

# ACLA Conference Guide

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Thank you for considering hosting the ACLA conference. This document should answer all of your basic questions. It is designed to guide you through the process of planning the conference, and to make as clear as possible how your local committee and university would interact with the ACLA, its Secretariat, and its Program Committee, in the 24 months leading up to the actual event. That said, all local situations are different; this guide gives advice and information based on our previous experiences, and will inevitably be modified by the challenges and opportunities presented by new locations and new universities. Your mileage may vary.

## Some Basic Facts

### Dates

The ACLA is held during one of the last three weekends of March or the first three weekends of April, usually at the end of the host university's spring break when the sessions are held on campus rather than in hotels. These dates sometimes conflict with either Passover or Easter. We do our best to avoid them, but given the constraints of hotel availability, or of university Spring Break schedules, we cannot make doing so a necessity. The conference begins with registration starting in late afternoon on the Thursday and a reception that evening. Sessions run during the full day on the Friday and Saturday, and conclude around 1:00pm on the Sunday.

### Participants

In recent years the ACLA has typically included about 1,800 participants (give or take a couple of hundred), usually split 50/50 between faculty and graduate students. In the case of serious constraints on meeting rooms, it is possible to limit attendance to 1500 or 1600 by exercising selectivity in accepting seminar proposals (more on this below).

### Hotel Space

The ACLA requires at least 550 reserved hotel rooms on its peak room night (usually Friday) and 500 on Saturday night. The Secretariat will do much (if not all) of the negotiating with hotels to get good block rates, but we will draw on your local knowledge for information about where to stay, eat, and so on. We have often split the conference among two or three hotels. While it is good to reserve this number of hotel rooms at a discounted conference rate, particularly if shuttle buses will be needed to bring participants to campus, most attendees can make their own reservations at whatever hotels best suit them for price and convenience, so it is good to provide a list of a dozen or so recommended hotels apart from the conference hotels proper.

### Meeting Space

Because of the seminar format, the ACLA requires an unusually large number of small meeting rooms: around 50 rooms holding 15-25 people, Friday and Saturday from 8:30am to 6:30pm, and Sunday from 8:30am to 1:00pm. This meeting space can be either in the conference hotels or in university classrooms. More on that below.

### Conference Format

The standard ACLA format is the two-day or three-day seminar. Each seminar lasts two hours (Fri/Sat/Sun morning for 3-day seminars, Fri/Sat afternoon for 2-day ones) and includes 4 papers per day. Some afternoon sessions are not seminars but simply nonce panels or roundtables. In recent years, half or more of our seminars have ended up as 2-day seminars; if afternoon spaces fill up, three two-day seminars can be fitted into two three-day morning slots, though this requires having some of them meet at different times on different days – no real problem, so long as this is shown in the program and explained to the seminar organizer(s) and participants. Seminars are scheduled in three or four “streams,” as shown on the sample schedule at the end of this memo; in recent years, our numbers have often required scheduling four seminar streams, though in a year with relatively low numbers of seminars, or with a large number of seminar rooms, it is possible to have a less crowded schedule with only three streams, two on the three mornings and one in the afternoon on Friday/Saturday. Two-day sessions should be held in rooms seating 15 or more (12 at a minimum); three-day sessions should be in rooms seating 20 or more (18 at a minimum).

### Midsize sessions

In the afternoons, along with the afternoon seminar stream(s), the conference can have whatever midsize sessions the organizers wish to create or accept. In addition, the ADPCL (Association of Departments and Programs in Comparative Literature) puts on two 90-minute or two-hour sessions, one devoted to programmatic or curricular issues, one to job market issues. ACLA has also recently established “ACL(x),” a smaller conference meeting off-cycle from the main conference, intended as a forum for emergent topics and an incubator of new session formats; a couple of afternoon sessions are likely to emerge each year from ACL(x). At a minimum, there should be two mid-sized meeting rooms (holding 50-150 people) available on Friday and Saturday afternoons.

