

Conquering the conference

For students attending their first conference, the atmosphere can be intimidating but just as equally rewarding.

By Samara Levine



One of my biggest regrets in my academic career was not going to the Materials Science and Technology conference my sophomore year. I thought that because I had just selected Materials Science and Engineering as my major, I would not benefit from going. I immediately knew I was mistaken when a couple of my peers, who had been more adventurous than me, returned from the conference excited by their new contacts and new insights. Not being one to make the same mistake twice, I immediately made plans to go to MS&T the following year.

I went to MS&T with several students from Virginia Tech. We arrived on Sunday morning and registered. Receiving the schedule of presentations was overwhelming. It was a booklet! Who knew there could be so many talks on sintering? Luckily, scheduling on the first afternoon was light so I did not have to make any decisions with my time right away. It was Sunday, and the conference was not in full swing yet. However, there were several



MS&T organizers planned plenty of activities for students, including this student mixer.

programs for students. I spent the afternoon supporting a fellow student in the ACerS speaking contest and attending a forum on graduate schools.

The following morning I perused the schedule over breakfast and figured out what talks I wanted to attend for the day. I was not prepared for how difficult a task it would be. I complained to my friend while frustratingly gesturing with my bagel, "How am I supposed to choose between all these presentations? There are so many that sound interesting!" Eventually, I developed a list of presentations I wanted to attend for the day. However, the same scene would repeat itself each morning of the conference.

Sitting in on presentations filled me with nerdy delight. It was as if everything I was learning in class was put into context. Suddenly seeing the applicability of topics like thermodynamics made all the equations I had struggled to learn in class redeeming and worthwhile.

At the same time, it was a humbling experience to see how my knowledge skimmed only the surface of the field of materials science and engineering.

As I listened to presenters from various universities and companies, questions I had wondered about during class were being answered and new ones were being formulated. A number of new perspectives were being opened to me.

My experience at MS&T was invaluable. I could argue that I learned more during the few days I spent at the conference than during an entire semester of school. My time at MS&T also connected me to the material science community. After the conference I kept in contact with one of the presenters who spoke on a topic on which I was particularly interested. Whether it is MS&T or another material science symposium, I highly recommend the experience. I eagerly look forward to this fall and am excited this time around to join the dialog, presenting on behalf of the ACerS's President's Council of Student Advisors on ceramics education.

About the author

Samara Levine is a junior studying materials science at Virginia Tech. She is the communications chair of PCSA.