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I was pretty nervous before my first URMA conference, held in Atlanta. I come from a school of 4,000+ students and over 300 faculty members and my background is humanities. We have only been publishing for two years. Would I fit in? Would this writer and editor understand what was being discussed? It turns out communication was no problem at all.

I was prepared to soak up as much as I could, so I signed up for the first day's tours. At the Georgia Aquarium we were treated to a "backstage tour." We watched the whale sharks being fed, saw the medical facilities for ill or injured residents of the aquarium, and were entertained by otters and belugas. Our second stop, the Center for Civil and Human Rights, was a much more somber experience, witnessing the civil rights movement from 1954 to the late 1960s, sometimes in bigger than life-size images. Some of Martin Luther King Jr.'s papers were on display. The Center brought a lot of memories of 1968 back to me.

Next morning was the formal conference kickoff, with *National Geographic* writer Maryn McKenna talking about the importance of sensory details in research magazine writing—sometimes we focus too much on the science and forget to describe. The rest of the day was jam-packed: a thorough review of the process Georgia Tech used when they approached the redesign of their *Research Horizons* magazine; Maria Balinska speaking about The Conversation, a site that publishes academic work on current topics (I immediately canvassed my own faculty and found that some had already published with them), and Georgia Tech faculty members discussing interactions in communications.

Our opening day ended with an amazing talk at the historic [Academy of Medicine](#) by photographer [Dan Winters](#), who gave us insight into his art and his career. I was lucky enough to then sit next to him at dinner and discuss one of his favorite subjects, the space program in the 1960s. Photographs are a vital part of our work in research publications and any insights we can glean will help us make our articles better.

I was really looking forward to the tour of the robotic facility at Georgia Tech the next morning. As we walked from area to area, what surprised me most was how each demonstrator emphasized the word "safety" when talking to us about the robots. The robots may move in what appears to be a gentle way, but they are very, very heavy and if a person is in the wrong place at the wrong time, the outcome could be pretty bad. The people working with the robots are very careful (and always aware of where the "kill" switch is!).

Afternoon brought some laughter in the "Humor in Science" presentation (I do try to use a little humor where appropriate when writing my articles—makes things more interesting for the writer and the reader). One of my favorite presentations was the "Communications Challenges of Ebola," where we heard from Emory communications staff besieged by outside media during the Ebola patients' stay last year. Drones: Love them? Hate them? Fly them onto the White House lawn? Our final speakers, from CNN and the Georgia Tech Research Institute, gave us a legal lesson in the use of drones in news reporting.

I've never been at a conference that had anything comparable to the "Fire Hose Sessions," but having members talk for five minutes on a subject and take questions for two minutes is actually incredibly effective and informative. I hope this feature continues at future conferences.

Our final morning was focused on social media, something I had been using for the entire conference (well, [Facebook](#) at least). This was the section I was really waiting for (even made sure my flight was late enough that I could stay). I know that social media plays a very important role in keeping readers engaged and the more I can manage to do, the better.

This was probably the most useful conference I have ever attended—I came away energized, full of ideas, and ready to do everything I can to improve *Research & Teaching at Penn State Altoona*. Already looking forward to next year!

—*Therese Boyd*