### Large sessions: Reception/Banquet/Plenary

The conference involves three larger-scale events. On Thursday evening there is an opening reception at which hors d'oeuvres are available; there is usually a cash bar, though depending on financial support, we sometimes provide a drink coupon for 200 or 300 people; this event typically attracts about 300 people altogether. At the end of the afternoon on Friday we usually hold the plenary session, which can attract anywhere from 300 to 500 people (more on rare occasions, but it's not necessary to budget space for more than 500). It can involve a single speaker, a pair of speakers, or a roundtable. This is decided on by the local committee. Friday evening can be left free, or can be a time for an event such as a poetry reading, dance performance, concert, or film showing. On Saturday evening we hold a banquet, at which the annual awards are given. Banquet attendance has been around 250-300; tickets are sold at cost to faculty, with 50 tickets made available to graduate students (on a first-come-first-served basis) at a subsidized price of \$25.

### Other Food Costs

One of the major conference costs is the coffee and pastries we provide outside sessions: a morning and afternoon coffee break on Friday and on Saturday, and a coffee break on Sunday morning. This cost runs as high as \$40,000 for the conference, and is usually provided by the university's caterer or conference services, or by the conference hotels for a hotel-based conference. Our recommendation is to control these costs by budgeting food for 75% of planned attendance on Friday and Saturday and 50% on Sunday morning. Coffee and tea are more important to our participants than lavish pastries.

## **The Big Decision: University Classroom or Hotel Meeting Space**

A key decision for you to make is whether you wish to use hotel meeting space, or to hold the conference on your campus. If you hold it on campus, you will almost certainly have to host the conference during the end of the week of your Spring Break to ensure adequate classroom space.

There are several major advantages to holding the conference on campus. First, money that would normally go to the hotel to pay for food and other necessities ends up going to the university's conference services and their A/V and custodial departments, a fact that helps encourage deans to offer support. Second, universities usually charge far less for catering and for A/V usage than do hotels. Third, we need so many seminar rooms ("break-out rooms" in hotel parlance) that they can be hard to secure at hotels without a commitment to much larger catering budgets than we need, and to a guarantee of more people staying at the conference hotels than we can be sure of attracting to those usually fairly expensive hotels. Intellectually, a campus-based conference tends to showcase the university and its programs in a much more intense way, since conference attendees actually spend time on campus. It may also be easier for universities to support the ACLA by providing in-kind subsidies of technical support staff, graduate or undergraduate student time, or A/V equipment, rather than providing a direct cash grant for off-campus events.

We have been most successful with the university classroom format when the university has been near enough to conference hotels to allow for a short walk (10-12 minutes) or shuttle bus ride (10-20 minutes). Shuttle bus service can be expensive (\$11,000 at one recent conference) but this cost is much lower than the costs for catering and A/V usage typically charged by hotels.

The major advantage of holding the conference at a hotel is simplicity: all sessions are at the hotel (or two or three neighboring hotels), meaning that we avoid shuttles, maps, walks, and the like. Hotels also tend to be near restaurants for lunch and dinner, as well as museums and other tourist attractions. The major disadvantage is cost.

This decision should be made jointly by you and the ACLA's Program Committee, as early as possible in the planning stages, since almost everything else follows from it.

## **What We Expect From the Local Committee**

### University Support

In years past the ACLA has received as much as \$50,000 in local university support. However, we have run successful conferences with much less. At the conference's present size, we recommend aiming for \$20,000 at a minimum. More on this below.

### Hotels and Meeting Space

Once candidate hotels are identified, the ACLA Secretariat will handle the majority of hotel negotiations, including (for hotel-based conferences) the contracts for the banquet, reception, coffee breaks, meeting space, and so on. For campus-based conferences, the local committee works with university conference services or building managers to establish a list of appropriate classrooms and meeting spaces, to reserve auditoria for plenaries, and to reserve banquet and reception facilities; these latter can also be held at the hotel or another attractive area venue, even for campus-based

conferences. For on-campus conferences, catering may be arranged directly through university conference services or the university food services, or may be handled by outside caterers; there are usually one or two local caterers who regularly work for the university and know the campus well.

