

URMA Conference 2015
Travel Grant for Katharine Tuerke

The URMA 2015 Conference was a wonderful experience. I really enjoyed meeting the other URMAnS. They were very welcoming and it was comforting to meet and share experiences with other academic communicators. The conference material was inspirational and informative.

The Georgia Aquarium was beautiful. I thoroughly enjoyed the backstage tour and was inspired by their use of signs about research, instrumentation and outcome to show their impact and improve knowledge mobilization. They also had an interactive display highlighting the research they are doing around the world and another highlighting their research partnerships. This approach to combine research, education and outreach was unique and memorable. We have an Earth Sciences Museum in the Faculty of Science at the University of Waterloo. I showed the displays to our curator and building manager who loved the idea. We are currently exploring ways to integrate research our scientists are doing with the topics highlighted in the museum. Our building manager is also looking into ways to highlight our research and students in our two new buildings (first opening in October, second in development).

The Center for Civil and Human rights was inspirational. The use of interactive displays, video, personal stories really brought the content to life. That theme continued with Maryn McKenna's talk on using detail and personal experience to tell stories. Both experiences were good reminders to be more human and less dry/factual when telling science stories.

I found the re-engineering of the Research Horizons Magazine very informative as we are just starting with our own print pieces. Although we have a much smaller team the approach to photography and integration between print and digital content was informative and helpful. Many discoveries in science are small and often happen in grey boxes which can make photography difficult. I really enjoyed Dan Winters' talk and in particular his image of the bee under the microscope. It was simple, beautiful and illustrated how to make science look more like art. Since the conference we have started a Reflections of Research page where faculty, students and research staff can submit photos of their research. This initiative helps us see research through their eyes, gives an authentic feel to the images and better engages viewers.

My favourite sessions were the ones where URMAnS talked about their experiences or initiatives. Some of the members presented unique ideas (iPhone videos, using abstract art, etc.) that were refreshing and brings new tools to the toolbox. In the social media session it reassuring to see others have similar struggles and share solutions that have worked for them.

Thank you for the opportunity to attend the URMA Conference. I thoroughly enjoyed meeting everyone and brought back many ideas and tips to Waterloo. I look forward to attending again next year.

Cheers,
Katharine