's your position and involvement in making decisions on textbooks. Be honest, of course.

It's also worth considering your own options for publishing. Several editors and contributors are likely to be in attendance so don't pass up a chance to discuss potential projects.

Be Prepared to be Unprepared

There is only one way to really be prepared for the Cs: be prepared to be poorly prepared. While there is a certain measure of professionalization and ethos (be sure to prep your mental glossary of rhetorical concepts!) involved, there are many, many newcomers to be found. Find them! Others who have seen their share of Chair's addresses, lanyards layered in ribbons down to their floor, and calmly tweaking their slides, will be happy to offer guidance in exchange for the opportunity to regale you with their own Cs wanderlusts.

Everyone's expectations and anticipations for their first Cs is unique of course. Any other advice for the CCCC initiate? Share your experiences in the comments, or if you have additional #newcomer advice, tweet it [@writingmke](https://twitter.com/writingmke) with #4C20 and #writingmke.

Kris Purzycki (UW-Milwaukee) is one of the founding members of the [Council for Play and Game Studies at CCCC](#) for which he currently serves as the Associate Chair. He is also currently working with the 2020 Hospitality and Social Media Committees.