International Seminar:

Attending an International Conference for Professional Development

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Attending an International Conference is a very important part of our professional development. We need to learn more and keep ourselves up to date and attending conferences are an important way to do so. I would like to present the steps commonly taken in order to attend a conference, what do you need to know once there and what you learn from it.

We, some students from the School of Translation and Interpretation, attended the ATA Conference held in NYC last October 2009 and it was an investment in my translator/interpreter training.

As an experience, it is important to keep in mind the steps to follow in order to get into an International conference when you decide to attend one.

The registration forms should be filled out correctly. We need to check not only once but twice our personal information before sending it and make sure it is correct and complete. In this case, we needed to fill out the registration form online, and then print it out and send it by fax or regular mail.

Once the participants sent the personal information and payment information, we received an email with a registration confirmation. With this confirmation, when the participants arrive at the conference, we needed to present this confirmation or give our full name so that the conference organizers could look us up in the system and give us the material with all the event information.

The material they gave was complete. They gave us a final program with a complete and clear schedule of the conferences, a complete list of the people.
Attending an International Conference for Professional Development

International Seminar

Attending the conference and their contact information, advertisements of the most important sponsors, as well as their products, like Trados. Actually, we visited Trados and it was an interesting demo. It showed how useful it is for a professional translator and that it is easy to learn to use it. We were really interested and it is an option for a future investment.

Then, during the event, they printed a daily schedule with the program for that day and the cancelled events. These informative flyers were available to everyone in a key place so everybody could get one while passing by. These flyers not only included the content of the sessions but what also was happening at the conferences, for example whether a speaker was congratulated or that in a specific session people had to sit on the floor. It was like a journal for the conference. This helps people because they may know, for future references, what speaker stood out and what sessions are worth attending - good to keep in mind for the next event.

The identification tag was clearly printed with relevant information. It specified whether you were student, organizer, attendee, and whether it was your first time or even what language you work in. There were some people who had a number of languages. I think this was good because some people with more experience were interested to know which school we attended and what country we were from. This gave us an opportunity to interact and exchange information.

Comentario [S1]: Asistir = attend > watch out for false cognates!
Comentario [S2]: Did you visit the sponsors booths? Did you talk to any agency reps or check out any of the technologies being advertised and demo’d?
Comentario [S3]: I never saw these. Did they actually specify if certain speakers were applauded or particularly liked?
Comentario [S4]: Great! Who did you talk with? Did you make friends or network, or have any worthwhile conversations?
In my case, I had the opportunity to talk to a Mexican translator during a conference about the ATA exam. We were giving our opinions about some terms and she asked where I study, since she noticed I was a student because of my identification tag.

The conference sessions were organized by topics and languages. Every language and every general topic had a specific color. This way, people could easily identify what sessions they wanted to attend, and if they were suitable to them.

Once the participants had decided which sessions they wanted to attend, they had a personal-conference organizer. This included the name of the conferences, which floor they were on, and the room, time and name of the speaker.

The rooms were assigned according to the importance or relevance of the session. One thing I noticed was that there was a mini questionnaire included with the registration forms regarding what topics you would like to hear. I think they used this information to assign the rooms to each speaker. There were rooms that were too small for the amount of people that wanted to attend it. The biggest rooms fit around 100 people while the smallest fit about 50 people.

The overall organization was good. However, there were some aspects that need to be improved for future conferences. For example, the registration forms that needed to be sent by fax or regular mail. I think this may work for locals but it is not convenient for people who come from abroad. The problem is that once you sent the forms, no one confirmed if they were received or not. You may have trouble with your registration but you may not know about it until you notice that you have not received the confirmation letter. But, on an international level, this may take a while. I think that with the current
Attending an International Conference for Professional Development

International Seminar

technology, this could be done online or by email and it would make it easier for them and for us to answer a confirmation email.

There was a wide range of topics. There were sessions on economics, medical or literary aspects of translation and even sessions on punctuation or technological shortcuts in your computer.

For me, the most interesting conference was the one about economics. It was given by Silvana Debonis, an Argentinean specialist in legal and financial translations. In this conference I got an interesting glossary with current economic and financial terminology. This conference was very active. She exchange information with the participants and we all get into a conclusion about her best option.

Another session that was interesting was the Preparation for the ATA exam. They explained the rules for passing the exam, what they measure in the exam, how the grades are given but the most importantly, they actually corrected exams and showed the classic errors made on the exam.

This gave us confidence because we were able to see that those texts are not far harder than our constant practices in class. It was important to know that all of our class discussions on how to arrive at the correct term were useful as they were similar to cases given in that exam. We realized we were able to take the exam and have a good chance at passing it. Even when I am not considering taking the exam right now, that means we are prepared for the labor market, get some experience and maybe then, to take the exam.

Attending an international conference is important because we can open our minds to new ideas and knowledge. I think that the most important thing I got
in this ATA Conferences was the experience itself and being there. It was important for me to watch and realize how many professional are working at the same field as me.

This experience made me increase my skills as a professional. I would like to improve my knowledge in terms of glossaries and updated information like new programs and current terminology for specialized vocabulary; and my attitude and perspective as a student who is from one step to graduation and to become a professional, in other words, to get familiar with the market knowing what it is asking for and be prepared for it.