### Conference Theme

The local committee chooses an overall theme, and often some sub-themes, for the year's conference. These themes should be broad enough to suit a wide range of interests, but focused enough to give the conference an intellectual flavor. A theme such as "Literature and Science," for example, while excellent for a smaller conference, won't be viable for enough of our members, while a theme such as "Comparative Literature Today" would lack any real traction. You can consult the ACLA's website for the themes (and the full programs) of our conferences over the past two decades (<http://www.acla.org/annualmeeting.html>), and see where you'd like to go from there.

### Conference Program

The saving grace of planning our large conference is that much of the ACLA program is self-generated by our members. Faculty and/or graduate students propose seminars via the seminar proposal page on the ACLA website; seminar proposals are typically due by September 15 in the fall prior to the conference. The ACLA Secretariat gives the host committee access to the proposals, and the committee gives them a cursory review to make sure they sound reasonable and have a substantial comparative, theoretical, or interdisciplinary focus; in general we accept 95% of seminar proposals. Members then apply via the ACLA website either to a specific seminar or the "General Pool," with an application deadline of November 1. Applicants to seminars are accepted or rejected by the seminar organizers. Rejected applicants are placed in the general pool, from which they can be selected by seminar organizers who are looking for more papers to fill out their seminar.

As a result, the vast majority of seminars organize themselves, usually by early December, with some fine-tuning into mid-January. The local committee, however, intervenes in four crucial ways. First, it can recommend acceptable general-pool papers to seminars with fewer than 12 papers (for 3-day seminars) or fewer than 8 papers (for 2-day seminars). Papers should *not*, however, be placed into a seminar without the agreement of the organizer(s). Second, the host committee can group good but unclaimed general-pool papers into new seminars. The local committee also considers applications for nonce (1-day) panels and roundtables and accepts/rejects them as appropriate. Finally, it is necessary to cancel the 10% or so of proposed seminars that have not acquired at least seven confirmed participants, including the organizer(s). Often a seminar organizer will be eager to carry on with six or fewer participants, but the result is likely to be a disappointment to those who come to the conference and find themselves speaking with only a handful of people. Unless a small session will clearly attract a substantial audience beyond its own speakers, undersized seminars need to be cancelled if they have not reached the minimum size of seven.

Seminar sizes should be reviewed in the first week of December, so that papers from cancelled seminars can be placed quickly into the general pool for consideration elsewhere. Given our numbers, we can only allow people to present in *one* seminar, and the committee will need to resolve any duplicate acceptances that haven't been caught by the Secretariat. People can, however, participate in other kinds of session in addition to a seminar.

These tasks take time; in the past, they have best been accomplished by a small (5-10) group of faculty and/or graduate students on the local committee. Two or three afternoon-long meetings, lubricated by pizza and (not too much) beer, have usually been enough to manage the work of

vetting seminars and the general pool. In the end, typically 90% of people who send in abstracts do find a home; the others will need to be sent rejection emails in mid-January. We naturally want to accept as many good papers as possible, but it doesn't serve a seminar well to take in a poor paper, or one only marginally related to its theme, simply in order to fill it out; and even a very good proposal should be turned down if it doesn't fit well into a seminar that has room.

If a seminar has more good proposals than the standard number of places available, it is fine for an organizer to accept 9 papers for a two-day seminar or 13 for a three-day seminar (never more). There is usually about a 10% "melt" of accepted participants who never end up making it to the conference, so there is a fairly good chance that one of the accepted people from any given seminar will not show up. Should the extra person come, 15 minutes can be added on one or two days at the start or end of the session to make the needed extra time for presentation and discussion.

In addition to overseeing the creation of the seminars and panels, the local committee chooses and invites the plenary speaker(s). The local committee may also organize special sessions around the theme or around issues of local interest (e.g., Canadian poets at the Vancouver conference), or that showcase local historical events or places (a trip to the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, the Kinsey Institute when ACLA met at Indiana University, and so on).

