

Shannon Hill (shannon-hill@uiowa.edu) | Navigating the hidden curriculum of  
conferences | GEM-CEDAR 2025

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# Navigating the “hidden curriculum” of conferences

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# Hidden curriculum – what is that?

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The “hidden curriculum” or “invisible curriculum” refers to the *unstated norms, policies, and expectations* that students need to know to succeed in higher education but are often not taught explicitly.

Center for Innovative Teaching and Learning at Indiana University Bloomington

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**Impacts everyone**

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## Impacts everyone

*Especially: anyone in a group not represented in the majority (e.g. first-generation students)*

# **Hidden curriculum – what do we do about it?**

## **We talk about it!**

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Your career is not a sprint – it is a marathon

Conferences are a check point –

you are reminding your scientific community that you are still running and that they should still cheer you on

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**Conferences are a place to “show face” and remind people that you still exist....**

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**Conferences are a place to “show face” and remind people that you still exist....**

- Go to sessions and ask questions (and introduce yourself before asking – *name drop your advisor and institution*)
  - Go to posters and ask questions (and introduce yourself)
- At the very least, say hi to that random person you met last conference (if you are nervous just keep smiling and walking)



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- Find that senior scientist whose paper you've read 1000 times and tell them you've read their paper (*people love that*)

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**Networking is more than talking to your fellow students and post-docs – *you need to find future mentors***

- GEM Mentor/Mentee program
- Find that senior scientist whose paper you've read 1000 times and tell them you've read their paper (*people love that*)
- Things might feel forced and that's okay... from the POV of a future mentor: an enthusiastic student or post-doc that tries to talk to you once a conference is much better than a student or post-doc you just don't know or remember

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**Nothing has to be a secret...**

***If you are confused about a social norm... chances are your fellow student or post-doc is also confused***

**So, talk about it!**