

LETTERS TO THE EDITORS

ASLO 2013 ANNUAL MEETING: STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES


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One of ASLO's guiding principles is to recruit and support undergraduate, graduate, and early career individuals to the aquatic sciences. Upon hearing that the Limnology class at Auburn University (Alabama) was interested in attending the 2013 meeting in New Orleans, ASLO put their principles to practice and invited the students, free of charge, to attend the meeting for one day. Five Auburn University undergraduate and graduate students, with diverse research interests including aquaculture, veterinary sciences, conservation ecology, and limnology, had the privilege to attend ASLO 2013. The five of us attended the ASLO meeting with the intent to learn about various research areas related to limnology and oceanography, to confirm our study interests, and to find our research niche. Despite our diverse interests, we all left the meeting feeling we had benefited intellectually from attending. There are some things that cannot be achieved by taking classes or running experiments. It is essential for students in science to understand the direction their intended fields are heading and to identify others who are conducting relevant research to develop effective collaborations. Scientific meetings, such as ASLO, encourage information

sharing and are an excellent way for aspiring researchers to begin networking. Given the necessity of effective professional networks for success in science today, we collectively agree that the atmosphere at ASLO was conducive for our professional development and establishing our professional networks.

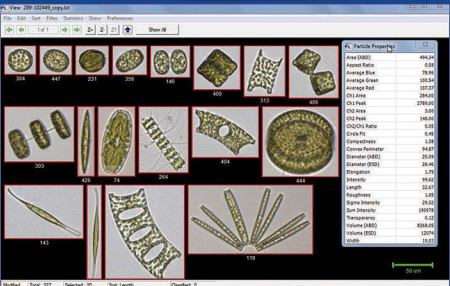
The meeting's first day introduced us to the collective theme of the conference. However, those of us who had never been to an academic conference, like ASLO, were initially overwhelmed. The quantity of presentations and the fast-pace at which the meetings operate is chaotic. The first day serves as an adjustment period for first-timers, but there were plenty of opportunities to speak with highly accomplished professionals or with researchers who, like ourselves, are just beginning their careers. Since the aquatic science community is relatively small, professional development and personal networking becomes essential to both undergraduate and graduate students' own personal development.

The undergraduate experience is one of exploration. Before coming to the ASLO conference, some of the undergraduates had not considered research as a part of their future. Although giving presentations is common in college courses, the talks at the conference helped them understand how to present research in a realistic setting. Seeing several presentations from many backgrounds also exposed the undergraduates to different ways of visually presenting data, organizing posters, and approaching the topics in an audience-friendly manner. Along with a better understanding for presenting the posters, some of the under-

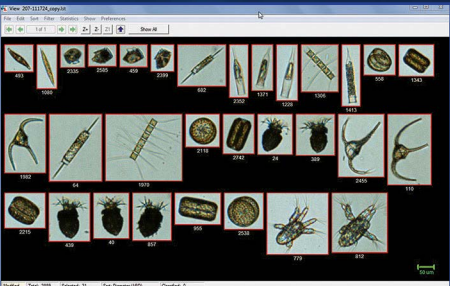


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graduates expressed a better understanding for the scientific process. After attending several talks, the undergraduates started to see patterns in the development and practices of carrying out experiments. Given a better understanding of research and experiencing the enthusiasm that presenters had for their work, some of the undergraduates began to express their interest in graduate school. The ASLO conference opened the door to many facets of limnology and oceanography, which showed the undergraduates that many exciting opportunities exist in these fields. Although they were able to learn about the practices and potentials of aquatic sciences, they also expressed a new understanding of why this field is important.

Graduate students are always looking for resources and ideas that may improve or develop their research. Throughout the day, the graduate students not only took advantage of talks that were related to their interests, but attended a wide variety of talks on other topics. Because ASLO is centralized around aquatic sciences, it is possible that even the most far-fetched topic can apply to one's own aquatic research. Because the graduate students are well exposed to the scientific literature, they started making connections between some of the papers they had read and the presented research. The ASLO conference also offers graduate students a chance to learn about exciting new discoveries in limnology and oceanography. One thing that was particularly important to some of the graduate students was the emphasis on scientific teaching methods. It is important to do research, but it is equally important to be able to communicate the results of the research to others, especially those young enough to consider pursuing the same career path.

