

URMA 2016 Conference Report  
*Raegen Pietrucha, University of Nevada-Las Vegas*

My goal in attending the URMA conference was to come away with best practices and a greater awareness of trends with respect to university research magazine production, and I'm happy to report that the conference did not disappoint.

I enjoyed hearing from Marilynn Marchione on how to best cover research in a fair, accurate manner. Although some of the more basic tenets of compelling storytelling were covered, I was glad she dug deeper and talked about the importance of getting an outsider's perspective on researchers' work as well as getting the other side of the argument with respect to that research. So often in university storytelling, we tend to take more of a marketing approach than a journalistic one, so this bit of information was really valuable. I also appreciated her taking some time to cover how best to pitch stories to media like her. For communicators like me who have to delve into every aspect of communications, including media relations and outreach, it was good to hear her acknowledge that every journalist likes to be pitched differently and that our primary goal as university communicators should be to build relationships with individual journalists to gain an understanding of what they prefer, then let the pitching evolve accordingly from there.

The design panel was also great. I'm glad it included artists who work on university publications as well as more mainstream publications because it's really easy to get stuck in the same old thing when you may not have access to peers producing other types of publications. I saw some really compelling covers that reinforced the importance of that art, even for research magazines, and I also got some design ideas for the upcoming issue of *Innovation* magazine that I'm currently working on.

I learned a lot from the writing/editing/managing panel about approaches I may want to take or, conversely, avoid with respect to working with others and their creative products.

The photography panel played off the design panel well, and I got some ideas for cover images and design from this session too. I also learned about some resources for free public domain images that I hadn't heard about before, and those will undoubtedly come in handy down the line.

It was interesting to hear Michael Lemonick's perspective on the tension between research writing and journalism; I hadn't really thought of it the way he presented it. My big takeaway from this session was that I should try to figure out what in UNLV's archive of story topics could be revisited in a fresh way, like Lemonick's fire ant story. As a young institution, we're always looking to build upon what foundation we do have, and this might be one way to do it, at least from a communications perspective.

Joey Shapiro Key gave me some insights into gathering additional data points/metrics on communications efforts as well as how I might help foster interdisciplinary collaborations from

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my communications position. She mentioned a couple different research groups/alliances that I hadn't heard about before, so I'll be looking into those now to see how UNLV might fit in.

I got some good ideas from Kristen Roberts on how to create really compelling research-focused events. Although this currently falls outside of my role, I was glad to learn about it because I anticipate that will change for me moving forward, so getting some interesting ideas for events and learning what made such events successful for another institution was valuable.

My big takeaway from Kathleen Gallagher and Mark Johnson's story was to really pay attention and think critically about story ideas when I first hear them to see if there's greater potential for them than might be apparent on the surface. I also learned that the right story might someday turn into a greater project, like a book, even if it's about someone else's research. I hadn't really thought about that before because most of the time, communicators like me are just trying to cover the research itself as opposed to its human impact (which, admittedly, we often don't know at the time, which is why following up later and seeing if it went anywhere is a really good idea).

The firehose sessions were great because all the presenters packed a lot of really practical information in there in a short amount of time. I know I'm not the only research communicator who faces the challenge of pushing communications efforts beyond a print magazine, so I'm glad I got to hear about new ways to create interesting and resonant online sites and publications, repurpose material, produce quality photography and video myself, and share content through platforms I hadn't given much thought to before.

Thanks again for this opportunity! As you can see, I got a lot out of it!

—*Raegen Pietrucha*