

# The 2012 Annual Canadian Psychological Association Convention: A Student Executive Member's Perspective

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## ABSTRACT

This article provides a review of events for students at the annual Canadian Psychological Association Convention from the perspective of an executive member of the Section for Students. The importance of student attendance at this conference is discussed, as well as the benefits of attending a conference that is generalist in nature.

## RÉSUMÉ

Cet article présente un examen des événements organisés à l'intention des étudiants à l'occasion du congrès annuel de la Société canadienne de psychologie du point de vue d'un membre exécutif de la section des étudiants. L'importance de la présence des étudiants à cette conférence est décrite, ainsi que les avantages d'assister à un congrès de nature générale.

## Another Busy but Exciting Convention

The 73rd annual Canadian Psychological Association (CPA) convention took place in scenic Nova Scotia from June 14<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup>, 2012 and was a rousing success. Halifax is a beautiful city filled with history and its own healthy student population. This was my second time attending the annual CPA convention. Although there are many conferences available to psychology students, the CPA convention remains one of my favourites. This year, my position on the Section for Students Executive increased my involvement in the activities of the conference. This provided me with the opportunity to see the outstanding students who are interested in pursuing a career in psychology in Canada, and also provided me with insight into the role of the annual CPA convention in promoting psychology in Canada and uniting those committed to the area.

Students play an important role at this conference, in part due to the large number in attendance. This year was no exception, with over 800 students in attendance. As the representative of the student membership, the Section for Students aims to provide events that cater to the needs and interests of



Students presenting their digital poster  
- photo courtesy of Dr. Don Sharpe

all students. This presents a tough challenge given the numbers of subfields of psychology, paths that one can take within the field, and varying levels of training among student attendees. When reflecting on this year's convention events, the executive can agree that they were a success. This year's events included the Section's keynote speaker address, four workshops, and the annual student social.

## Review of Student Section Events

This year's keynote address was presented by Dr. Arla Day, a Canada Research Chair and professor of industrial and organizational psychology at St. Mary's University. Dr. Day provided an engaging and witty discussion of her research on work-life balance and recommendations for students on how to achieve this balance. Hearing about the importance of work-life balance from an individual who – despite her admitted workaholic tendencies – has been through the student process helped to emphasize how we each need to find our own balance.

At each CPA convention the Students Section presents a workshop for undergraduate students interested in pursuing graduate studies. This year's workshop was presented by Missy Teatero, M.A., the Section's chair-elect. As always, this workshop was presented to a room full of anxiety-ridden undergraduate students looking for answers to the enigmatic application process. This year Missy chose to adjust the format of the session



Students at the Student Social  
- photo courtesy of Hayden Woodley

to address the specific concerns of as many students as possible. During the question period, a panel of graduate students representing several levels of study at programs across Canada answered the questions of inquiring students. It was interesting to learn how, despite all having been accepted into graduate school, the experiences of the graduate students varied. One point remained the same: none of the graduate students had any desire to relive the process of graduate school applications.

New to this year's program was a workshop geared towards students hoping to attend or already attending a graduate program in clinical psychology. This workshop focused on the roles, responsibilities, and expectations of graduate students in clinical psychology. The first part of the workshop was presented by two of the Section's executive members from Canadian clinical psychology programs; however, the highlight of the session was the guest speaker, Dr. Peter Bieling, Director of Mental Health and Addictions Services at St. Joseph's Hospital, and Chair of the CPA Clinical Section. Dr. Bieling, who is well versed in the internship process and expectations for clinical students, offered valuable advice for students to consider as they progress through their graduate training and work towards that intimidating internship year.

Also new this year was a workshop on applying for Tri-Council funding. The ways of the Tri-Council will likely always remain somewhat of a mystery to students. Nevertheless, Dr. Christine Chambers, Canada Research Chair in Pain and Child Health and Professor of Pediatrics and Psychology at Dalhousie University, provided helpful advice about what reviewers look for and how to improve applications. She offered a well-rounded perspective, as she was able to speak as someone who has applied for funding, supervised students applying for funding, and reviewed student applications.

The last session offered by the Section focused on non-traditional avenues of work, including consumer behavior and industrial/organizational (I/O), for graduate students in psychology. This workshop was presented by the new chair of the Section for Students, Justin Feeney, M.Sc. Justin, a graduate student in I/O psychology at the University of Western Ontario, did an excellent job of demonstrating to those who have not chosen an I/O path the errors of their ways! This session was well attended by students who were interested in learning more about, or even becoming a part of, this exciting subfield of psychology.

Wrapping up the list of main student events was the annual student social. This event took place at the Foggy Goggle on the opening evening of the conference. Although there were two other parties taking place at the Foggy Goggle that night, which had servers exclaiming that it was never this busy on a Thursday, the hospitality was exceptional. As one of the more festive student events, the student social has much to offer. In addition to being an excellent opportunity for students to socialize, it provides students with the occasion to become acquainted with students from across Canada who share their interests. It is a chance for students to talk honestly about their perspectives on various issues,

or not talk about psychology at all! It's also a nice opportunity to reunite with friends made during undergraduate studies or at a previous convention.

### **An Opportunity to Meet our Leaders and Future Colleagues**

The abundance of workshop, symposia, and meetings provides something of interest to students, researchers, and professionals of any background. The breadth of areas addressed at the CPA conference means that numerous researchers, clinicians, and knowledge users travel to attend. For students, this provides an excellent opportunity to meet people and to network. As we write papers, theses, and dissertations, sometimes we forget that the people whose work we cite in our papers are real people at work across Canada. Conferences provide us with the opportunity to attach a face to a name, or even meet and share ideas with the Canadian psychologists whose work we read and admire.

As I progress through my graduate training, I frequently hear, from students and professors alike, that the CPA conference is too general and that students should be focusing on attending conferences specific to their field of research. While I appreciate this perspective, it is important not to disregard what CPA has to offer to new and more advanced students. I believe that it is the wide scope of this conference that makes it so unique. From this conference we can gain a better idea of the current Canadian psychology landscape including all its subfields. We are provided with the opportunity to meet important people in Canadian psychology, from whose success we can learn, even if they do not share our research interests.

Unfortunately, at times, the vast number of areas in which one can focus can segregate the various subfields of psychology. This conference reminds us that we share common roots. The annual convention allows for the possibility of cross-sectional collaboration by presenting an ideal opportunity for members from different subfields to build ties. Moreover, it reminds us of the role we must play in promoting psychology as a whole, not just our specific areas of research or practice.

The annual CPA convention is a wonderful opportunity to create contacts and develop friendships. We never know where our career might take us. These are our future colleagues. The generalist nature of the CPA convention allows students to connect with people they might meet again somewhere down the road. I look forward to the 2013 convention in Québec city. I have no doubt that it will live up to this year's success.

For more information on next year's convention, visit <http://www.cpa.ca/convention>. The Section for Students is always interested in hearing from its membership. Those with suggestions of workshops or events that they would like to see offered by the Section for Students are invited to contact the Section chair, Justin Feeney. Visit the Section for Students website for more information: <http://www.cpa.ca/students/about/>.