



Forum 20/20: An Opportunity like None Other

I recently attended Forum 20/20, a cleantech conference hosted by the Massachusetts Clean Energy Center (MassCEC), thanks entirely to a generous grant through The Fletcher School's Center for International Environment and Resource Policy (CIERP). I was one of only three students able to attend the event, due to the cost, but access to this event proved invaluable both in terms of the content of the panel discussions and the contacts I was able to establish through networking.

Content

As Forum 20/20 is premier event of its type in the Boston area, MassCEC was able to attract the top industry and government leaders in the energy space to sit on its panels. Paired with insightful questions from Greentech Media, the discussion was uniquely relevant and insightful.

For example, the opening plenary (pictured to the right) was populated by the director of ARPA-E, the head of the DOE loan program, and the CEO of a successful renewable energy company, and was moderated by a top MIT professor. The clever design of this panel, combining expertise on research and development, prototyping, and commercialization, facilitated a discussion of cleantech throughout the innovation pathway.



This panel was followed by enlightening discussions on the utility of the future, cleantech growing globally (a particular interest of mine, as a Fletcher student), localized energy solutions, clean energy finance, water solutions, and future market insights. The quality of the conference was further highlighted by the keynote address, delivered by Governor Deval Patrick (pictured to the left), whose policies have helped turn Massachusetts into one of the top cleantech hubs in the world. The event greatly added to my understanding of the energy landscape in Boston, and ensured that I am up to date with the cutting edge of cleantech globally.

Contacts

Possibly even more important in the longer term are the contacts I made. The biggest benefit of being one of the few students present was that the rest of the attendees were all heads of organizations and had years of experience in the industry; as a result, the average quality of the contacts I made was very high. Furthermore, when I met people and introduced myself as a Fletcher student, they immediately knew from my presence at the conference that both my school and I are serious about clean energy.

I met all kinds of interesting people, from an individual my age starting a renewable energy private equity fund to an experienced executive managing an oil major's venture capital arm, and from a Fletcher alumnus running an energy storage start-up to the chairman and CEO of the fastest growing demand-response company in the world. I got a plethora of business cards (pictured to the right), and emailed each and every one of my new contacts within the next day to continue the relationships. All will be useful sources of information and advice as I advance in my career, and some are already bearing fruit in terms of potential internship opportunities or as participants in the Tufts Energy Conference (TEC) I am helping organize.



The Bottom Line



I thoroughly enjoyed the occasion, and was so committed to getting the most out of it as possible that I was among the last to leave (pictured to the left).

This conference was the best cleantech event I have attended to-date, and I am very grateful for the funding that enabled my access to it. It is this type of generosity that provides students, such as myself, the opportunity to be at the leading edge of their fields, thus ensuring that The Fletcher School stays at the forefront of the world's most pressing issues.

Bonus: I also got to test drive a Tesla Model S electric vehicle around the streets of South Boston!



Update: Four Months Later

As I sit here, four months later, I reflect on the numerous benefits that attending Forum 20/20 yielded; the content and contacts from the event have since developed into some fruitful relationships and exciting opportunities.

Relationships

They say *who* you know is just as important as *what* you know, and I have already seen this truism born out on several counts.

For example, I was able to convince several of the contacts I made at Forum 20/20 to come participate in the Tufts Energy Conference (TEC) Showcase. The event was a great success, continuing Fletcher's leadership in the sector.

I have also stayed in touch with a Fletcher alumnus I met, and he has been a great resource in helping me understand and plug in to Boston's clean tech industry.

If I had not been given the opportunity to attend this conference, I simply would not have met these people.

Opportunities

Perhaps even more exciting are the tangible opportunities that attending the event has generated.

Shortly after the conference, I was able to secure an internship for this spring semester with the Boston-based private equity firm that I had mentioned. Now I am performing market assessments and due diligence on wind farms in North America, which is a great chance to gain some real tangible experience in the sector.

Not only did the conference help me find an internship for the semester, but there is a chance that it may help me get one for this summer as well. While at Forum 20/20, I heard the CEO of a Boston-based wind development firm speak on a panel on "Charting Clean Tech's Future." Recently, I met the CEO of a solar development company that had just purchased that wind developer, and I was able to strike up a conversation with him based on my knowledge of the two firms from Forum 20/20. As a result, I now have an interview lined up with the CEO of the first company, which is looking to expand internationally.

Thank you again for providing me with the opportunity to attend the Forum 20/20, it truly was a valuable experience.