4S 2019 Conference Report


4S 2019 has been a success! We have been able to bring together an outstanding group of STSers, provide support in terms of accessibility, engage important themes, and innovate in terms of the conference structure and organization. We have prepared this report to give you a comprehensive view on our accomplishments and point at some issues that could benefit from more discussion as the conference continues to grow.

**Indicators and Comparisons**

Registration numbers:

- New Orleans 2019: 1869
- Sydney 2018: 1122
- Boston 2017: 1552
- Barcelona 2016: 1966
- Denver 2015: 1235

Given the political situation in the US and the increasing awareness of how travel contributes to climate change, the number of participants for this year is still very high.

Participants in 4S 2019 by category:

- Undergrad: 43
- Grad student: 658
- PostDoc: 241
- Asst Prof: 303
- Assoc Prof: 268
- Full Prof: 202
- Adjunct: 55
- Govt: 19
- Media: 8
- Other non-academic: 66
- Retired: 19
- Other/Unemployed: 64
- Total: 1946

Complimentary registrations this year: 276
Cancellations: 77

About **1,300** of the participants in the conference are students, postdocs or non-tenured academics.

Self-reported income level:
Registrations by close of early registration (4/27): 1267
Registrations by the deadline to appear in the program (7/1): 1830

Registration

Revenue generated through registration:
New Orleans: $433,000. (as of Sept 1, provided by Steve Coffee).

Comparatives, (provided by Wes Shrum):
  Sydney: $313,045*
  Boston: $440,680*

*We are unsure if this is registration only, or registration + membership.

Support to Participants:
- Travel Grants: Through NSF, the conference gets $11,000 for travel grants and an additional $5,000 is allocated for Asia/Latin America/Africa applicants. This year there were an unprecedented number of travel grant applications -- more than twice than what was requested for Australia. $5,000 was requested for undergraduate support (25 students were offered $200 and conference registration waivers). We received $1,750 in sustaining/society membership as well. Vivian and Noela requested an additional $7,000 to accommodate the large number of requests. Grant recipients also received conference fee waivers. Noela and Vivian also selected 25 grant applicants to be “volunteers,” for which they would receive conference fee waivers. For applicants coming from distant countries, Noela and Vivian gave larger sums and chose to give smaller amounts for those coming in from closer distances. For more detailed information: Travel Awards Report

Summary:

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<tr>
<td>Applications</td>
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• **Travel Buddy System:** Given the political situation at US borders, especially this year, and following 4S Boston, we put out a call for U.S.-based travel buddies to support those coming from countries outside the U.S. This time we set up a Google form for buddy requests and solicited volunteers from attendee records on AA.
  - We received 29 requests from conference attendees: (Europe: 13; Latin America: 9; Australia: 3; Asia: 3; Canada: 1).
  - 42 conference attendees based in the U.S. volunteered to serve as a buddy for a traveler.

• **Childcare support:**
  - We solicited applications for childcare grants and received requests from six people who each will receive $200 to reimburse them for childcare services they use during the conference.

**Conference program (with data from All Academic)**

**# of open panels vs “traditional panels”**
- There are 191 accepted open panels (a small number of which may be unscheduled because of paper withdrawals), vs. 71 accepted (traditional) closed panels.
- There are 309 scheduled sessions for Open Panels, vs. 78 traditional closed panel sessions (this doesn’t include meetings, prize sessions, and other events in the closed panel unit).
- There are also 12 scheduled sessions created by program committee members for single paper submissions (the rest of the single paper submissions found their way to open or closed panels), as well as papers that were accepted through the review process but not included in a panel by open panel organizers.

**# of papers**
- There are 1,587 individual presentations scheduled for panels (this does not include exhibitions)
- 1,246 of these are scheduled for open panels, 291 for closed panels, and 50 for panels created by program committee members
- Approximately 300 papers were withdrawn (it is hard to know exactly because of the way AA is set up; see Appendix A).

