

Interview with Josh Gonzalez



Michigan Technological University student, Josh Gonzalez was chosen and supported by the NASA National Space Grant Program Office to attend the Southern Regional Educational Board's Institute on Teaching and Mentoring conference this year. The conference was held in Atlanta, Georgia on October 24th-27th, 2019. We asked Josh a few questions about his experience:

A summary of the sessions that you attended?

Panel discussion for NASA

fellows - It was encouraging to hear the graduate experiences from the current NASA fellows. I asked the question in this session of when to start applying for post-doc fellowships and the current post-docs answer helped me realize that I should be currently looking for fellowship opportunities. I should start applying as soon as I enter the candidacy phase. Also, to directly approach mentors about developing a proposal for post-doc fellowships.

Writing you Dissertation: David Schuldberg -Dr. Schuldberg gave an entertaining presentation. The main takeaways I got were to start writing in the grad school format early and how to approach and communicate with committee members so to create a cooperative and not competitive environment within the committee.

Prestigious Scholarship and Fellowship Opportunities -This was an extremely informative session with many fellowship opportunities in a succinct format. I don't believe I would have heard about all the opportunities without this session. NIH, NSF, NASA, and Fulbright were all represented. I especially appreciated NIH's presentation on how to communicate with program officers and what role they play in the fellowship process.

What does it take to become a radical public intellectual – Karsonya Wise Whitehead -This presentation really expanded my perspective of what you can do with a PhD outside and within academia. What stuck with me is that Dr.

Whitehead successfully negotiated a large portion of her tenure contract to be service. Dr. Whitehead has a radio show, book, and also does many television appearances that put her name out there. It was interesting to learn how she promoted herself to the community of Baltimore and how she was able to incorporate service as a large part of her career.

Any magical or interesting moments that had a positive impact on your experience?

NASA Pinning Ceremony: My senior year of undergrad I wasn't really sure what I wanted to do after graduation. My second to last semester I took a Space Life Sciences seminar graduate level course and it enthralled me and motivated me to go on to graduate school. Since the decision was late in my undergrad education I had missed most graduate school application deadlines so I worked as tour guide for Space Center Houston leading public tours to the Johnson Space Center. While I loved giving the tours and nerding out JSC history I knew that I wanted to be involved in the science taking place there. The pinning ceremony felt like in a small way, I had been taken into the fold as a NASA researcher.

Ideas from the conference that you will put to practice?

Accountability partners when it comes to writing my dissertation. Sharing my research to a broader audience through public outreach. The conference also stressed the importance of mentors in your career and research. It made me realize that while for many graduate students their advisors are also our mentors, having a network of

mentors to reach out to in our careers is important.

Tips for future students attending?

Meet and try to connect with everyone within the NASA scholar group. Sign up for the free business cards I ended up using them to network with the other NASA scholars and to give to people I interacted with. Look ahead at the schedule and attend seminars that you believe may be applicable later in your career. Attend seminars that may be outside of your wheelhouse. The how to be a public intellectual seminar gave me a lot of ideas of how to be an academic inside and outside of a university setting.

Overall takeaway from the conference?

The Institute on Teaching and Mentoring was the most positive and encouraging experiences I have had in graduate school. It really emphasized to me the impact of receiving a PhD as a minority student. So that one day I can empower students to achieve their goals. The Institute is a place to go to be encouraged, validated, and inspired.

Would you go again?

I would absolutely attend The Institute on Teaching and Mentoring again. I have been to many academic conferences and I have never felt more encouraged or inspired than I did after leaving the Institute. At the Institute I felt instantly validated, everyone there encouraged me to finish my PhD. It felt like a celebration for graduate education and put into perspective the importance of getting a PhD and the potential impact we can have at our institutions and communities.