Once the program is settled, the local committee reports its results to the Secretariat, which provides a template for the conference program. The editing of the program is done locally, ideally by a graduate student hired to do this substantial task, including constant updating of the program until a week before the conference begins. Printing is also arranged locally, with the number of copies to be discussed with the Secretariat in view of the availability of a downloadable version for iPads and cell phones, and the number of requests for hard copies. Design of the program—especially the cover, but including any other features associated with special programming—is up to the local committee, but the basic program format and structure can be based on the ACLA program template.

#### Payment and Registration

Pre-registration and payments are handled online by the ACLA. At the conference itself, computers must be available at registration to enable the Secretariat staff to verify and submit new registrations. Four tables are needed, set up in a large entrance hall or room with good entrances and exits.

#### Labor before and at the Conference

In the months leading up to the conference, local committees handle many hundreds of questions and requests from seminar leaders and prospective participants. In order to keep these all from filling the in-box of the conference director, you should set up a dedicated email address for the conference, and assign a staff person (or hire a graduate student) to monitor it daily, answering them when possible and forwarding messages on to an appropriate person when necessary.

Once seminars have been approved, it works well to assign graduate students as "floor managers" to be responsible for handling 15-20 seminars apiece (conferences these days usually have around 100 three-day seminars and 100 two-day seminars). It is important for the "floor managers" to check in periodically with their seminar leaders, to see that program copy is in order, that accepted participants have confirmed their attendance, and to collect and collate requests for A/V or for other special needs, such as wheelchair access. The ideal is for accepted participants to ask their questions of their seminar leader(s), who in turn can ask their floor manager for any answers they need; the floor managers then turn to the conference director for advice and answers as needed.

Also before the conference, the local committee finds student workers to help with registration, which typically requires four tables staffed by two or three people each, to handle registration and give out badges and badge-holders (we provide templates), banquet tickets, and the program for attendees who want a hard-copy program. In the budget figures below we give you a sense of how many hours of work this is and how much we expect to pay for it. Wrangling the workers is, however, the task of the local committee. In recent years, we've moved away from having canvas bags or even a folder to hold flyers (at a dollar each, folders alone can run \$2,000). Instead, we try to put all relevant information into the program itself, including campus or hotel maps, information on restaurants and local area attractions, and the call for papers for the next year's annual meeting.

At the conference itself, the registration tables need to be staffed late Thursday afternoon and all day Friday and Saturday, with a dozen people on hand for the Thursday afternoon and Friday morning; good to have one person there Sunday morning. The registration process is overseen by ACLA's Secretary/Treasurer with some staff and students brought from the home office, supplemented by several local students, who are paid for their work. The local registration force meets with the Secretariat group in the early afternoon on Thursday to set up and learn procedures.

We recommend that you handle this work by paying hourly wages; however, some universities have instead assigned one or two graduate students' TA-ship time to the ACLA conference. Such students will still need occasional hourly support, and will need to be supplemented especially when it comes to staffing registration. It is also very helpful to be sure that a couple of students are on hand through the registration period to answer questions about locations and other local issues.

## **Budgeting the Conference**

As we've noted above, local support often amounts to about \$20,000 in either financial or in-kind contributions. If necessary, the conference can be run without this institutional support, but most deans will consider this amount extremely reasonable for an international conference of this scale and impact, and this level of support gives us much-needed breathing room. A higher level of support is of course always welcome, and can allow us to offer things such as a free lunch for attendees at the business meeting, or reduced registration costs for graduate students.

There are a number of ways to handle institutional support. Often the provost or dean of Arts & Sciences provides a lump sum, to be disbursed as the conference committee decides. One institution sponsored the plenary roundtable (\$6,000), the opening reception (\$8,000), and the hourly wages for students (\$6,000); another mainly covered 50 percent of A/V costs by simply directly subsidizing its on-campus tech support unit. Still others have combined a graduate assistantship with support for plenaries and hourly labor. A basic sample budget follows; it is also available as an Excel spreadsheet for easier adjusting to local conditions, and then readjusting as your plans evolve.