**Communications and workload**

We wanted to provide details about the workload that organizing 4S involves and the scale at which we are operating. With this magnitude of work, the Society might reconsider the infrastructure and support it has in place for a conference of this scale.

Email communications with participants and committees through the official conference email:
● Number of emails received/processed by conference secretary as of 8/31: 5,731 (2,605 conversations/threads)
● Number of emails sent by conference secretary as of 8/31: 3,251 (1,909 conversations/threads)
  ○ These numbers do not include communications between subcommittees (Making and Doing, Innovating STS, Travel Grants, Buddy System, Accessibility, Ethics, Podcast Initiative, Social Media) or any messaging conducted by the Program chairs directly with participants, with 4S or with the sub-committees.
  ○ The # of bulk emails sent through All Academic was 24,226, not counting auto responses.

Additionally, secretaries spent a huge amount of time in AA entering and managing data.

All Academic instruction booklets
As we began organizing the conference and reached out to previous chairs to learn from their experience, one of their main preoccupations was how difficult and inadequate All Academic is for organizers. As we involved Program Committee members and panel organizers in making many substantive decisions about papers and panels, they needed to complete tasks in AA and sometimes Google Docs. These tasks included reviewing several different kinds of submissions, creating sessions for panels, providing feedback about room sizes, and selecting “orphaned” papers for their panels. To make this process more user friendly we developed nine instruction manuals to facilitate their work. In some cases, the instructions were conveyed in the form of short instructional videos and also included “office hours” with the organizing team on Zoom. The instructions we created will be shared with future conference organizers and are listed here:

● Instructions for Program Committee Session Creation with Single Paper Submissions and Transfers out of OP
● Reviewer Instructions (General CFP)
● Reviewer Instructions - Open Panel Submissions
● Instructions for Creating Multiple Closed Panel Sessions
● Instructions for Meeting Planners
● Instructions for Open Panel Organizers
● Room size feedback
● Assigning Reviewers (video)
● Closed Panels Submission/Editing Instructions (video)

Program Committee Work
The program chairs assembled a conference program committee of eighteen 4S members who would become the core group for the activities listed above. Regular check-in meetings were held with the program committee, in addition to meetings to provide guidance and instructions for the above-listed activities. Meetings also included all other committees, including Making and Doing, Innovating STS, Social Media, and the Undergraduate Program.
**Innovations**

**Improved the technical infrastructure for 4S conference organizing**
- Collected information from participants such as their professional status and self-reported income level. This required making changes in AA (the conference management software 4s uses). As a result we know more about who is attending the conference. This information should help with decisions about programming, fees, and types of events.

- We opted for having the program committee (PC) review all OP submissions and paper submissions in AA.

- Moving the whole process into AA. We managed to do this within the limited parameters that AA gave us -- as apparently we were supposed to have informed them of this before submissions were made. The difficulty with including those requests at the stage of contract update is that the commitment for the new year is signed well before the team has used the system and knows about its limitations first hand.

- Review process: the committee reviewed open panels, closed panels and papers. The review was oriented towards intellectual integrity, looking out for hoaxes. Given the space constraints we face this year (rooms too small or too big), we also enrolled the program committee in helping assess whether the room assigned to each panel was the correct size.

- We adjusted the schedule of the conference itself -- added an extra session -- to accommodate the large number of panels, this shortened coffee and lunch breaks, but allowed us to accommodate all submissions.

- Created a series of how-to videos and instruction guidelines on how to use AA for paper and panel submitters (see above).

**Emphasized conference theme to create a dialogue that stretched throughout the conference plenaries**
- Used the opening plenary to set the stage for the conference as a whole, with presentations by the 4S President and conference co-chairs that advance the conference theme: Innovations, Interruptions, Regenerations.

