

AAAS Mass Media Science and Engineering Fellows Put Science on the Front Page

Cloning, missions to Mars, electric cars. As science becomes front-page news, the need for knowledgeable reporting is more and more important. If the public is to understand the issues and how they affect their lives, journalists and scientists must become more adept at explaining scientific concepts.

The American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) considers it imperative to increase public understanding of science and technology. The AAAS Mass Media Science and Engineering Fellowship program has helped to improve coverage of science and technology in the mass media for 30 years.

The Program

Each spring, 18 to 20 fellows are selected from a pool of more than 150 applicants to participate in the 10-week summer fellowship. Fellows work as reporters, researchers, and production assistants at newspapers, magazines, and radio and television stations. Partnered with a mentor at each media outlet, the student-scientists learn how to make science news clear and comprehensive for the public. Fellowship sites include the *Los Angeles Times*, the *Chicago Tribune*, and National Public Radio.

Many fellows talk about learning the difference between what excites them as scientists and what topics interest the public. Often the two aren't the same; sometimes there isn't room in a daily newspaper, for instance, to cover an issue in depth. On the other side, many fellows have successfully pitched story ideas to their editors that are based on their own findings or experiences.

The History

In 1973, the Russell Sage Foundation asked AAAS to take over its 2-year-old science-journalism summer internship. Initially funded largely by the Russell Sage Foundation and a grant from the National Science Foundation, today the program is funded by AAAS, its affiliates, corporations, and foundations, such as the Burroughs Wellcome Fund and the Foundation for Child Development. Originally, funding from outside sources went into a general pool, and all partici-

pants were simply known as AAAS mass media fellows. Today, individual funders can "claim" their fellows so that their specific disciplines are represented.

To qualify, candidates must be graduate students, advanced undergraduates, or post-doctoral students in natural, social, or behavioral sciences, mathematics, engineering, or medicine. Fellows receive a weekly stipend, and all travel expenses are paid.

The Outcome

To date, more than 450 fellows have benefited from the program. Many do go into science journalism, but a number have remained in science in an array of capacities, including full-time researchers, teachers, and public-information officers. Many are well known in their fields and more widely known, such as Eric Lander, of the Whitehead Institute in Cambridge, Massachusetts, who was a 1977 fellow.

Still, many fellows choose to keep working in mass media after their fellowship has ended. Some have worked for major science publications, including *Chemical & Engineering News*, *Science*, and the Materials Research Society's *MRS Bulletin*, which is edited by 1989 fellow Betsy Fleischer. Other fellows have worked on staff or as freelancers at such newspapers as *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and the *Los Angeles Times* or at such magazines as *Newsweek*, *Business Week*, and *US News & World Report*. Alumni have also worked for National Public Radio, including Richard Harris, David Kestenbaum, and Joe Palca.

Fellows' paths may be varied, but often the outcome is the same. Their writing, editing, or researching helps to educate the public about the inner workings of science and scientific discoveries. And increasing public understanding is essential for increasing public support of scientific exploration on Earth or on Mars.

For information about next year's program, visit ehweb.aaas.org/massmedia.htm. The application deadline will be 15 January 2005.

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