Reporting from the AGU Fall Meeting: A guide for first-timers

Tuesday, November 14, 2017
AGU Public Information Office
Welcome! Ways to Participate Today:

• Join the conference line by phone:
  • Dial in number: +1 (213) 929-4212
  • Participant code: 827-461-325
• Or use your computer’s audio

• During Q&A: Please use the question box on the right.
Please…

• If you’re on the phone:
  – *Mute your computer speakers*
  – *Mute your phone when not talking*

• If you have technical difficulties, type them into the chat box or email Lauren Lipuma at llipuma@agu.org.

• *Note: We are recording this webinar and will be posting it on the web for future reference.*
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Tuesday, November 14, 2017
AGU Public Information Office
Who we are

Nanci Bompey

Jon Amos

Lauren Lipuma

Julia Rosen
About Fall Meeting
AGU Fall Meeting

- Largest gathering of Earth and space scientists
- 20,000+ attendees
- 1,800+ sessions
- 22,000+ abstracts
- 5 full days (Monday – Friday)
The scientific program

• 24 scientific disciplines
  (Atmospheric science, ocean science, natural hazards, planetary science, etc.)

• Keynote lectures

• Union and town hall sessions

• Education and public affairs sessions
# Scientific program at a glance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Oral sessions</th>
<th>Poster sessions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8 am</td>
<td>Morning oral session 1 (8 am – 10 am)</td>
<td>Morning poster session (8 am – 12:20 pm)</td>
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<tr>
<td>9 am</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>10 am</td>
<td>Break</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:20 am</td>
<td>Morning oral session 2 (10:20 am – 12:20 pm)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>11 am</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>12:20 pm</td>
<td>Lunch break / Keynotes / Town halls (12:30 pm – 1:30 pm)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1:40 pm</td>
<td>Afternoon oral session 1 (1:40 – 3:40 pm)</td>
<td>Afternoon poster session (1:40 pm – 6 pm)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 pm</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:40 pm</td>
<td>Break</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 pm</td>
<td>Afternoon oral session 2 (4 pm – 6 pm)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 pm</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:15 pm</td>
<td>Town hall lectures (6:15 pm – 7:15 pm)</td>
<td></td>
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Press at the AGU Fall Meeting

- 250+ members of the media
- Reporters, bloggers, public information officers, authors, filmmakers, photo and video journalists, journalism students and educators
The Press Room

- Space to eat, work and mingle
  - Internet, computers, printers, phones
  - Meals provided by AGU

- This year: separate press work room
  - Quiet work space

- Quiet rooms for interviews

- Hours:
  - 7:30 am to 6:30 pm Monday through Thursday
  - 7:30 am to 2:00 pm Friday
Press Events

- Press conferences
- Workshops
- Media availabilities
  - Monday – Thursday, 8 am to 6 pm
- Schedule announced Dec. 4
- Events streamed live
- Other resources:
  - AGU tip sheet
  - Press releases
The New Orleans Convention Center
Room Locations

Second Floor
Above Great Hall, Halls B-C

Quiet Room 2: S.O. B211
Fits 8 people

Quiet Room 3: S.O. B212
Fits 8 people, has internet hard drop and phone

Quiet Room 4: S.O. B213
Fits 8 people, has internet hard drop and phone

Quiet room hours: 8 am to 6 pm
Reserve quiet rooms at the front desk in the Press Room (350-351)

Third Floor
Above Halls D-F

341: Quiet Room 1
Fits 16 people

346-347: Press Conference Room

348-349: Press Work Room
Quiet work space

350-351: Press Room
Check-in, Meals, Networking

AGU.ORG
Before the meeting
Why am I going? #AGU17

• Briefings on future events
• Updates on running stories
• New stories to write at #AGU17
• New stories to take away
• To thank/make contacts
• To be educated in stuff
Navigating the programme

- Use the search tool with caution
- Start with topics you know work
- What are past contacts presenting?
- Avoid what you know won’t work
- Feeling lucky: The blind search
Lucky dip: Random key words

#Spectacular #Remarkable #Oldest #Earliest #Youngest #Biggest #Smallest #Mystery...
Covering conferences as a freelancer

- You need a different strategy than staffers

- Or, pre-arrange to work for a pub

- Either way, it’s a good investment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Cost</th>
<th>Income</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>$5300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>$800</td>
<td>$6600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>$970</td>
<td>$4500, so far...</td>
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Planning for procrastinators

- Peruse the first day’s schedule, find a few promising sessions
  - Don’t forget about townhalls, etc. (good for background)
  - Pay attention to session location (rooms can be far apart)

- Search for keywords of interest and block out important sessions throughout the week

- See if there are any sources/experts at the meeting you want to connect with
Pre-screening talks

• Is the title understandable?