- Followed with three plenaries (all at 6:15pm) that brought diverse panelists to elaborate on the conference theme, each focusing on Innovations, Interruptions, and Regenerations. The plenaries were designed as conversations between scholars at different moments of their careers, and representing different disciplines and areas of research interest.
• Designed receptions to follow the plenaries as a way to increase opportunities for community-building within the conference. This was done to facilitate networking and interaction between junior scholars/students and more established scholars with whom they would not necessarily socialize outside of the venue. We also wanted to democratize those opportunities and achieve this without asking people who are already investing a lot of money attending the conference to incur in additional costs (such as paid tickets).

Convened events that brought conference attendees into the work of the 4S Council, historic reflection, and planning for the future of 4S and STS.

• Presidential Roundtables were organized to draw conference participants into the work of the 4S Council: STS Affiliations and Ecologies (Thursday, 9:45am), STS Publishing Futures (Thursday, 2:45pm), Honoring STS Mentoring (Thursday, 1:00pm), Futuring STS and 4S (Thursday, 4:30pm), and STS Archiving and Research Infrastructure (Saturday, 1:00pm).

• Flashbacks: a series of five short blog entries that highlight the history of 4S 1994 when the conference took place in New Orleans. The flashback series was led by two grad students, Yesmar Oyarzun and Aadita Chaudhury.

• Supported Joe Klett’s oral STS history project

Proactively worked to make the conference more inclusive

• Implemented a first iteration of the Event Ethics Policy that states the foundation for a civil and harassment-free environment and determines the procedure to follow if issues arise. We deemed this necessary after very prominent cases in the US occurred during academic conferences: Society for Classical Studies; Society for American Archaeology. Because this is the first year the policy is implemented, there will be many lessons learned that Council could incorporate to improve the process. An email address where people may write in with an issue was created, in addition to an event ethics committee that will be on-call during the conference.

• Proactively supported Accessibility through recommendations for presenters and negotiations with Sheraton to provide a scent-free environment, baby care room, and gender-neutral bathroom. These have become increasingly standard recommendations and actions at other conferences (for example AAA), though not always the norm in American hotels. Additionally, we appointed an accessibility ombuds committee that can be reached during the conference by email or phone -- to report problems needing immediate attention and suggestions for future events. The phone number and email were set up using gmail and google phone numbers and can be used for future conferences.
Inclusion and support for undergraduate participants. We actively sought undergraduate participants and offered financial and pedagogical support by creating a series of mentoring events designed specially for them. This committee was led by Ali Kenner.

Decompression Space. For many people that come to 4S for the first time, the conference is hard to navigate. This room holds daily sessions of one hour where people can just drop by, meet new people, and ask for informal guidance on what 4S offers. This initiative is being led by graduate student Yu Ra Kim.

Structured the conference considering issues of economic inclusion through:
- Fee structure that reflects the salary brackets of participants (self-reported).
- To be able to make better decisions in future conferences, we collected self-reported salary brackets of participants. This gives us some information, not perfect in any way, about how 4S could potentially support participants.
- Adopted a policy of no extra payment for any event in the conference. All official activities are open to all and free of charge.
- These are important experiments to analyze and consider given the longstanding critique of large conferences and how they replicate forms of structural economic inequality.

Experimented with forms of scholarly communication and conference participation

- Included the Innovating STS Exhibit which explicitly aims to increase the transnational character of STS. Lead by Aalok Khandekar, participants also were required to submit abstracts which were reviewed by Khandekar and the I-STS committee. The committee and participants worked together for months leading up to the conference, producing both digital and gallery-style presentations. See the Innovating STS Exhibit Catalog. These exhibits will also be hosted on https://stsinfrastructures.org.

- PodCast program: program committee members Laura Foster and Tim Neale are leading a podcast initiative that will take the scholarship being presented inside the conference outside of the hotel walls.

