

Unreal. From the moment that this opportunity was presented to me in AP Biology to the moment that I jumped from a floating platform into the cold lake, this trip was surreal. A quick google search during class was enough to convince me. How could I say no to meeting world class scientists, with a beautiful view of Fallen Leaf Lake and great food? After putting in my application to my teacher, I waited rather impatiently until she told me that I had a spot to go.

The morning of I was very nervous about the trip. This group of scientists had gone through so many years of school, and they knew everything, or so I thought. After being shocked by 4 courses at dinner, we attended the first round of presentations. The first presentation by keynote speaker, Brent Constantz (Blue Planet founder & CEO), forever changed my perception of concrete. Blue Planet was creating limestone, a common rock found at the bottom of the ocean from animal shells and skeletons, through the sequestration of carbon dioxide into calcium carbonate. Their process was designed to take carbon dioxide from our atmosphere and reduce the problem posed by global warming. So, the daily practice of pouring thousands of cubic yards of concrete would come with a huge bonus. The following presentations shared ideas of how to further develop our understanding of crystals in order to apply them.

In all honestly, there were only a few moments of true understanding, but the exposure and experience taught me many lessons. The first one being that no one knows everything. While speaking with a graduate student, she confessed to me that even the established scientists don't understand every presentation, especially as they begin to home in on one topic. Instead, they focus on making connections with people in similar branches of study. From that moment on, I was able to see the scientists as humans at different points in their lifetime. Another lesson learned was to stay curious. Curiosity is what pushed me to attend the conference, fueled the scientists to work and make discoveries, and ultimately brought us together. For these lessons, I would like to thank everyone that was a part of bringing us to the conference. You gave us an unreal opportunity, even now as I reflect upon everything it remains that way. I didn't go home with a perfect understanding of crystal growth. Instead, I went home filled with curiosity and excitement about joining the scientific community and working alongside them as we find discoveries to help one another.

~Genoveva V.