



## From the Editor's Desk

The summer months have come and gone and hopefully everyone enjoyed their time spent both in and outside of the lab. The latest edition of the newsletter features a letter from the newly elected chair of the FYI Steering Committee, Dr. Jim Gould. We also have a review from the 9<sup>th</sup> Annual Colloquium held in the early half of the year and an update of national post-doc issues discussed at a recent NPA conference. Another feature is an interview with Dr. Glen Merlino, one of the recipients of a 2008 NCI Outstanding Mentoring Awards. In addition, you don't want to miss the article interviewing two individuals who are actively involved with government policy.

Editors:  
Tim Chan, PhD  
Geraldine O'Connor, PhD  
Selinda Orr, PhD  
Raed Samara, PhD

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IF YOU HAVE ANY COMMENTS, SUGGESTIONS OR WOULD LIKE TO CONTRIBUTE TO FUTURE NEWSLETTERS PLEASE EMAIL US AT [nciccrfyi@mail.nih.gov](mailto:nciccrfyi@mail.nih.gov), or [chantim@mail.nih.gov](mailto:chantim@mail.nih.gov)

**Providing support for fellows at CCR**

CCR-FYI Association is supported by the CCR Office of the Director

## 21<sup>st</sup> Century Science Careers: Government Policy

If you are looking for a science career that doesn't involve working in the lab, you may want to consider government policymaking. What does a career in government policy look like? How do you transition from trouble-shooting your PCR reaction to crafting science policy for the State Department? I interviewed two scientists who work in the arena of government policy to provide some helpful insights for anyone looking to change their scientific focus from the lab to policy. They both gained their policy skills through the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) Fellowship in Science and Technology Policy. Fellowships are a one year term, but can be extended. Dianna Edgil, PhD is a current AAAS Fellow working at the Department of State. Her main area of responsibility is to support the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR). Dianna's fellowship was extended, and she is now in her second and final year. Julie Schneider, PhD used her AAAS Fellowship experience to launch her career in government policy. She is currently an NCI Program Director on long-term assignment in Beijing, China. Her main focus is to set-up an NCI Office of China Cancer Programs. I first interviewed Dianna to find out what it is like to be an AAAS Fellow, then Julie to provide us with an outlook on a career in policy.

### DIANNA EDGIL, PhD

Dianna Edgil completed her PhD at UC, Berkeley. Her research focused on a mosquito-borne viral disease called Dengue Hemorrhagic Fever. In addition to her bench research, she acted as a scientific consultant to laboratories in Ecuador and Nicaragua, helping to set up dengue diagnostics for several national programs. After graduating, she relocated to Washington, DC and worked as a project manager for Georgetown's Lombardi Cancer Center. In 2006, she joined a non-governmental organization (NGO) called the International Vaccine Institute in Seoul, South



*"The most fun thing about the job is that I am constantly meeting new people from other agencies and every day is different" - Dianna Edgil*

Korea to work on the Pediatric Dengue Vaccine Initiative. She set up dengue diagnostics laboratories in several developing countries including Colombia, India, and Thailand. In 2008, she returned to Washington, DC to begin her AAAS Fellowship.

How difficult was the application process?

*The application process was pretty simple, basically a CV and personal statement. There was also an interview with a committee and finally interviews with offices for placement following acceptance into the program.*

Why did you pick this particular fellowship (Diplomacy at State)?

*I picked the diplomacy fellowship because my background and interests are in international health. I studied a mosquito-borne tropical disease for nearly 10 years academically and worked internationally with an NGO. The one thing that I felt I had no experience with was the U.S. government's activities in international health.*

What is a typical day like? How many hours do you work per week?

*I took a position with the Office of the Global AIDS Coordinator, which is the office that oversees the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief. In general my day involves a ton of meetings to discuss issues that influence policy both within the office as well as with other U.S. Government agencies, such as United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the CDC, and with multilateral organizations like the Global Fund and WHO. We also receive various requests for information from Congress or the Office of Management and Budget that we are required to answer ASAP. I usually work about 50 hours per week - so, not bad really...*

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What kind of projects are you currently working on?