- Created a social media committee led by Dan Breslau and Kate Henne. They developed a system to support key conference dates and promote submissions, open panels, and accepted panels closer to the conference. They also disseminated information about Innovating STS and Making and Doing. We inherited the @4sConference account from the Sydney team and recommend keeping it as the official account for our conference. The account has 2167 followers at the time and has been listed 21 times. Keeping the same account helps consolidate an audience and a conversation on social media. We will be happy to pass it along to Steve as the person keeping records and to the next team.
Issues with and within the host city.

- Lagniappe section of the website: a series of web entries that provide context on New Orleans as a city, its geography, politics, environmental, and cultural issues: https://www.4s2019.org/blog/

- Worked with an STS scholar to share a sobering message about why they decided not to attend the New Orleans meeting to protest Louisiana’s recent abortion ban. We also worked with a local reproductive justice group, the Birthmark Doulas who will lead a special session titled “Survivor’s Birth and Reproductive Rights” (Saturday, 1:30pm).

- Produced an informational booklet in collaboration with Gould Evans Architects, a local architecture firm. The booklet suggests neighborhood circuits that take 4S Participants off the French Quarter as a way to engage with the city’s architecture and democratize the dollars the conference brings to the city. This work was donated by Gould Evans Architects to 4S.

- Created an accommodation page informing people where to stay without contributing to housing issues exacerbated by platforms such as Airbnb.

- Joan Donovan led a workshop session for/with local journalists on “Covering Academic Research as a Journalist.” More than 900 journalists in Louisiana were invited, including 210 in New Orleans.

Environmental Considerations:

- Requested that the hotel not use plastic cups for water stations, coffee breaks, or water for speakers.
- Used environmentally-friendly lanyards made of recycled material.
- No plastic name badges.

Challenges

4S is no longer a small conference. This year it attracted almost 1900 people. Additionally, the participants/membership is largely composed of younger scholars that are working under distinct economic constraints and scholarly expectations; that is, attending 4S is necessary for career-building, yet is no minor expense for them. Additionally, political and environmental contexts also create important challenges. The society will only be strengthened by considering this changing social context and evolving membership and re-examining organizational policies, structures, and actions. We hope the following points help in that process. We are trying to be as concrete as possible so that specific ideas can emerge about how to deal with our growing pains.
Roles and responsibilities

- Unclear role division and expectations. The program chairs do much more than process abstracts and develop conference themes and plenaries. If that were the extent of their job there would be no need for much budgetary information or other data for decision making. However, chairs have to coordinate a broad array of things, including creating subcommittees and facilitating resources for them (M+D, Innovating STS Exhibits, Undergraduate Program); Childcare; Travel Grants; Learning All Academic; Program-Building; Webpage Content; Room Set-up; Lanyards; Badges, and all manner of logistics. Having an itemized budget would have helped better consider how each of these fits into the bigger picture, enabling us to anticipate or allocate more or less time and resources on certain projects and activities (see budgeting section for details).
- Steve Coffee is a great resource, he was always responsive and willing to help us. At some points, however, we were all unclear about whether certain responsibilities would fall under his purview or not (particularly in relation to AA).
- Book exhibit: it is unclear what the vision is for it. This might be a lost opportunity to disseminate the scholarship STSers are producing.

Organizational memory and functioning

- Limited organizational memory related to AA and very poor technical support from the company. It is unrealistic to expect previous conference organizers to lay out all the intricacies of the software for the new team, there is just too much to learn. That knowledge should be with 4S, not with a team that does the job for one year and then moves on. See Appendix A for some examples of issues with AA.
- Logistical decisions that should have been pro-forma ended up being made late and without the best information. For example, after a number of members complained about Wifi not being available, we were told it was viable to contract this service. Program chairs had raised this issue many times throughout the year and were always told it was an impossible request. The implications of such last minute change are many, but one is that we had told a number of 4S members that were planning innovative sessions that needed internet that such sessions would not be possible because of lack of wifi. As a result, they decided to not participate in the conference. We are cognizant that the Wifi issue has been discussed before, but there is a lack of clarity about what Council’s position is.
- The schedule for abstract submissions, review, acceptance, withdrawals, and finalizing the program is fluid; we adjusted according to what we thought was best, but it would be better if this is determined by 4S. That stability would help new organizing teams come to a structure that has been tested. This would also make the process more predictable for 4S members.
- Organizational memory isn’t archived or stewarded in an accessible way. While files were passed from previous conference organizers, they are massive and very hard to make sense of for a new team. We are happy to pass on our files as well, but foresee a similar problem for the next team. We ended up gathering information on lessons
learned by reaching out to previous chairs in a variety of occasions. We are profoundly thankful to Heather Paxson, Emma Kowal and Thao Phan for their willingness to help us and their generosity with their time. See Appendix B as an example of insight collected through email outreach and thanks to the willingness of previous teams to once again recount their experience.

