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My main objective for attending Grad Cohort was to decrease my unease in attending conferences. In the pervious conferences I have attended I have only socialized with others that I knew and I wanted a chance to learn how to start a conversation with people I had never met before and network. My second objective was to get more of a sense of the culture in academic institutions other than mine.

I was able to strike up conversations with a diverse group of people and connect with some individuals who gave me ideas for my research and my future career goals both in and, possibly, out of academia. I know that this was a unique environment and it may not be as easy to start a conversation in a setting that is primarily designed not as a networking environment, however it also occurs to me that it might be easier to maintain these ties when at a conference that centers around a specific research area as there will be more to follow up with. Where as at Grad Cohort I spoke with many who had fascinating research and I'm sure will do great and fascinating things, since I am working on very different research I don't know if I will keep up with them.

I was able, to a lesser extent, to also accomplish my second objective of getting a sense of other institutions just by talking to a large variety of attendees.

Speaking with such a large number of people was the activity I did at Grad Cohort and at times it was overwhelming. I loved hearing the diversity of research topics and the enthusiasm that accompanied them. Talking to people helped me understand what going for a PhD might be like and a few gave me good research and career ideas. I also gained a lot from the sessions that helped me figure out some strategies for interacting with my advisors and gave me good notes on how to apply for jobs a little later down the line.

I think my future plans have changed in that I feel they are more solid. I gained a few ideas of what kinds of things I might want to do, but more importantly I got a clearer picture of what the jobs I might want in the future would consist of and how to get them if and when I figure out which one of them I want to pursue. I am still not sure if I want to pursue a PhD and become a teaching professor for example, but I know the steps I have to take to put myself on that path. I don't know where I might want to work in industry, but I have a clearer picture of how to best show my future employers what an asset I would be to their team if I find a job that looks like it might inspire me to be my best. And because I can see how these futures could be made they don't seem quite as far away and terrifying as they did before I came to Grad Cohort. This is also no less true because I have met some of the people I could be working with, and seen how lost or directed they are. It is nice, on occasion, to feel part of a community.