Notes from the WiGS 2015 Poster Workshop

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Topic: How to make a winning poster
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Good resource: UW design help desk: http://depts.washington.edu/deshelp/

Conference philosophy
- Why are you at this conference? Many possible reasons
  - to learn about other people's science
  - hang out w scientists
  - find next job or collaboration
  - socializing
  - practice presenting — especially to people who haven't heard your work before
- learning about science is not the most important, because you can do that not at conference - hanging out you can only do at a conference

What is the purpose of presenting a poster?
- Instead of just putting information out there, make sure they understand it — onus is on you to make it stick
- get out of the "typical order" — how am I going to present my story in a way that it actually sticks with them, and that they enjoy it?
- Traps scientists in an actual conversation with you and get real advice from them
- Learn how to handle a crowd of different types of people — empathy
- Sell your work and your skills

Conference rules:
- Do not hang out with your lab because you're scared
- Talk to NEW PEOPLE
- Have fun, get new ideas — get stoked on science, it's like a recharge
- It's ok to skip some talks and explore — give yourself permission. Not all the talks are going to be relevant; make yourself a little schedule. Don't want to burn out.

Poster rules:
- A poster is not like a paper.
- Try to equate it to a long platform presentation.
- Give a platform talk whether you got one or not.
- When you lay it out, lay it out like your slides would have been —> narrative
- Practice your poster; memorize a few things, develop the bones of a script

Make your talk accessible, make yourself available:

- Poster is your visual aid for your talk (though do build it so it's ok for people to look at if you're not around, and they might come back to talk to you) — which side do you stand on? Where do your hands go?
- Be enthusiastic whether you have to fake it or not (and this is where practice will save you — practice enthused)
- Present all the time. Be at your poster as often as possible even if it's not during your designated slot
- Can even put your poster in a poster hole — if only one group can have their posters up at a time
- You'll meet more people giving your poster than looking at others'

Make your poster easy for the listener to follow:
- Colors good, text blocks bad
- Try to make the text readable, not too technical
- Use whitespace to separate things and make it more readable
- Can use a background to up the contrast
- Most important elements: colors, title, summary (NOT abstract) — have a good summary that really explains the conclusions
- Give them a good lead-in about what they're going to learn
- Section titles should be as informative as slide titles would be
- References — don't include other people's stuff, include your papers only
- Can use arrows to lead
- Focus is on the figures — if on a dark background, can really set these apart in white boxes
- All the text should be bullet-pointed
- But mostly, your poster is a reflection of your style and personality
- Hand-drawn diagrams are very fun and visually appealing
- Most important thing: what do you want to say? what's the big take-away? build the poster around that

Making a great poster — give it effort!
- How should it be *different* from a talk you'd give with slides?
    - Don't have a hard time limit but be able to go into detail about specific things depending on your audience — it's adaptable
- The first 5 minutes - start with the problem, a big statement that's going to be interesting — there's a big problem, what is it? how are we going to solve it, we're going to solve it
- Can't guess at the level, so make it generally accessible
- Try to get feedback from the listener; if you're getting a signal they're bored or lost, engage
- Be able to summarize each section in one sentence - mini elevator speeches that you can use to catch people up
- If someone comes in part-way, it's ok if you have to go back a little bit, people will get more out of it

- If you make jokes they should be calculated and well placed; and never self-deprecating; if you can only ad lib, just don't do it too often; can lighten the mood but also want people to take you seriously

When you get back from a conference, write down your measurables — be really deliberate – who did you meet? What collaborations did you establish?

Resources:
http://colinpurrington.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/scientific-poster-advice-purrington.pdf
http://guides.nyu.edu/posters
https://nau.edu/Undergraduate-Research/Poster-Presentation-Tips/

Questions from the attendees:
How do you keep the connections you make?
- set goals — make things happen, work to find people or find them again
- not everyone you'll need to keep up with
- sometimes it just takes time to build the connections — see each other at meetings over the years
- Follow up with people in a really targeted way if you liked them

What if you don't have a wingman? No one to ask to introduce you?
- think about who you want to meet and put yourself in their shoes
- most professors want to talk to you
- it's ok to be sketchy
- make it happen
- if you know who they are, can tell them you read their papers

What about the people who walk up mid-spiel and don't interrupt but are just kind of hanging out - staggered arrivals?
- bring them in, greet them, catch them up; make eye contact, really get them involved

How do you start to design a poster? Do you sketch it out or start with powerpoint slides?
- Ivan actually starts with powerpoint slides; slaps up the ones that are the very most important points
- Reserve constant regions (title, abstract area, summary) think of everything like blocks
- Describe method in bottom left corner
- Apply the method — all the cool data in the middle
- Put in pictures first, then frame the words around them
- Figure out how you're going to delineate things
- Use the whitespace, can even use lines too