This may all seem confusing, but trust us! We've done this before, and can help you figure out how to manage it, even if your local contribution doesn't seem to match the categories or figures above. Lots of things are possible. We're eager to work with you to make the conference a success both for your institution and for the ACLA.

**Sample ACLA Conference Budget  
for a campus-based conference of 1600**

**Income**

Registration fees:	
750 Faculty @ \$125	93,750
100 Independent scholars @ \$90	9,000
750 Students @ \$60	45,000
Banquet tickets: 200 faculty @ \$65, 50 students @ \$25	14,250
Host university support	20,000
	<b><u>Total income:</u>     \$ 182,000</b>

**Expenses**

Coffee breaks, at 4 stations, @ \$6.50 per person:	
Fri and Sat am and pm: 4 x 1200 people	\$ 31,400
Sunday morning: once for 800 people	5,200
Opening reception on Thursday for 500	8,500
Friday dinner for plenary speakers, guests	600
ACLA Board meeting	300
ADPCL board breakfast: 15 x \$20	300
Lunches for registration staff, Fri/Sat	200
Saturday banquet (total \$2000 subsidy for 50 students)	16,250
Hotel Shuttle buses	11,000
Honorarium and expenses for plenary speaker	2,000
Email gatekeeper salary (c. 200 hours @ \$15/hour)	3,000
Program editing and formatting (100 hours @ \$15/hour)	1,500
Program printing	11,000
Program Update printing	300
Banner/signage/Stationery costs	1,000
Security for opening buildings	2,500
Custodial maintenance/cleanup	4,500
Secretariat staff work (web applications, registrations, inquiries etc.)	25,000
Secretariat staff travel/lodging costs	5,000
Hourly fees for graduate student factota: 300 hours @ \$15/hour	4,500
Undergraduate assistants at registration etc: 125 hours @ \$10/hour	1,250
Tech support Friday/Saturday	3,000
A/V rental for seminars and plenary sessions	15,000
Lecture hall rental for 3 plenary sessions	1,500
Table rental for registration and book exhibit	1,500
Graduate student hotel/travel subsidies	7,500
Contingencies (10% of expenses)	18,200
	<b><u>Total expenses:</u>     \$ 182,000</b>

## Sample Conference Schedule

### Thursday

2:00 – 6:00pm	ACLA Board Meeting
4:00 – 8:00pm	Registration Book exhibit: often located near Registration
4:30 – 6:00pm	Possible midsize panel(s)
6:00 – 8:00pm	Opening Reception

### Friday

7:30 – 5:00	Registration continues (with a break from 12-1)
9:00 – 5:00	Book exhibit
8:30 – 10:30	Seminar Stream A
10:30 – 11:00	Coffee breaks: in 3 or 4 locations
11:00 – 1:00	Seminar Stream B
1:00 – 2:00	ACLA Business Meeting
2:00 – 4:00	Seminar Stream C
4:00 – 4:30	Coffee breaks
4:30 – 6:30	Seminar Stream D
4:30 – 6:30	ADPCL, ACL(x) and other midsize sessions
6:45 – 8:15	Plenary Speaker or Panel
Evening	Possible performance, poetry reading, etc.

### Saturday

8:00 – 3:00	Registration continues
9:00 – 5:00	Book exhibit
8:30 – 10:00	ADPCL Breakfast Meeting
8:30 – 10:30	Seminar Stream A
10:30 – 11:00	Coffee breaks
11:00 – 1:00	Seminar Stream B
2:00 – 4:00	Seminar Stream C
4:00 – 4:30	Coffee breaks
4:30 – 6:30	Seminar Stream D
5:00 – 6:30	Midsized sessions
6:45 – 7:45	Presidential Address
8:00 – 11:00	Banquet and Awards

### Sunday

8:30 – 10:30	Seminar Stream A
9:00 – 12:00	Book exhibit
10:30 – 11:00	Coffee breaks
11:00 – 1:00	Seminar Stream B
1:00pm	Conference ends