• Does the abstract give some sense of the big picture context, and why it matters?

• Are there results?
  – No. Don’t worry. But don’t bank on a good story either.
  – Yes. Great! But check to make sure the paper hasn’t already come out.
During the meeting
How not to be intimidated?

• The meeting can be terrifying
• Convention centres are huge
• Come dressed for combat
• Formulate a realistic plan
• Make the meeting do the work
How to play press conferences

- Don’t go to all of them
- Record some in your absence
- Radio reporters need shush!
- Work with the pack (or at least a buddy)
As a matter of course

• Scan the press release tables
• Daily newspaper and #AGU17
• Accept invitations to receptions
• Walk the poster halls (quickly)
• Take those two minutes to talk
An evolving plan

- Every night, sketch out a loose plan for the next day
- Freelancers: avoid press conferences, unless you have an assignment already
- Let your plans change, follow your nose
  - Rip out the pages from the conference program
  - Pick up a copy of the daily newspaper
  - **Resign yourself to missing something (lots of things)**
- Brave the poster hall (great source of feature ideas!)
When to bail

- Conference talks are extremely hit or miss (even for scientists)

- I leave if I don’t understand the talk, or if I know it’s unlikely to be a story

- Be polite, but don’t feel obligated to stay until the end

- But, before you go:
  - Check what’s up next in the session
  - See what’s happening in the next room
What is fair game?

- Scientists are often confused about whether journalists are allowed to cover conference talks (At AGU, we are)
- However, embargo policies at some publications bar researchers from giving interviews
- You can still write about the research, but only using material from their talk or poster
- Be aware that you may anger scientists
- For more: see today’s story on the Open Notebook
Writing during the meeting

- Pros and cons for freelancers:
  - quick stories cover costs
  - but they cause you to miss sessions

- My strategy: find a story early in the week and bang it out, often at night

- Then, if no pub has paid for my travel, I defend my time

- My goal is to gather as many story ideas as I can
Other meeting to-dos

• Keep a running list of all promising stories in the back of your notebook

• If you’re really excited about an idea, try to catch the researcher before they leave and do a short interview

• Pitch short news stories that you might want to write in the next week or so
After the meeting
What have you got left?

- Can’t do everything at once
- What got dropped?
- Planning for future events?
- Build your meeting archive
- Thinking about next year
The post-meeting debrief

- Finalize list of story ideas, add to master list

- Usually, stories fall into 3 categories:
  - newsy stories that need to be pitched now
  - seeds for feature ideas
  - vague ideas that interest me but aren’t clearly stories yet

- Start pitching news, researching long-term ideas

- Enter expense data and file away receipts.
It’s just the beginning...

- Stories can take years to come out
- Conferences inform future story ideas
- Conferences are great places to find sources for future stories
  - take note of interesting/well-spoken scientists
  - look back at the program for lists of speakers and conveners
Resources: The Open Notebook

The Reluctant Scientist: When Meeting Presenters Get Cold Feet
November 14, 2017  Cassandra Willyard

Getting the Most out of Scientific Conferences
June 13, 2017  Rodrigo Pérez Ortega

Ask TON

Ask TON: Which Meetings?
June 18, 2013  TON Editors

Ask TON: Meeting Coverage
October 25, 2011  TON Editors
More information
Fall Meeting Media Center
fallmeeting.agu.org/2017/media-center/

- Registration
- Housing
- Field trip
- Expert tools
- Media advisories
- Press releases
- Press conference materials
- Webstreaming
The AGU Public Information Team

Nanci Bompey
Public Information Manager

Lauren Lipuma
Public Information Specialist

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Social Media Specialist

Olivia Trani
Public Information Intern

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news@agu.org
Questions?