

2007 AGU Fall Meeting

By Kendra Rand, SPS Program Coordinator

After surviving heavy fog, freezing rain, and airports in Baltimore, Charlotte, and Chicago I finally arrived refreshed and ready to go in San Francisco on the night of the 9th. Well...refreshed and ready to go is a bit of an exaggeration, but after some food and a walk around Union Square, I was again looking forward to my first American Geophysical Union (AGU) meeting. I was also excited to be back in San Francisco. I did an REU in the area in 2002 – investigating the use of infrared imaging for breast cancer detection in the Molecular Physics Lab at SRI International (<http://www.sri.com/>) – and had a blast, but hadn't been back since.



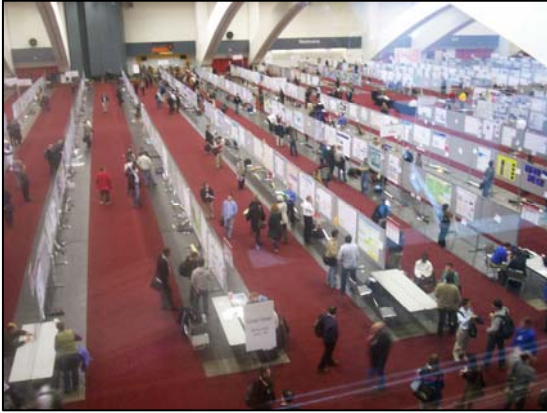
Having missed the opening reception on Sunday night because of flight delays, the meeting started for me bright and early Monday morning, 6:30 AM to be exact, at the student breakfast. Roughly 300 students and a number of AGU leaders were rewarded for early rising with bacon, eggs, and a nice welcome by the President of AGU, among others. I sat with two graduate students, four undergraduates, and the chair of the AGU Committee on Education & Human Resources, Dr. Cathy Manduca.

The undergraduate students at my table represented a variety of STEM majors, and came to the meeting through the MS PHD program: Minorities Striving and Pursuing Higher Degrees of Success (www.msphds.usf.edu/). The program provides professional development and support for minorities in earth systems science. The MS PHD students at my table were enthusiastic about the meeting and I had fun chatting with them. Looking back, I realize that other than these students I saw very few African American attendees at the meeting. Sadly, the under representation of women and minority groups at science meetings is not uncommon – although I did notice more females at this meeting than I have at many others.

The graduate students at my table (from Ireland and Germany) both came to present research, and were both first-time AGU attendees. Their stories seemed to be pretty common – coming to the meeting to present their thesis work as a way of networking with prospective collaborators, colleagues, and employers. About 15,000 people were expected at this meeting, with an estimated 25% of them students. In addition to the student breakfast there was a career center, career lunch for students, and a number of grad school recruiters.

I've traveled to a number of science meetings in the past couple of years, including meetings of the American Physical Society, American Association of Physics Teachers, and the National Science Teachers Association, and usually pass some airport time speculating about which other passengers are also meeting attendees. The poster tubes were a dead give-away for this meeting. Unlike some other society meetings, most of the research presented at AGU is done through poster presentations.

You can see the poster hall in the pictures below. The first picture was taken just after the lunch break ended, and the second was taken in the late afternoon when the free beer was out. Lest you recognize someone in line, I should mention that coffee and pop was available as well...



I spent some time wandering through the posters on Monday and Tuesday. The number of colorful, well-organized posters was striking, but the most interesting part for me was observing the intense discussions. I got the sense that the real work of the meeting is done in this large hall.

I attended a number of oral sessions as well, mostly related to education and policy. There are many efforts within the geophysical community to give teachers hands-on research experience, as well as to educate the public on issues surrounding the environment and climate change. There was a talk on the cost-benefit of building weather observations stations and efficiently fighting forest fires that I particularly enjoyed, and another on guidelines for conducting climate change research in areas populated by indigenous communities that was pretty powerful.

After two days of poster sessions, oral sessions, press conferences, and dinners with good food and great company, I was beat. But the meeting carried on long after I left Wednesday morning, with sessions continuing through Friday afternoon. I was sad to miss a reception in honor of the Nobel Peace Prize-winning Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change that took place on Thursday night (http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/2007). I hear they even brought a medal to show off!



The 2007 Nobel Prize Award Ceremony begins.
Copyright © Nobel Web AB 2007
Photo: Hans Mehlin

All-in-all I had a great meeting – I learned a lot, met a lot of people, and have a much better sense of what AGU is all about. Hope to see you at next year's fall meeting!