

COSEE Network Meeting 2009: COSEE on Hilton Head, South Carolina

By Jane Lee

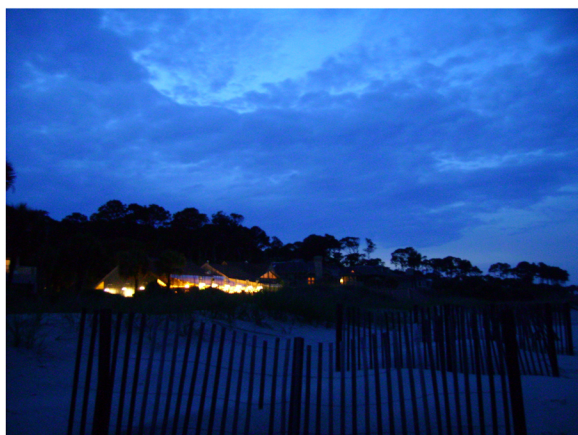
Introduction

The island theme continued this year as representatives from COSEE Centers across the nation gathered at the Palmetto Dunes Resort on the island of Hilton Head in South Carolina for the second annual COSEE Network Meeting. My first thought after having hop-scotched across the country was that there sure were a lot of golf courses in South Carolina. Not the most on-topic mindset for a COSEE meeting, but apt, in that the concentration of golf courses and COSEE Center staff made this little corner of South Carolina the place to be for golfers and marine scientists/educators.



The beach on Hilton Head, South Carolina

Photo: Gwen Noda



The Dunes House at Night

Photo: Gwen Noda

Monday, May 4, 2009

With a lot of COSEE staff squeaking in at the last minute to attend the welcome Reception and Dinner, there wasn't too much time to marvel at the bathroom in our unit that had been wallpapered plaid, or the beautiful scenery out the window. We dropped off our bags and headed out to reconnect with old friends, meet new ones and put faces to names. A nighttime hike on the beach back to my room was a nice way to end a hectic day of travel.

Tuesday, May 5, 2009

The first day of the Network meeting dawned breezy and cool. Walking to "work" on the beach, we came across a number of cannonball jellies (*Stomolophus meleagris*) that had washed ashore, as well as other COSEE center staff headed for breakfast and a day of all things COSEE.



The "Cannonball Jelly"

Photo: Gwen Noda



Palmettos on Hilton Head, South Carolina

Photo: Gwen Noda

Gail Scowcroft opened the meeting with a welcome and a run-down of what COSEE had accomplished over the past several years. Then Don Elthon from the National Science Foundation (NSF) gave everyone an update as to the status and potential future of the COSEE Network in light of our upcoming decadal review. He also reiterated the emphasis that NSF is placing on connecting ocean scientists with the formal and informal education community.

The morning's plenary session centered on "Effective evaluation of and research on COSEE." Mark St. John from Inverness Research, Inc. presented the evaluators' approach for appraising COSEE such that we are viewed as an investment by NSF, rather than as an expenditure. In order to achieve this, a case study-based approach is needed.

Susan Ross of COSEE Central Gulf of Mexico presented an example whereby her center was able to compare two different models of an institute they run during the summer. Tracie Sempier (also of COSEE Central Gulf of Mexico) presented data from her dissertation on teacher perceptions of COSEE Central Gulf of Mexico, which included isolating predictor variables for how likely an educator would be to use new lesson plans. Phil Bell of COSEE Ocean Learning Communities discussed how people learn and mentioned that the National Academies has published a document that looks at how people learn in informal environments ("Learning Science in Informal Environments").



Walking to 'work'

Photo: Gwen Noda



Thunderstorm on the beach

Photo: Gwen Noda

The afternoon concurrent sessions centered on two topics, "Strategies for Engaging Scientists" and "Engaging the Business/Industry Sector in COSEE." The "Engaging Scientists" session emphasized the fact that many, if not all, scientists are not given very many incentives to participate in outreach activities. The ones that do get involved do so of their own volition. The "Engaging Business/Industry" session emphasized the fact that the roles of the COSEE Network and its many centers needs to be clarified so that if someone in the network were to go after a potential corporate donor or partner, they could have their elevator spiel ready.

After a break, everyone reconvened and Gail Scowcroft introduced the new Sant Ocean Hall educator, Elizabeth Ban. Then Annette deCharon, Laura Murray, Rosanne Fortner, Phil Bell and Lundie Spence gave us an update as to where their respective working groups were in their various tasks. After their presentations, it was time for more informal networking and dinner, both of which were accompanied by thunder, lightening and rain.

Wednesday, May 6, 2009

The last day of the Network meeting, we jumped right into things and kicked off the day with two concurrent sessions, "Citizens Science" and "Storytelling as a Communication Tool." The storytelling session gave participants tips and pointers on how to present the stories of our COSEE Centers. We also got to practice presenting a couple stories to everyone else in the room. The "Citizens Science" session emphasized how important involvement of students in science was to the broader scientific community. Such programs are a venue for current scientists to do outreach, but they can also serve as a spark for future scientists to replenish the ranks.

After lunch, we split into groups based on whichever topic interested us: web developers/administrators, professional development facilitators/coordinators, scientists, promotion/branding/marketing personnel (which got folded into the web developers group), evaluators, formal educators, informal educators and administrators/Pis/directors. Our task was to identify a need within the COSEE Network (related to our group's topic), determine a solution, define the process to achieve that solution, and to make sure that our plan could be accomplished within a year and for very little to no cost.



The morning after the storm

Photo: Gwen Noda

All groups reported out on large post-it-note pads and everyone was able to view the various plans in a mini poster session. Gwen Noda of COSEE-West took pictures of all the min posters, which are available in her photo album.

After some closing remarks from Gail Scowcroft, our time together was over. People who had to catch flights dispersed in a flurry of cabs, shuttles and rental cars. A lot of those same people ended up returning to Hilton Head later that evening due to a shut down of local airports because of severe thunderstorms. Several COSEE-West staff and I had a surreal experience whereby our airline was clearly on a mission to get us out of Dodge before the weather closed in. I've never been shoved down a jet-way and on to an airplane in such a determined manner before. I can't complain though, since I did end up getting home that night instead of the next day.



Incoming thunderstorm at Dunes House

Photo: Gwen Noda



Through the reeds

Photo: Gwen Noda

Conclusion

This meeting was very much a working meeting. Which isn't to say that last year's meeting was not a working meeting, but with the continual reminder that COSEE's decadal review is right around the corner, there was an added sense of urgency to this Network meeting. The very last session where various groups came up with tangible, inexpensive plans to improve the COSEE Network were invaluable I think. Because we were not allowed to think up grandiose plans for scientist-educator harmony and world peace, our focus was turned on to what we could accomplish now, not five or ten years from now.

The amount of energy and will contained in that conference room bodes well for the COSEE Network. It's a little impossible sometimes for me to wrap my head around the fact that what we do is infiltrating places both unexpected and needed. But sitting in that room during those two days made me realize that COSEE has set a boulder in motion, and one can only hope that its impact at the bottom of the hill is large and spectacular.



Palmetto Dunes Resort, Hilton Head, SC

Photo: Gwen Noda