

The Sam Nunn Security Program (SNSP) Fellows' 2013 Trip to Washington, DC

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This past month, the Sam Nunn Security Fellows at the Georgia Institute of Technology visited Washington DC as part of their program to study issues critical to United States national security. Funded by the MacArthur Foundation, the goal of the Sam Nunn Security Program (SNSP) Fellowship is to prepare students currently pursuing higher education in fields of science and technology for future participation, either directly or indirectly, in political arenas to influence policy with strong technical components. After a semester and a half of studying a wide range of topics from nuclear proliferation to energy resource availability to cyber security, the visit to Washington DC between March 18th and 21st of 2013 provided a first-hand look as to what it is like to operate and be successful in high-level political environments.

Starting with a visit to the Georgia Tech Office of Federal Relations, the fellows were able to meet four different AAAS fellows as well as Robert Knotts, director of Georgia Tech federal relations. The American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) currently sponsors 270 AAAS Fellows who are currently placed in various agencies in the US government. working on science and technology issues. For more info on AAAS fellowships see <http://fellowships.aaas.org/>.

The AAAS fellows gave personal accounts of what it was like to serve as the link between policy and science and technology in many government offices including the Department of Defense, State Department, Department of Energy, and the National Science Foundation. Students were able to meet with other AAAS fellows later in the trip during visits to the Department of Energy and Department of State, and as a result, were able to solidify their

understanding of what specific role a PhD in government could fill, and how exactly they could impact the formation of policy in various technical arenas.

Visits to the Pentagon and Capitol Hill provided insight into the fast-paced nature of the government, and what specifically was necessary not only to survive but thrive in such environments. At the Pentagon, meetings with Nuclear Security Advisors David Kulp and Tera Murphey, and GT faculty member Maggie Kosal (who is on a leave of absence), explained the challenges of balancing technical facts with political motivations, interfacing the fast pace of Washington with the slower methodical pace of academia, and specifics about being hired for government positions. On Capitol Hill, the students met with Jamila Thompson (Senior Policy Adviser to John Lewis), Dahlia Sokolov (member of House Committee on Science and Technology), Ronald Gecan (principal analyst in the Congressional Budget Office), and New Jersey Representative Rush Holt. Representative Holt, holding a PhD in Physics from Princeton, gave not only a concrete example of how a PhD can influence policy, but also an enlightening look into strategies the government can use to encourage the use of scientifically-based decision making in policy development.

A visit to the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) was hosted by Patricia Falcone, Assistant Director of National Security and International Affairs. A detailed three-hour visit with Paul Werbos (Intelligent Systems and Energy Program Officer) gave a wide overview of highly technical security issues related to NSF funded projects. Herb Lin hosted the visit to the National Academy of Science, and Diane Rausch hosted a visit to NASA Headquarters with a presentation on international space cooperation.

In concluding discussions amongst the SNSP fellows, a well-developed interest in government employment in policy development was displayed, as well as a better understanding of the culture and psychology of government employees and institutions. Students displayed an understanding of the challenges related to government work, including the necessity to make quick and often spur-of-the-moment decisions, engage in quick and succinct communication, and foster personal relationships with those around them.