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My time at Testing the Waters 8 conference, Seattle, by Neil Byrnes

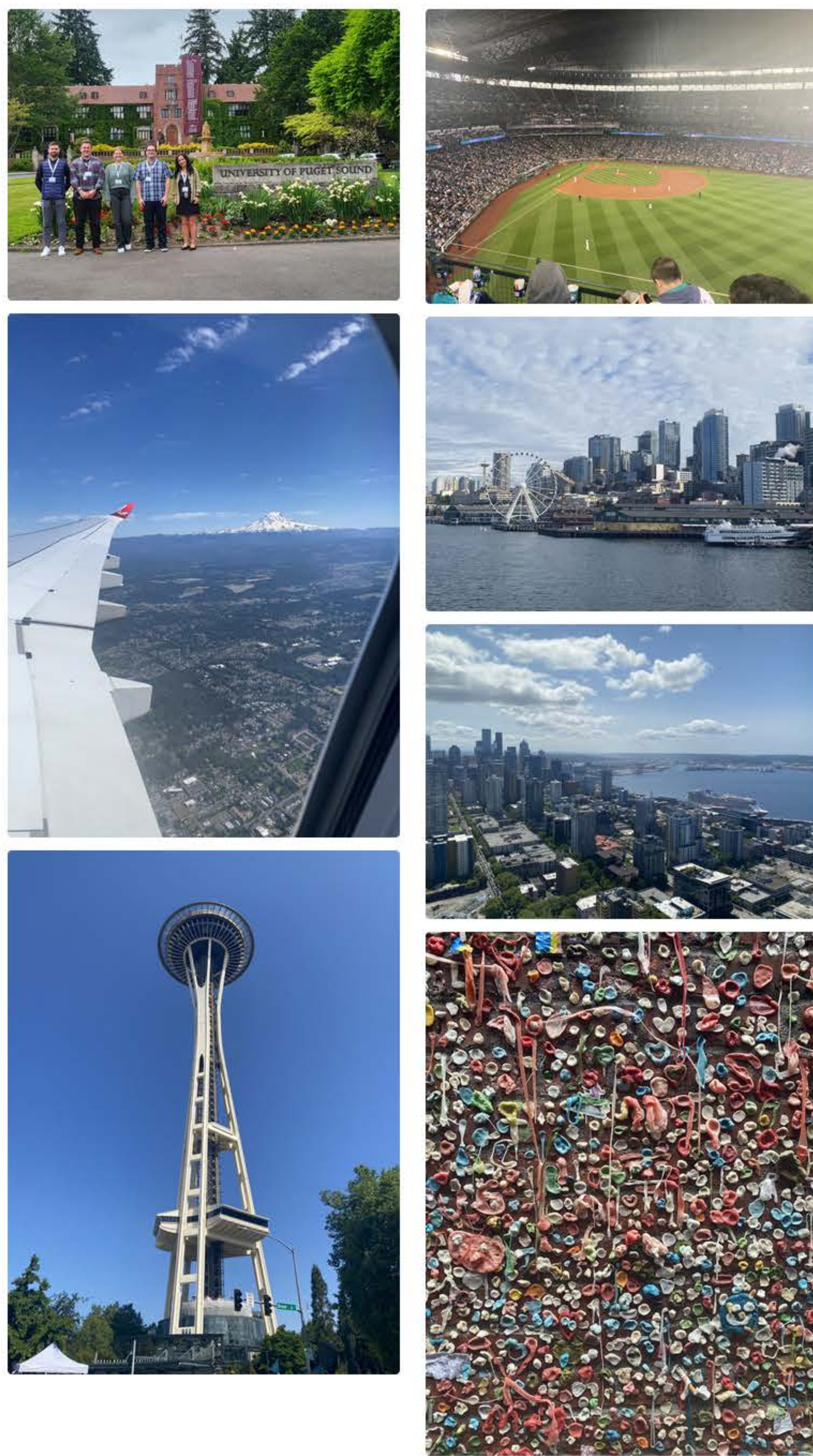


The [conference](#) was attended by both chemists and biologists, public health officials, epidemiologists, and representatives from wastewater utilities. There were attendees from a variety of international destinations including: Canada, United States, Mexico, Chile, Iceland, United Kingdom, Belgium, Türkiye, China, Australia, and New Zealand. Each day began with a presentation from a keynote speaker, followed by talks divided into sessions based on themes, and concluded with a panel-style discussion which provided an opportunity for everyone to openly discuss key issues in the field. This was followed by a poster session.

I found the conference highly engaging and relevant to the work being done at CWBE. Presentations covered a variety of topics such as illicit drug use, disease surveillance (e.g., COVID-19, measles), and challenges within WBE (e.g., data normalization). I was especially interested in novel research which expanded the scope of WBE by integrating wastewater data (e.g., drug usage trends) with socioeconomic and demographic data to develop a more comprehensive understanding of community health. This research highlighted the capabilities of WBE and reaffirmed that CWBE's research is at the forefront of the field.

Accommodations and meals were provided on campus which was convenient and encouraged interaction among researchers. My favourite part of the conference was the poster sessions as they offered valuable opportunities to connect with both early-career and established researchers. These sessions allowed me to explore others' work in depth, ask questions, discuss my own research, and build meaningful connections within the field.

In addition to the conference itself, I had the chance to explore Seattle with other group members as we arrived a few days early to adjust to the time difference. We visited the iconic Space Needle and saw a stunning view of the city, mountains, and surrounding coastline. Other highlights included: Pike Place Market, attending a baseball game, and seeing the famous Gum Wall. We also took a ferry to Bainbridge Island for a relaxing morning spent visiting bookstores, a coffee shop, a market, and exploring a local park. Overall, I thoroughly enjoyed Testing the Waters 8 and will definitely be attending again next year!



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