

Public Policy Update

APS Public Policy Board Intern Gains Understanding and Motivation

Angela R. Records, Texas A&M University, arecords@ag.tamu.edu



This year, I had the pleasure of serving as the early career intern with the APS Public Policy Board (PPB). Prior to this experience, I had a limited understanding of the important role that advisory boards play in our legislative process. However, I quickly learned that a well-respected group like APS is uniquely positioned to influence our country's science policies and funding initiatives.

The internship began with monthly conference calls in which we discussed important issues related to plant pathology. These discussions led to the preparation of white papers highlighting PPB initiatives, including food safety, the future of plant pathology education, plant biosecurity, culture resource systems for the future, plant-associated microbial genomics, and industry issues. The PPB traveled to Washington, DC, where we met with a number of key policymakers, including congressional staff and high-ranking members of several federal agencies. Our goals were to communicate APS matters of interest and to hear from the agencies about their priorities.

Through this internship, I gained hands-on experience that will serve me well as I progress in my career as a plant pathologist. First, because I was involved in drafting the current APS initiatives and discussing future priorities, I now have a broader understanding of the plant pathology discipline as a whole. The PPB represents the entire APS membership, so we were charged with addressing an array of concerns—many of which I was previously unaware. I am now conscious of issues that affect all of us, such as the decline in numbers of broadly trained plant pathologists or the current lack of a national culture resource system, and I am motivated to help in any way that I can.

Secondly, the meetings in Washington, DC, provided a course in professional etiquette that few have the opportunity to experience. I listened as PPB members delivered well-articulated messages, raising the awareness of both scientists and nonscientists in positions of influence. Seeing how business is carried out within our government and interacting with the people who create policy and make funding decisions, undoubtedly, gave me an advantage that will serve me throughout my career. I am now confident in my ability to prepare written materials for agency review and to lead discussions with officials and decision-makers.

Lastly, through developing relationships with members of the APS PPB and individuals in Washington, DC, I have established a network of colleagues, mentors, and confidants whom I likely would not have met otherwise. I now have an expanded group of friends to communicate and partner with in future endeavors. I hope to maintain long-term relationships with all of these individuals throughout my career.

The PPB internship provides an early career APS member (graduate student or member within 10 years of receiving a degree) a rare opportunity to learn how science policies are shaped. I would encourage others to take advantage of this rewarding experience. I learned a great deal and enjoyed it immensely. ■



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