

2018 RACI Tasmanian Branch Youth Lecture

I had the great honour of delivering the 2018 RACI Youth Tasmanian Lecture to nine schools across the state from the 24th-28th of September. Through this lecture, I shared my journey as a chemist with budding scientists in years 8-12. My goal was to inspire them about the many positive impacts of chemistry on human life and the environment, and encourage them to consider higher education and scientific discovery as an accessible future path.



I started my presentation by explaining how I grew up in a rural farming community in Kansas and traced my scientific education and early career from Pittsburgh to Oxford to Tulsa to Adelaide. I made a point that science is truly global and that even a kid-farmer from a small town can join this unique human endeavour. As for the science, I discussed our latest research in converting waste into useful materials that benefit the environment. The applications in mercury capture, oil spill clean-up and sustainable gold mining illustrate the way the chemistry can make tangible impacts. These projects also appealed to students' strong affinity for environmental stewardship, which was evident in the lively question and answer sessions.

Day one was a three-school tour of Hobart with stops at St Mary's College, Elizabeth College and Taroona High School. I was joined by RACI Tasmania Branch President Nathan Kilah, who graciously facilitated introductions and discussions. It was also valuable to have the students meet Nathan, so they have a port-of-call at UTAS for all their future chemistry interests we might have sparked.

After Hobart, I journeyed up through the Central Highlands and to the northern coast for visits to Devonport High, Hellyer College in Burnie and Penguin Secondary School. Pushing out to the beautiful Northwest, I also visited Smithton High School and Wynyard High School. These schools were a treat to visit because they reminded me about my own schooling in rural Kansas. I was also impressed with the curious and insightful questions these students asked. I think many have a future in science. In one case, I received some emails from some students on my return to Adelaide to help them set up a school research project using some of our oil-capturing polymers. I am thrilled our research can support their chemistry education.

I then moved back south, with a final visit at Riverside High School in Launceston. This was a nice school to wrap up the tour and I thank the teachers and administrators for combining several classes for a large and vibrant crowd.

I thank the RACI Tasmania Branch for this special opportunity to share chemistry with curious students around the state. It was also great to explore the natural beauty of the state—fine inspiration for talks on environmental chemistry! Most importantly, I commend the RACI for supporting these initiatives that bring chemistry to students in order to share the many benefits of our discipline. It is especially admirable to support visits to regional areas that too often miss out on these opportunities. Hopefully I will have the chance to do this again. It was great fun.

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