*Currently, I'm working on a few projects. One of them is a collaboration with the United Nations Joint Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) to improve PEPFAR reports on spending in the countries where we work. We also use mathematical models to help us to estimate the impact of our treatment and prevention programs. As the "scientist", I've been given the lead on all things related to modeling.*

What's most fun/least fun about the job?

*The most fun thing about the job is that I am constantly meeting new people from other agencies and every day is different. Whether it is a request for information from Congress or a visit from the Secretary of State, you never know what might happen. The least fun thing about my job is the meetings. They go on forever and, I think it is generally acknowledged that, for every hour of meeting, you get about 5 minutes of work done.*

Why did you decide to renew for a 2<sup>nd</sup> year?

*I really felt as though I wouldn't be able to make an impact in just one year. It took about 6 months for me to feel comfortable in my position. I wanted not simply to learn something new, but to actually be of use to the office.*

Do you miss working in the lab?

*I do miss working in the lab! I've actually joined what we call the "Laboratory Technical Working Group," which deals with some of the technicalities of HIV diagnostics so that I can be exposed as much as possible to the laboratory.*

How much "science" is involved in your current work?

*Not very much, honestly. We do try to use evidence-based decision-making as often as possible, but we are often greatly influenced*

*by politics. However, my group of mathematical modelers are a pretty scientific bunch.*

What new skill sets have you developed from the fellowship?

*I have never been a good "networker." This fellowship has forced me outside of my comfort zone in that area which is an extremely good thing. I'm also becoming very familiar with the economics of international aid. Economics was not something that I was ever really interested in, but it is now intrinsic to every decision made in my office.*

What do you see yourself doing after AAAS?

*Funny you should ask, because I was just asked by my office to take a permanent position with them. However, in the future I can also see myself going back to working with another NGO or a nonprofit doing international health work.*

How is your work/life balance?

*My work/life balance is a bit chaotic right now. About 3 months into my fellowship I had a baby boy. I have definitely been struggling with parenthood and making the most of my fellowship and I think I've been successful. I will say though that my social life has taken a real beating.*



#### JULIE SCHNEIDER, PhD

Julie Schneider completed her PhD at the Institute of Molecular Medicine (Weatherall Institute) at Oxford University in human genetic diversity. Her thesis research focused on understanding the effect of a recombination hot spot on creating patterns of genetic diversity in the beta-globin gene cluster. She then interned at the National Academy of Sciences as part of the Christine Mirzayan Policy Fellowship. Before starting her AAAS fellowship, she worked for a biotech company studying the

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effect of SNP and haplotype diversity on drug response.

Was your AAAS fellowship a good experience?

*My AAAS fellowship was a wonderful experience. During my AAAS fellowship, I learned about many career options that require different combinations of scientific and communication skills, provide opportunities to learn about new areas of science, and require an understanding of broader issues that affect research. Since completing my fellowship, it has been very valuable to be connected to an impressive network of current and former AAAS fellows in the Washington, DC area who are working on a range of important issues in science and technology.*

What skill sets did you develop from your fellowship that impact your work today?

*During my AAAS fellowship, I helped develop two reports addressing possible new models to manage biospecimens for genomic- and proteomic-based cancer research. These reports were based on input from experts in several areas, including: research, pathology, surgery, bioethics, intellectual property law, informatics, and patient advocacy. It was a privilege to meet and work with so many prominent individuals during my fellowship year. As an AAAS fellow, I learned how to design, plan and implement scientific meetings, workshops and discussions to inform the development of new reports, programs and initiatives. I was also extremely fortunate to have several excellent mentors at the NCI who guided my work, gave me significant responsibility over projects and provided many opportunities for me to present the results of these efforts in public.*

What did you do after your fellowship?

*After the conclusion of my year as an AAAS Fellow, the NCI hired me to continue working in the NCI Office of the Director. For several years, I helped coordinate the development of best practices for managing biospecimens for cancer research. This involved managing a trans-NCI committee who oversee NCI-supported biospecimen resources and organizing several meetings and conferences of extramural experts on this topic. Approximately one year ago, I began a long-term assignment for the NCI in China. I am now based at the U.S. Embassy in Beijing. My*

*primary responsibility is to establish an NCI Office of China Cancer Programs that will support the development of new partnerships with research institutions and cancer research experts in China.*

What is your current job like? How many hours do you work per week? How is your work/life balance?