**Budgeting**

- It was not possible to obtain an itemized planning budget from previous conferences. This document would have helped guide what needed to be planned for, and whether there were tradeoffs to be made between the cost of different programs/initiatives.
- We did not have a working budget for the 2019 conference as a whole either, we only had one for the secretaries. This meant that everything was a singular request. This created a lack of clarity about whether we were spending too much or if we still had a margin to help initiatives that would have appreciated support. We tried to create a planning budget to pass on to the new team, but were unable to get information on the general costs of items that should be included (such as receptions, AV support, Making and Doing, filming and archiving, other materials, etc).
- Given the time and location of this year’s conference we had to purchase insurance, so that if a hurricane hit 4S did not have to pay the hotel for expenses. We were close with Dorian, but luckily it did not affect the conference substantially, although, whether this has impacted participants’ flights is unclear by the time we submit this report.
- Changing financial outlook. While we understand that there is variation between budgeted expenses and final costs, we were confused and stymied by widely changing information about the financial health of the conference. From being healthy, to being in a serious financial situation, to having enough to make a major investment in Wifi, to costs being 5x what originally expected. This oscillation created confusion for teams that had been working for months on particular set ups. When we asked for clarity and communication, we were told that this is how “conferences are every time” and “this is how we do things.” It would be great for 4S to think carefully about how to reduce this kind of variability.

**Venue**

- The majority of the rooms in the Sheraton were very small. When selecting new venues we suggest contracting with those that can provide the majority of rooms with a capacity of 40-60.
- Also, consideration must be given to the various initiatives the conference hosts. M&D, for example, will need a large space with. Conference theme exhibits, such as Innovating STS this year, which are a newer initiative, will also need space as will book exhibits.
- Communication with the Sheraton Events Manager was difficult. We had to send multiple emails, in one case spread over a month, requesting answers to our questions or requests.
It is unclear whether 4S has a policy on venue selection in relation to issues such as labor, immigration, and other issues that are important to members.

Scheduling

- Scheduling the conference in early September makes it difficult for the many people who start teaching or have children who start school at that time. This means that the conference would potentially attract more participants if held at a different date. We suggest considering other possibilities.

Other Logistics

- Given the political climate and anti-immigration policies globally and travel bans, having a system in place to support travelers is necessary. The buddy system put together this year, following Boston’s experience, was also managed by the organizing committee. If 4S is becoming increasingly international, it is necessary to have a permanent support system beyond Visa letters. That could potentially include remote participation if wifi were available.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Difficulties with All Academic

Appendix B: Information from past chairs about issues that emerge during the conference

Appendix A: Difficulties with All Academic

Katie’s notes on key problems with AA:

