Science & Politics in Washington  by Shannon McNeely

In June I had the very fortunate opportunity to attend the American Meteorological Society (AMS) Summer Policy Colloquium (SPC). The first SPC was in 2001 and takes place every summer in Washington D.C. I have known many colleagues at NCAR who have attended (I first started at NCAR in 2000 as a research assistant and then became an associate scientist) and had always heard great things, so I was very excited to finally have this opportunity thanks to the Advanced Study Program. Before coming to NCAR and working in climate sciences, I got a Master’s degree in International Environmental Policy. So, I have long been interested in the intersections between science and policy.

The purpose of the SPC is to introduce scientists to the policy and politics of science in D.C. and to educate them on how government works, especially as it relates to the scientific community. We were exposed to many staffers and aids from the U.S. House of Representatives, Senate, and the White House as well as representatives from various other government agencies that deal with climate and weather. Topics covered a wide range from science funding and budgets, policy making, and climate/security issues to leadership, media, and effective communication. The exposure to such a broad spectrum of people and ideas is invaluable. I probably learned the most from the presentations on the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and the Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP). While on the surface, budgets sounds really dry and boring, these are the two offices that carry out the (continued on Page 2)

August Fellows Socials

The Fellows Association is planning a happy hour gathering at the Drafthouse on August 11th and a hike on August 29th. Watch the email list for more details. All postdocs and graduate students at NCAR are invited and encouraged to attend.
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directions for science set by the President. OSTP manages the National Science and Technology Council, which coordinates all of the federal science programs. This includes the National Science Foundation, which of course, funds NCAR and most of our research.

Most exciting to me was to learn how much has changed during the Obama administration. President Obama holds science in high regard and plans to double the science budgets of several agencies, including NSF. This means that a lot more money and resources are being allocated to climate science and adaptation strategies. And the need for experts in the field is great. To me, this is very encouraging both for helping to advance the climate and weather social and natural sciences, and for future funding and job opportunities.

In addition to the great content in the colloquium, I had the opportunity to meet and network with a whole cohort of really bright and engaging participants from universities and agencies across the country. It was an intense and exciting 10 days, but I can honestly say I enjoyed every minute of the experience. I highly recommend it to anyone who is interested in science and policy.

Self-arranged travel can be hazardous to your wallet

As a government-sponsored agency, NCAR has many rules and regulations which must be followed when it comes to spending the taxpayers’ dollars. As a traveler, that means that there are many pitfalls that you could stumble into if you make your own travel arrangements. The best way to avoid this is to let your program’s administrative staff handle the arrangements. However, if you choose to make them yourself, you should understand two things:

1. the Fly America Act, and
2. The rules regarding personal travel.

The Fly America Act stipulates primarily that any traveler traveling on government funds MUST use an American airline unless none is available, even if it costs more money. There are several caveats to these rules, so your best bet is to consult your administrative support staff. If you purchase an airline ticket that violates the Fly America Act, you will not be reimbursed. There are no exceptions.

If you purchase a ticket that includes business travel and personal travel, you must provide documentation that indicates what the cost of your trip would have been without the personal travel. You cannot be reimbursed without that documentation. Again, the safest bet is to work with your administrative support staff anytime you need to travel.

Happy Trails!

-Paula Fisher

The World is a book, and those who do not travel read only a page.

-Saint Augustine