*My job is very exciting because it is at the intersection of scientific research and international cooperation. Working on science policy in a different culture is challenging, and typically results in long work weeks. I frequently participate in teleconferences at night to accommodate the time difference between the U.S. and China. Work/life balance overseas can be challenging at times, but the opportunity to build international cooperation in this area is truly unique.*

What kind of projects are you currently working on?

*I am currently working to complete a draft NCI Strategic Plan for expanding cancer research partnerships with Chinese institutions. The purpose of the plan is to: 1) summarize NCI's existing work in China; 2) provide an overview of the cancer research system in China, highlighting key similarities and differences in policymaking, funding, and research; and 3) suggest high-priority scientific areas for expanded research cooperation of interest to both countries. Over the next 6-12 months, I plan to assist the NCI in organizing workshops of U.S. and Chinese experts to inform the development of new collaborative pilot projects.*

What's most fun/least fun about your current job?

*It has been very exciting to learn about biomedical research in China, to meet many Chinese experts, to suggest research priorities and possible partnership models and to assist the NCI leadership in designing a new international program. I would have to say that the least fun part of my job is surviving Beijing rush hour traffic!*

Do you miss working in the lab?

*I do not miss conducting laboratory experiments, but I sometimes miss learning about cutting edge*

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ideas and findings before they have been published and widely disseminated.

How much "science" is involved in your current work?

*I no longer conduct scientific research, but I frequently read scientific papers, and I apply many of the skills that I learned during my time in the laboratory to my daily work such as: attention to detail, troubleshooting, critical thinking, and analysis.*

Do you have any advice for scientists who are thinking about transitioning into a non-lab science career?

*First, I would recommend conducting as many informational interviews as possible with people who are working in a field of interest. These discussions will provide information and perspectives that may not be available in the laboratory environment. Next, I would recommend identifying fellowship and internship opportunities to experiment directly with the possibility of transitioning to a non-laboratory career. Finally, I would advise scientists to be excited and optimistic about the different opportunities available – there are many interesting science-related issues to work on and explore.*

#### Applying for a AAAS Fellowship

If you are interested in applying for a AAAS Fellowship, details can be found at <http://fellowships.aaas.org>. The online applications opened September 1st, with a December 15<sup>th</sup> deadline. You'll hear back from AAAS in the Spring, and then the program starts in September. Stipends are generous at \$73,000 to \$92,000 depending on experience. You have to have a PhD or equivalent doctoral-level degree, and you must be a US citizen. Fellowships are available in five programmatic areas: (1) Congressional, (2) Diplomacy, Security and Develop-

ment (3) Energy, Environment and Agriculture (4) Health, Education and Human Services and (5) Roger Revelle Global Stewardship. Global Stewardship may not be available this year.

In order to find out what AAAS is looking for in an applicant, I consulted with Cynthia Robinson, Director of the AAAS Science and Technology Policy Fellowships. She had this to say, "Of course, successful candidates must first have excellent scientific or technical credentials pertinent to their career stage. But that's not all we're looking for. We seek scientists and engineers who show a commitment to apply their expertise in a broader policy realm, who have the ability to communicate about science and technology with

non-scientists, and who have enthusiasm to address societal challenges." Other recommendations from the AAAS office to strengthen your application included the following: learn more about the science/policy interface, take a course in public policy, get involved in campus governance (join FYI for example), volunteer in the community, be active in scientific associations, interact with young people to pass along your passion for science. "We're not looking for people with a lot of policy experience - that's what the fellowships are designed to provide," Robinson explained. "We want individuals who are interested in

learning about science and its role in policy and who can demonstrate that interest in their application." Everyone I've interacted with from AAAS has been very friendly and helpful. Also, there was an AAAS representative at the career fair at the FYI Retreat this past year. We are hoping AAAS will have a table again in 2010.

Submitted by:  
Katie Stagliano

*In addition to the AAAS, there are a multitude of policy internship and fellowship programs available. AAAS has an extensive list on their website. Some sponsors include: the Academy of Medical Sciences and the Wellcome Trust, American Academy of Arts & Sciences, American Institute of Biological Sciences, American Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology, American Society of Human Genetics, Department of Commerce, NASA, National Human Genome Research Institute, Office of Personal Management and Research!America.*