

ASLE Biennial Conference



More Time at “Island Time”

by Dan Philippon

One of my favorite tasks as a teacher is reading the course evaluations my students submit at the end of each semester. Over the years, I’ve gotten used to the usual irreconcilable requests: more small groups, fewer small groups; longer papers, shorter papers; more technology, less technology; and so on. What I look for instead are trends: what things are *lots* of students requesting and few students rejecting, and which of these things might help us better achieve our course objectives?

What holds for courses also holds for conferences, and your responses to ASLE’s recent membership survey were invaluable in helping Richard Pickard and me plan ASLE’s upcoming conference in Victoria. You helped us choose a date, suggested speakers to invite, and told us that an all-day Saturday session was fine, so long as we started on a Wednesday. But the trend that stood out above all was: “give us more time.” Again and again, you told us you wanted three things in particular: longer sessions, fewer papers, and fewer concurrent sessions. So we’re doing our best to give them to you, and I’d like to tell you how.

We started by adopting the standard session model for many conferences in the humanities: we expanded the concurrent sessions from 75 to 90 minutes, reduced the number of presentations to three per session, and increased the time allotted for each presentation from 15 to 20 minutes. This new model now provides 30 minutes for introductions, discussion and, in some cases, a respondent, as well as more time for presenters to share their work.

But making this change on its own would have required accepting fewer proposals, as would making the additional changes you requested, such as longer lunches and more time between sessions. Many of you said that was just fine, such as the person who reassured us that “it’s okay to accept fewer proposals.” But as another survey respondent observed, doing so seems to violate “the ethic of inclusivity ASLE has cultivated,” and this is a concern we take very seriously. ASLE has worked hard over the years to make its biennial conferences accessible to a wide range of people, including graduate students, independent scholars, and freelance writers. But since most people don’t attend conferences unless they’re on the program, it’s hard to remain accessible while also being more selective.

Our solution to this dilemma is a new set of concurrent sessions we’re calling “paper jams,” which will feature seven 8-minute presentations (including self-introductions), followed by 30 minutes of discussion. By providing the opportunity for more people to present the results of their creative and scholarly activity in a single session, these “paper jam” sessions

should help to offset the decreased opportunities for 20-minute presentations. But they will also serve another purpose. Much like improvisational “jam sessions” (thus their name), “paper jams” will provide an especially welcoming venue for work that is more experimental or exploratory, since the point of a paper jam is not to develop an idea fully but to introduce colleagues to something new and then consider it in more detail during the discussion period and after the session has ended. Some paper jam presentations will be abbreviated versions of longer projects, of course, but we hope that others will feature a new or provocative idea that might not yet be developed enough for a 20-minute presentation. Most of all, we hope these paper jams will create the kind of intellectual excitement that roundtables at their best can generate.

When you submit your proposal, you will need to select which of these two formats you prefer. If you select the traditional 20-minute presentation, you will also be asked to indicate whether you would be willing to present an abbreviated version of your presentation as part of a paper jam—and we hope you will be, given the limited number of openings that will exist for traditional presentations. Likewise, should you be asked to participate in a paper jam, we hope you will see this not as a judgment on your work but as the necessary consequence of trying to make more time available for conversation, dialogue, and discussion. Finally, although the program committee will try its best to group similar presentations together in paper jam sessions, the increased number of presentations per session may make this difficult, and some paper jam sessions may not have the thematic unity present in traditional sessions. For this reason *we strongly encourage the submission of pre-formed panels*, which may take the form of either traditional sessions or paper jams.

All of these changes would be worth trying even if they were only a response to the recent membership survey. But like the trends in student evaluations that also meet my goals as a teacher, these changes will also help ASLE fulfill part of our revised mission, which includes the goal of “maintaining and advocating ecologically sustainable practices” (for more on our revised mission, see the President’s Column on pg. 1). As the Executive Council agreed at our spring retreat in Idaho, the climate crisis summons us to action, calling us to create an intellectual and creative space where things can happen *that would not happen otherwise*, in order to justify (at least in part) the carbon emissions associated with our travel. In other words, as several EC members forcefully put it, “no more business as usual.”

