



FROM THE REP

Some Thoughts on Virtual Conferences

Last week, I participated in the 105th annual meeting of the Ecological Society of America, which was entirely virtual for the first time in ESA's history. It was my first experience with a virtual conference, and it's an opportunity that I wouldn't have had without the pandemic. So, I've been thinking about the pros and cons that virtual conferences have for accessibility, participation, and impact.

Obviously, the biggest advantage of a virtual conference is access: it's cheaper to attend, doesn't require a visa, and enables participation by people who can't travel easily (e.g., those with significant dependent care responsibilities). However, a good virtual conference platform isn't free; there are still some costs associated with attendance. The majority of the content at this conference was asynchronous, which minimizes problems with time zones and spotty Internet connections.

Virtual conferences are great for increasing access to the scientific content, but I'm not sure if they are replicating the invaluable relationship-building that happens in person. I enjoyed the talks, panels, and workshops that I watched—I learned a ton, and I emerged inspired to keep doing my scientific work. However, I didn't really meet anyone new, and I didn't get a "break" from my normal life and responsibilities to be immersed in the conference atmosphere.

In the future, I'm interested to see how we can leverage these digital tools to design hybrid conferences or networks of regional hubs to tackle issues related to access and the environmental costs of conferences.

What do you think? Have you attended a virtual conference? What did you like or not like about it?

— Chrissy



TOS STUDENT HIGHLIGHT

JANINE BARR. Science communication interests me greatly. I was introduced to the field in the summer of 2014 when I was an intern editing memorandums for the US Department of State's Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs. Then, after graduating from Gettysburg College in 2015, I worked as the communication coordinator for a division of the US Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Office of Water. In this role I learned the value of taking dense scientific information and breaking it down into digestible pieces to help others understand the significance of said information. As a result of these experiences, my career goal is to become a marine policymaker and communicator who helps to incorporate research into management decisions.

Although I enjoyed my work at the EPA, after three and a half years, I felt that to be a more effective science communicator for the ocean sciences, I needed to better understand the scientific field itself. As such, I am currently a graduate student at Rutgers University pursuing a master of science degree in oceanography with Daphne Munroe as my advisor. My research at the Haskin Shellfish Research Lab is quantifying the water quality benefits oyster farms provide in New Jersey's coastal waters under current and future water quality conditions. With just one year of my master's completed, I have learned a great deal and look forward to learning more.

If you're interested in learning more about how to communicate your ocean research, check out this handbook produced by the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration for some tips: <https://climas.arizona.edu/sites/default/files/pdfjacobs-2002.pdf>. Happy communicating, everyone!

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