

Reflections from Richard Michael Garza about the MANRRS trip to Birmingham, Alabama.

The MANRRS Conference in Birmingham Alabama gave me sight to life's many possibilities. I acquired so much knowledge on how to continue on my career goals. Several new friendships were made along with the trip. I think bringing as many students to the trip was an incredible decision. We all connected on such a great level, I can honestly say I made some incredible new friends along the way. The trip as a whole is so hard to put into words and I mean that in the best of ways.

1. When I considered applying for the trip, I originally did because my friend Shelby asked to me to apply with her. I had no expectations of getting it and I honestly had no idea what I was about to get myself into. When I reviewed the application I started realizing that this is a great opportunity that I can't miss out on. It was as if Shelby was sent from the heavens to guide me on this trip.

2. I had no expectations going into this trip, just a mindset of being ready for anything that would happen, anything that contained greatness anyway. My mindset was spot on, and I'm content that I went into it the right way.

3. What I learned from the conference was how many opportunities there are and what I must do to obtain those phenomenal experiences waiting for me to go to them. There are so many internship, job, volunteering, and learning experiences that are available for the USDA Fate Scholarship students.

4. The Conference has definitely given me a new perspective of my career goals. There's so much more that I can be doing to help pursue my career and I wasn't in light of that until the conference. The countless internships I viewed at the one day career fair alone left me speechless, from working at the zoo in Washington D.C. to getting along with a lady so well who works for the Florida Parks & Wildlife, who introduced me to some of her own specialties in aquatics and marine life internships in Puerto Rico and The Virgin Islands. I couldn't believe all that was there waiting for me. It truly did change me and I'm eternally grateful for it.

5. The scholarship alone has helped me with several financial issues and friend issues. Before being accepted into the grant I didn't have a solid foundation of friends. Due to the scholarship however, I feel like I found some great friends. I feel more at my roots with the other FATE Scholarship members and it's very welcoming to see each and every one of them. Being chosen for the grant has helped me into pursuing my college education greatly. I feel like I can actually do more with myself and it's an amazing feeling.

6. My favorite part about the experience in Birmingham has to be the opportunities, the opportunities of internships, of great new friendships, and self-empowerment. The whole trip was my favorite, I can't pick from one part from another. The trip as a whole was just too incredible to say one part was better than the next.

7. I'll tell my scholars, "You should've been there." I hope more spots are open for next year's conference and I do plan on going to next year's conference, there is not a doubt in my mind that I will be on a car ride to Houston, Texas sometime next year for the next conference.

8. My fondest memory of the trip was when Jessica had us write letters to one other. We read our own letters and got to see where they came from. To read what my fellow peers and mentors thought about me was heart touching. I still have those letters and I plan to keep them with me forever, as a remembrance on how great I presented myself to these amazing people I got to spend the trip with.



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