- Emails from AA go out with a non-descript “don’t reply” subject line -- making them easy to miss or ignore.
- Despite this being a software for academic conferences, the infrastructure is just not well suited for a conference like 4S, at least as long as 4S continues to do the open panels (which it seems that is the main direction the conference is going). In order to do the Open Panel submissions in AA, they had to make every open panel proposal a sub-unit. But this prevents one from being able to use any bulk review functions with the open panels: in assigning reviewers and also going through to officially “accept” papers in the system, we had to go into each open panel sub-unit individually. This created an immense amount of extra work. In general, having open panel submissions as sub-units makes it quite difficult to do about everything because you can't look at all open panel paper submissions/reviewers at once, you have to go into each individual sub-unit. I don’t know if AA would be able to come up with a better solution without reworking their software quite fundamentally, which would of course cost a lot.
- Also despite the fact that this seems like it should be a key part of a conference submission software, the scheduling function was almost completely manual. It seems like it wouldn’t be too hard to generate an algorithm to do the scheduling and avoid
person conflicts and schedule multi-part panels sequentially. Not only did we have to put each session into the grid manually (all AA was do was show us what time slots had person conflicts), but AA was unable to recognize multi-part panels as needing sequential scheduling, so we weren’t able to schedule multi-part panels as units. Instead, you could start scheduling parts I and II, but then maybe for part III you’d see that there was a person conflict there, so you’d have to go back and start over with the whole panel. And scheduling in AA requires numerous clicks, so it’s not easy to do trial and error here. We ended up making a master grid in Excel where we manually tried to fit everything in first, based on scheduling requests and multi-part panels, and avoiding thematic overlaps as much as possible. (This was based on what the Sydney secretaries did.) Then we started putting this into AA and when a person conflict came up we had to go back to the Excel grid to see how we could rearrange things. Very time consuming and again just seems like a basic element that this kind of software should have.

- There is no way to administratively submit a proposal on behalf of someone but still have them receive all the relevant emails. Right now you can submit on behalf of them, but the administrator gets all the relevant emails and the system still thinks the administrator is the submitter. This makes it difficult to add late submissions or other specialty submissions, as we have to manually email all of those folks afterwards whenever we send out an automated email through AA.

- AA is currently not set up to disallow presenters from submitting multiple submissions. This created a lot of extra labor to track down and email those people who submitted more than one abstract. This might be possible to set up in AA in the future but also might cost more.

- It is surprisingly difficult to look up basic numbers in AA, like total number of papers scheduled, making it hard to keep track of logistics.

Pedro’s notes on key AA problems:

- There are many small inconveniences, which add up. The most obvious is the inability to use the back button. For many routine tasks, you have to click through several pages. While it is not a problem for the occasional edit to the program, we often have to do a large volume of changes at once. The many extra steps take a lot of extra time (which, of course, means that it costs 4S money).

- There is an overall lack of documentation.

- AA staff communication is wanting. They use a “ticket” system to communicate with clients, for example. While this is not a problem in itself, there is no message from their system when a ticket is closed. In a few instances, replies to an existing thread we assumed was still opened went unread because the ticket had been closed without our knowledge. AA also rarely alerts you when a requested task has been completed, which can also cause problems. Finally, AA staff were sometimes patronizing, and would often scold the organizing team when we asked for changes. Particularly with the lack of documentation and the lack of institutional memory (although Steve Coffee was very helpful in this regard), we often had to ask for changes as we went along rather than at the beginning of the process. The options and needs were often not laid out for us,
which led to a few small mistakes and other problems (e.g., we assumed there would be a confirmation email for CFP submitters as there was for open panel submissions, but there was not until we noticed and asked for it). To be fair, there were certainly some instances where AA came through on difficult requests on relatively short notice.

- Future organizing teams should avoid launching major projects on AA on or right before the weekend, since it means changes and questions take a long time to resolve. This was more our fault than theirs, but there are many changes that are difficult for us to make directly because of either a lack of documentation or the way the system is designed.
- Email targeting is somewhat confusing and limited. We are still a little confused about the numbers that different targeting options produce. It is also not possible to change the alias, so all of our communication through AA comes from "do_not_respond." This can easily be taken for spam and ignored. You cannot use previous bulk emails to target. When a bulk message is targeting too many people, you lose the ability to exclude individual recipients.
- The previews of the outgoing emails do not always reflect reality when it comes to spacing. While I eventually figured it out, one or two bulk emails from the system were sent with spacing issues.
- Abstracts cannot include images or hyperlinks. There are no ways to collect images and have them connected in a visible way with submissions.
- There are insufficient options for "bulk" edits.
- It is not aesthetically pleasing.
- There is no smartphone app that would allow one to use the personal schedule off-line, which is particularly bad for international participants where wifi is unavailable or limited.