## Timeline

### **24+ months ahead of the conference**

Host department secures university funding, agrees with ACLA board to host the conference, sets conference dates

For a hotel-based conference, host committee and ACLA Secretariat identify hotels and negotiate terms for room blocks and meeting room, catering, and A/V costs

### **24 months ahead**

Conference director sends ACLA an outline of planned arrangements and budget

Hotel and/or campus rooms secured (hotels sooner if possible)

### **18 months ahead**

Conference director finalizes committee, arranges staff support and graduate student assistance.

Committee discusses conference theme and begins thinking about plans

### **12 months ahead**

Call for papers included in preceding year's program

Conference director or designee attends the year's annual meeting, and comes to the ACLA board meeting to discuss plans and raise any current issues or questions

Conference email account is set up at host institution, monitored by a paid student

### **June 1**

Conference page set up on the ACLA website

### **July 1**

Seminar and paper proposal pages go live.

### **September 15**

Seminar proposals due; posted once approved by committee (many already can post in August)

For a campus-based conference, during September committee chair or delegated committee members meet with building and catering services to line up the basics needed

By the end of the month, the committee updates the budget, in consultation with ACLA's Secretary/Treasurer and the heads of the Program and Finance Committees

### **November 1**

Deadline for individual paper proposals. Seminar leaders make their choices, returning excess to the General Pool, begin looking through General Pool for further additions

November 15, host committee updates budget, and discusses with ACLA any emerging questions about potential shortfalls in funding, or best ways to use potential surplus funds

### **December**

Seminar selection basically complete. In first week of the month, committee cancels any seminars that lack at least 7 members; floor managers are assigned to groups of seminars

Host committee looks through General Pool for any outstanding papers not yet chosen, completing seminars in consultation with seminar leaders by c. December 15

Seminar leaders issue invitations, participants confirm intention to attend. Seminar leader determines seminar paper order and formats the seminar listing, sending it in to ACLA  
Updated budget is again shared and discussed with ACLA  
Floor managers confirm final listings with seminar leaders, who communicate with their participants and get confirmation of program copy and any requests for A/V or other special needs  
Once accepted, conference participants register online, renewing their ACLA membership for the coming year if they haven't already done so

### **January**

By mid-January, seminar leaders send their floor managers their final program copy. A member of the local committee assigns each seminar or other event to a room  
Conference program editor begins constructing the program using the ACLA template, modified as necessary for events specific to the year's conference  
Secretariat and a local committee member begin soliciting ads for the program, the Secretariat reaching out to presses, the local committee to area bookstores, restaurants, etc.  
In early January, ACLA website begins accepting travel grant applications from graduate students

### **February**

First week of February: travel grant applicants are informed of award (or not) of a grant  
February 15: deadline for early registration and for banquet ticket orders, all handled online by the Secretariat. (Fifty tickets sold to graduate students for \$25 on a first-come-first-served basis.)  
Local committee confirms arrangements for catering, meeting rooms, A/V, and travel for plenary speaker(s). ACLA monitors reservations for rooms in conference hotel blocks

### **One month before the conference begins**

Budget is finalized by host committee in discussion with ACLA  
Orders are adjusted up or down as appropriate for banquet, reception, and coffee breaks (earlier if required by hotel or catering contracts)  
Program is complete apart from a few final adjustments for late changes

### **Two weeks before the conference**

Deadline for any final changes to be made to the hard-copy program; file is sent as pdf to the local printer, and uploaded by ACLA on the website, downloadable to iPads and cell phones

### **Three days before the conference**

Deadline for program updates, entered online at ACLA and photocopied locally for registration

### **At the conference**

A hugely successful event takes place. Participants overflow with gratitude and good feeling toward the host institution and its organizing committee.

### **Two weeks after the conference**

Host committee finalizes definitive budget, consulting with the Secretariat on the payment of remaining bills either by the Secretariat or by the host institution.