I am extremely grateful for the opportunity to attend this year’s ESOF conference in Copenhagen, Denmark. The entire experience helped enrich my thoughts about both my personal and professional goals for the future.

The initial open ceremony was a spectacular way to start the conference, and by ending it with the “Career Beer” social I was immediately able to meet people that were related to my field of risk analysis, vulnerability, and disaster mitigation. Throughout the conference, there were ample social events to enhance networking opportunities between attendees. Since I came from the United States, I did not know any other attendees at the conference, so the social events were an important mechanism through which I made valuable contacts for the future.

The most career-relevant session that I attended was titled, “Natural Disasters: Can we learn from the past?” One of the panelists from this session, David Alexander from University College London, led a session at a Disaster Risk Reduction conference I attended in London in 2009. All of the panelists, including David, made themselves readily available after the session to further discuss ideas and how the research on disasters has evolved over the last two decades in Europe as well as in the United States. It was particularly encouraging to hear that my research is innovative and will likely lead to a successful, professional/academic career. Networking with this distinguished list of panelists was definitely a highlight of the ESOF event.

Another particularly relevant session was, “Going to jail for being a scientist? The pitfalls of communicating scientific risk assessments.” This topic is of great interest to me professionally, because my work often involves communicating volcanic risk to lay people in rural Central America. The session focused on the L’Aquila earthquake in Italy and helped provide real-world insight into the difficulties of communicating risk but also helped provide some “lessons learned” that I can use during future interaction throughout volcanic crises in a Latin American context. Mostly, it was a positive reminder that, for the most part, the media and the public tend to agree with scientists’ analyses and generally support their conclusions, even when there is uncertainty involved.

The session regarding “The role of social science and humanities in addressing global challenges” helped me realize that other scientists are bringing the gap between the physical and social sciences. This has always been a challenge for me, because in the United States, it seems that we are less-advanced or less-willing to work across disciplines. In my case, half of my advisory committee are geologists/volcanologists, while the other half are anthropologists/ethnographers. Bridging this gap and maneuvering across disciplines has been a research and professional goal of mine throughout my post-graduate career. This session
helped provide a detailed “course of action” for how social sciences were well-equipped to help address the challenges throughout the developed and developing world.

The entire format of ESOF revolved around effective communication of scientific ideas between scientists across different disciplines and also to the public and media. This was the overarching theme that resonated so well with my professional career goals. As a geologist focusing on geophysical hazards, the ability to effectively communicate risk and hazard information to a range of stakeholders, including the lay public, is of vital importance. Traditionally, physical scientists are poor communicators and tend to focus more on data collection and analysis, rather than communication of results. ESOF emphasized the importance of clear communication, and the format of the program permitted limitless opportunities to put this into practice. Even at the ESOF party/social, I found myself describing my work to non-academic business representatives or individuals from the media. The challenge was to keep these individuals engaged while clearly explaining my research. The biggest surprise was the feedback I received from a philosopher who had led the session on “What is life?”—he helped me reframe my research goals around the idea of social responsibility and that the results of my work, if done well, has the potential to save lives. This was a truly special moment for me at ESOF.

In summary, I would like to thank ESOF for this amazing opportunity to enhance my own research and career ideas. The sessions I attended, the individuals I was able to meet, and the Science in the City events all made this event very special. I have no doubt that my participation enriched my own outlook on how willing scientists and stakeholders from all different background are eager to communicate, learn, and improve throughout our personal and professional lives.

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