

Careers in Science Policy

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FelCom's Career Development Seminar, "Careers in Science Policy" offered an opportunity for NIH fellows to learn more about this career choice from four outstanding speakers.

Dr. Kristofor Langlais, a former NIH postdoctoral fellow, described his journey from the day he obtained his Ph.D. to his current position as a Health Science Policy Analyst at NIH. After obtaining his doctorate in Molecular and Developmental Biology from Oregon Health and Science University School of Medicine, Dr. Langlais taught a variety of biology and genetics lectures and laboratories at Portland Community College. He continued his training toward a teaching career with a postdoctoral fellowship at Middlebury College, where he taught various biology classes. He finally took a position as a Science teacher at Okemo Mountain School. Dr. Langlais found this teaching experience very valuable while he was aspiring to transition into a new career. In 2008, Dr. Langlais started a postdoctoral fellowship at the NIH working in epigenetics and molecular genetics. Alongside his research he founded the NIH science policy discussion group, wrote a variety of articles for the NIH CATALYST, chaired the steering committee of his institute retreat, and was involved in the advocacy committee of the National Postdoctoral Association as project leader. Through these experiences he developed important skills for a career in science policy, such as leadership, organization, writing, and networking. After an open and honest conversation with his mentor about his long-term goals, Kristofor was able to do a 3 month detail as an International Health Analyst at the office of Global Affairs of the Department of Health and Human Services. Finally, in October 2011, Dr. Langlais achieved his goal to start a career in science policy when he accepted the position of Health Science Policy analyst for the National Institutes of Health. Kristofor Langlais advised all NIH fellows to take advantage of all the training resources provided by NIH, and more importantly, not to be ashamed to look for a job while in the lab, even if it is away from the bench.

The conversation then turned to Dr. Karen Mowrer. Also a former NIH postdoctoral fellow, she is now a legislative affairs officer at the Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology (FASEB). She received her Ph.D. in biological chemistry and molecular pharmacology from Harvard medical school. She went on to start a postdoctoral fellowship at NIH working in Mark Cookson's lab in the National Institute on Aging. A few months after joining NIH, Dr. Mowrer's interest in science policy led her to apply for the Christine Mirzayan Science and Technology Policy fellowship offered by the National Academy of Sciences. As these fellowships are very competitive, she confessed to being happily surprised when she was awarded

one. During her fellowship at the National Academy of Sciences, she developed public programs for the Marian Koshland Science Museum and learned more about the process governing US science and technology policy. Upon completion of her fellowship she obtained her current position at FASEB, where she is responsible for monitoring legislation relevant to FASEB's member societies and implementing advocacy strategies on Capitol Hill in support of federal science agencies. Her advice to the audience would be grab on any possibilities that present themselves, and make the best of all situations. A sentiment echoed by the following speaker, Dr. Dawn Defenbaugh.

Dr. Dawn Defenbaugh completed a BS in biology from Marymount University. Upon graduation she took a job as a research technician at the Genetics and IVF institute where she acquired a passion for research. This passion led her to start a position as a Research Associate at Georgetown University. She remained at Georgetown University to complete a Ph.D. in microbiology and immunology. Dr. Defenbaugh then did a doctoral internship at the Potomac Institute of Policy Studies. During this internship she was faced with various challenges, giving her the opportunity to develop organizational, communication, and writing skills. At the end of this internship, she accepted a position at Quantum Leap Innovation, in the computer software industry, as a senior scientist in microbiology and immunology. Her hard work and her atypical training in various aspects of the science world led her employer to offer her the position of executive assistant to the CEO of Quantum Leap Innovation. In this position, she is the bridge between science, industry, and policy for her company.

Our last speaker was Dr. Jonathan Gitlin, Science policy analyst at the NIH. Dr. Gitlin obtained his PhD from Imperial College in London, after which he crossed the "pond" to pursue a postdoctoral fellowship at the Scripps Research Institute for two years and at the University of Kentucky for 5 years. Concurrently, he acquired the skill of writing in non-scientific language about scientific issues through *Ars Technica*, an online journal where he is a science writer. As a postdoc, he joined the National Postdoctoral Association, where he became Vice-Chair for a term. Once again, his writing and leadership experience led him to be hired by the National Human Genome Research Institute as a science policy analyst. His advice to the group was to develop writing skills; he gave a few examples on how to build non-scientific writing experience, such as starting a blog or writing for an Institute newsletter. Finally Dr. Gitlin emphasized the importance of building and maintaining a network with members in the science policy field.

In summary, if you are considering a career in science policy, it is important to expand on your skill-set by writing in non-scientific language, getting involved in various committees in your institute or at NIH (such as FelCom), and by networking with those already in the science policy field.