We all agree that being able to attend ASLO was a great experience. Collectively, we wish we had been able to attend the whole week of ASLO. This would provide a better grasp of ideas and further enhance our professional networks. In closing, if any of you have the opportunity to attend the ASLO meeting, do it! We would like to give a special thanks to ASLO and our advisor, Dr. Alan Wilson, for funding the trip to ASLO 2013.

BRIDGING THE SALTY DIVIDE?

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The essay by Kavanagh et al. in the May 2013 issue of the *ASLO Bulletin* presents some very convincing and disturbing data about ASLO. The data show that, while we like to think of ourselves as a scientific society that integrates among the sciences of limnology and oceanography, our actions tell a different story. In terms of metrics such as cross citations, we are more like two societies, one salty and one fresh, housed together but not interacting strongly.

My first impulse was to argue that this divide is an illusion created by using tangible metrics that do not reach the true, but less tangible, strong interactions among limnologists and oceanographers within ASLO. After all, there are a number of ways oceanographers and limnologists influence each other with ideas that may not show up as cross citations. Having done an oceanographic post-doc but mostly freshwater work since then, I have lots of examples of this kind of cross fertilization from my

own career. Someone gives a great fresh or salty talk at an ASLO meeting that sparks interest on both sides of the salty divide.

And there is the rub: meetings. For the inspirational spark to spread, limnologists and oceanographers need to attend the same ASLO meeting. ASLO has three taxa of meetings and the most complex life cycle of meetings in the known world: The ASLO Summer Meeting, held in summers of years with an even number, which, by and large, is a freshwater affair. The ASLO-AGU-TOS Ocean Science Meeting, a largely salty affair held in winter of years with even numbers; and the Aquatic Science Meeting, the only meeting that self consciously tries to bring limnologists and oceanographers together, and this is held in the winter of years with odd numbers. While all three taxa have merit, we have created our salty divide by our well-meaning intentions to serve all ASLO members.

We could start to bridge the salty divide by repairing our own meeting schedule. There should be one kind of ASLO meeting, held at one time of the year. This meeting should have the integrative character of the Aquatic Science meeting, but not the name. Oceanographers don't like the name "Aquatic Science." The "ASLO Annual Meeting" would do just fine as a title. There ought to be one of these per year, held at roughly the same time of year. The themes could vary; the organizers could stress different research types in various environments for a given meeting. A regularized meeting schedule causes members to put the meeting on their calendars at least in a general way and plan for them. Our nutty schedule of three meetings every two years is unnecessary and causes members to choose to attend only some of our own meetings. Try explaining the ASLO meeting cycle to a colleague from outside of North America who expresses an interest in ASLO. By the time you say "... then every other winter, the ones with even numbers..." they will be totally lost. Actually, try explaining this to another ASLO member who is not on the board, and he or she will also be totally lost.

Some years ago there was a survey that asked ASLO members to identify what they wanted for a meeting schedule. The survey revealed that each of the three kinds of meetings, and their timings (summer versus winter), had support within ASLO. Looking at these results, the board reasoned that one size does not fit all and so the complex schedule was retained. In view of the start data on the salty divide it is time to look at this again. By trying to serve all of our members needs with three different kinds of specially tailored meetings, we have divided ourselves. It is time to try to bridge the salty divide. Maybe ASLO cannot deliver a salty and fresh water meeting, and provide meetings in both the winter and summer and stick to its goals. The mission statement reads:

"The purpose of ASLO is to foster a diverse, international scientific community that creates, integrates and communicates knowledge across the full spectrum of aquatic sciences, advances public awareness and education about aquatic resources and research, and promotes scientific stewardship of aquatic resources for the public interest. Its products and activities are directed toward these ends."