

“My Uncle’s Got a Barn” – Dos and Don’ts of Convening a Conference

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As attendees at the biennial *Slayage* Conferences are well aware, a “Slay-age” (three days followed by two years) is a long time to go without a Whedon-centric academic conference, a problem that K. Dale Koontz and Ensley F. Guffey decided to tackle by convening the *Joss In June* Conference on the Works of Joss Whedon in Shelby, North Carolina on June 29, 2013. Envisioned as a kind of “inter-*Slayage Slayage*,” the key challenge was this – would it be possible to convene a successful academic conference devoted to the works of Joss Whedon in a small town (population 21,000) located an hour from the nearest airport? There were many questions to be answered including:

- How do you put together an eye-catching call for papers (“CFP”)?
- Where do you go to get that CFP out to a broad audience?
- What do you look for in a suitable conference facility?
- What sort of technical support do attendees expect and require?
- How do you obtain a keynote speaker for the conference?
- How do you manage the paperwork as proposals begin arriving?
- How do you feed the attendees – especially those with particular dietary restrictions?
- What about housing for the attendees?
- How do you handle transportation when attendees can’t stay on-site?
- How do you approach sponsors about off-setting some of the costs?
- How do you integrate new media to spread the word and as a part of the conference itself?
- How do you do all of this without winding up in the red financially?
- In short, will this work or is this a hare-brained idea that will turn out worse than one of Buffy’s birthdays?

Some of our answers to the above questions worked very well, while others did not, and as we worked through our list, new questions arose. Due to the tireless efforts of many, many people, *Joss in June* was a rousing success and we hope that others will take the initiative and that similar conferences will spring up in the years between *Slayage* conferences. In aid of this, we will present a workshop detailing our experience convening *Joss In June*. While the specifics of organizing similar conferences elsewhere will vary, the types of challenges we faced, and our methods of meeting them, will be applicable to similar events regardless of their locations. Attendees can expect an open and honest post-mortem of what we did right and what we did wrong with an eye to helping them avoid our mistakes and to capitalize on our successes in convening future conferences. In addition, we will provide attendees with handouts/links to timetables, sample expenses, and other essential information gleaned from our experience.