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We've made other changes, too—including new breakfast discussions, informal discussions for attendees with special interests, and several large concurrent discussion sessions for everyone at the end of the conference—all in the hope that the resulting conversations will create the kind of deep understanding that comes only from personal encounters. And, of course, we are also creating as “green” a conference as possible in terms of our ecological footprint, including offering carbon offsets for our travel.

As with any class, we will not get everything right this time. But I hope you will again tell us what we can do better the next time we ask, so we can continue to improve the gathering that most defines what ASLE is, does, and eventually can become.

“On the Ground at ASLE Victoria”

By Richard Pickard

Some days I tell myself that there's nothing to worry about, because there are still eight months before ASLE comes to Victoria next summer. Usually, though, my calendar tells me there are *only* eight months before ASLE comes to Victoria! We've done a lot of planning, but there is still lots more to do.

We would like to share information with you about the upcoming conference and to ask for your feedback. A variety of questions have come in from people thinking of attending, and most of them have been on three topics:

Accommodation, or “where should we stay?”

The conference will be held on the university's campus, and we hope that most attendees will stay in the university's residences. For information about the residences, see <http://housing.uvic.ca>; for information about accessibility for individuals with a disability, see <http://housing.uvic.ca/Buildings/index.php#accessible>.

Victoria is a tourist destination, with many excellent hotels. We hope to announce a hotel affiliation in the near future, but keep in mind that all of the city's hotels are about a 15-minute drive from UVic. There are numerous B&B's nearby, and using one of those would give you a more personal experience, but be sure to use an online map page (like Google Maps) to confirm locations and distances.

Camping may also be available on or very near campus. If you are interested in camping, please send us an email (asle@uvic.ca) so we can estimate and plan with reasonable accuracy.

Travel, or “how should we get there?”

There's no getting around the fact that Vancouver Island is a long way from the larger population centers of North America, which is one reason we're trying so hard to make it worth the trip.

One option for those concerned about carbon emissions is to consider the train. From California or Oregon, Amtrak offers a beautiful trip up the Pacific Coast (<http://www.amtrak.com/>). From the Northeast, there are fairly reasonable passes on Canada's VIA Rail (http://www.viarail.ca/planner/en_cart_canr.html), including a conference discount (if enough people use this option); it takes more than three days each way to cross Canada by train, but what an experience!

Major airlines fly direct to Victoria, but depending where you're flying from, it may be cheaper to stop in Seattle on the way. You should also consider flying into either Seattle or Vancouver and taking the ferry to Victoria on Vancouver Island to take advantage of the scenery.

Field trips, or “what can we do in Victoria?”

We're planning visits to several sites of interest, as well as volunteer options. While there will be a range of activities and opportunities, specific feedback about volunteer interests would be very helpful to us.

Here are some of the likely Friday afternoon options:

- ♦ volunteering: speaking to students or seniors, pulling invasive plants, and creek or beach clean-up
- ♦ a cycling tour of organic farms, with dinner at a winery or cidery
- ♦ a First Nations cultural experience, which could be learning about place-based history or helping with a harvest
- ♦ visiting Emily Carr House, Wawaditla (Mungo Martin House) and the Royal BC Museum
- ♦ less strenuous options, such as a trip to Butchart Gardens or a scenic bus tour
- ♦ kayaking, hiking, bird-watching or mushrooming

For Sunday or overnight options, we're looking at the following:

- ♦ volunteering: trail building and ecosystem restoration work
- ♦ a trip to Long Beach, Tofino and Clayoquot Sound
- ♦ hiking in the old-growth coastal rainforest of the Walbran and Carmanah Valleys
- ♦ a visit to Saltspring Island

If there's something you'd like to know about on-the-ground details, please don't hesitate to drop us a line (asle@uvic.ca). We're always happy to hear from you, but we're especially keen to hear about any interest in volunteering – since this is the first time ASLE will coordinate local volunteering, we want to make sure the options line up with attendees' interests. We look forward to meeting you all, and we'll see you in June!

Proposal Deadline is November 15!
Submit yours at <http://asle.uvic.ca/>