Appendix B: Information from past chairs about issues that emerge during the conference

The list below was collected by the New Orleans organizing group by emailing previous conference chairs and secretaries from Sydney (Emma Kowal and Thao Phan) and Boston (Heather Paxson).

- **Visas for international visitors:** There were many people who didn’t realise they would need a visa to travel, or who were waiting right up until the last minute for visas to be approved. Would recommend sending an email to remind people of visa requirements when travelling
- **Volunteer drop-outs:** We had about 10 volunteers drop-out in the days leading up to the conference. Best to have a few back-up people on hand (local grad students, program committee or local organising committee members) who can jump in to assist with small tasks like working the registration desk etc.
- **Program amendments:** The program is a living document: constantly evolving, changing, never complete, always in the process of becoming. But it does eventually
need to go to the printer. This does not stop changes from occurring though so you’ll need to create a separate document listing all the new amendments.

- **Adapters, cables, room set-up:** Double-check the room set-up to see what the venue is providing. Is there a computer there that presenters can use? Can they use their own? What adapters do they need if they want to use their own? Important to let people know that we don’t provide adapters, they will need to check what they need and prepare accordingly. Wes requested additional roaming volunteers to assist with IT issues last minute so another good reason to have a standing reserve of people ready to step in and help.
- **Double-check your booking agreement with the venue:** I’m sure you’ve already done this but worth looking over the actual booking agreement contract to ensure all rooms and agreed upon services are accounted for (we received a number of panicked calls from Wes about this last minute).
- **Manage expectations with catering:** best to let people know what kind of catering to expect day-to-day and at banquet events so they can prepare themselves—hungry people can be very unkind.
- People complained about the lack of wifi. Steve Coffee bore the brunt of that. Nothing we could do about it without dramatically raising registration fees, which wasn’t on the table. Not sure how things look for you with that — but if wifi will be limited best to let people know in advance to manage expectations.
- We did arrange in advance to bring in wifi boosters to 4-5 panel sessions to allow for remote participation owing to visa issues/travel ban and one late-stage pregnancy. The wifi devices Wes brought didn’t really work, so we found local participants with unlimited cell service and used their phones to create hot spots. If I recall correctly. Wes dealt with that. In the end, I received emails of gratitude so obviously it all worked out somehow! But it was a scramble.
- The initial orders of coffee for the coffee breaks were too modest — stepped in to ensure we had enough coffee at all the scheduled breaks so again, crisis averted. But it’s something to monitor.
- I had to dispatch a student to retrieve a video camera at the last minute to video record the plenaries for the archives — one thing that hadn’t been anticipated in advance.
- We had a few lunchtime workshops that involved food (despite the hotel disallowing it) and rearranging furniture in rooms that were immediately thereafter used for panel sessions — I had to run around and do some cleaning up (including in the restrooms from food/prop prep!) and furniture reassembly between the workshops and the afternoon panel sessions. Maybe have some student volunteers on call to help with this if there will be tight turn-around in the rooms?
- Having a cell phone contact for the IT person at the venue is critical.
- We circulated a list of cell phone contacts for key conference organisers and gave it to each of the organising team.
- We used Slack messaging in the lead up to the conference with different people enrolled in different conversations. It was good to have separate messaging for the conference and turn notifications for all other messaging off.
- On venues, we had to change two session rooms close to the conference as we weren’t aware that opening up two rooms into one bigger room would take time and there couldn’t be sessions scheduled for the time slot beforehand.