Science Societies

A conversation with Taylor Dunivin, 2020 Congressional Science Fellow

By Julie McClure

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The ASA, CSSA, and SSSA Congressional Science Fellowship provides a Society member the opportunity to work for a member of Congress for one year. The 2020–2021 Congressional Science Fellow was Taylor Dunivin who spent her Fellowship year working for Ranking Member Debbie Stabenow on the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry. As her Fellowship year ends, she shares her thoughts about working on the Hill.



Taylor Dunivin

Q: What did you learn about the role of science in policy and government from your fellowship?

A: Science policy within Congress is critical to funding research and ensuring that new policies are grounded in science. I learned a lot about how science can influence new policies, which varies between the legislative and executive branches of government. On Day 1 of my experience as a Congressional Fellow, I attended a hearing with the Deputy Secretary of the USDA on the implementation of the 2018 farm bill. From this hearing, I quickly started to learn the different roles science plays in legislation (legislative branch) versus policy implementation (executive branch). For example, legislation might call on an executive agency to consider the best available science, but executive agency scientists must make implementation decisions using scientific information.

Q: What issue or project that you worked on were you most proud of?

A: I'm most proud of my work facilitating the development of the bipartisan Growing Climate Solutions Act, which was introduced by Senators Braun, Stabenow, Graham, and Whitehouse in June 2020. This bill will help promote climate-smart agriculture and forestry by reducing barriers to entry for producers interested in participating in carbon markets. I worked on this for my entire Fellowship year and am proud to have worked on legislation that helps show the broad interest in supporting climate-smart agriculture and forestry policy. Ultimately, more than 50 environmental and industry groups formally supported the legislation, and we held a hearing on the bill in July 2020. It was an incredible experience to participate in coalition building, finding common ground with offices from both political parties, and to work on legislation from initial stages to a legislative hearing.

Q: Obviously, COVID-19 impacted your Fellowship year. Is there anything you would like Society members to know about advocacy under virtual/socially distant circumstances?

A: Just as every congressional office is run differently, each office has handled the COVID-19 pandemic differently. While some groups are back in the office, many still work remotely full time, so don't be offended if your representatives or their staff offer virtual meetings instead of in person. In some ways, this can makes offices more accessible than ever since Society members would not need to travel to DC for advocacy days.

While COVID-19 has many wide-reaching impacts, avoid mischaracterizing requests as being related to COVID-19 related unless there is a true connection. Staffers are available to discuss issues outside of the pandemic, so be honest about where your

request is coming from. There is no need to label every request as COVID-19-related.

Q: What are your long-term career goals? Do you think you will stay involved in science policy?

A: I absolutely want to work in science policy long term! I am currently starting as an AAAS S&T Policy Fellow in the Office of Communications and Government Relations at the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases where I will work on legislative affairs for Dr. Fauci. In this role, I'm hoping to continue to gain experience interacting with Congress and to determine what science policy role best complements my skill set.

Q: Do you have any advice for student and senior members who would like to get involved in science policy?

A: Go for it! There are so many ways to get involved, depending on your time and comfort level. For example, if you enjoy writing, you could try writing an op-ed in a local newspaper on a science issue that is important to you. You might be surprised at how many members of Congress read those news sources. If you prefer speaking, I'd encourage you to reach out to a representative in local, state, or federal offices to set up a meeting on an issue you're interested in. Since many meetings right now are virtual, it's more convenient than ever to talk with congressional staff. Scientific societies—including ASA, CSSA, and SSSA—actually organize meetings at least once per year with Congress members, so volunteering with them is helpful. Don't forget that plenty of science policy happens within the executive branch as well. Many rulemakings require public comment, so keep an eye out for rulemakings related to your area of expertise so that you can share feedback.

Meet the 2021 Fellow, Kate Ivancic



Kate Ivancic

Kate Ivancic's career has come full circle as she makes her way back to Washington, DC. Ivancic will be serving as the 2021 ASA, CSSA, and SSSA Congressional Science Fellow. She received her Ph.D. in Agronomy and master's in Soil Science and Agroecology at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. Ivancic's academic research focused on nutrient cycling and crop performance in perennial and annual agroecosystems. Her interest in science policy dates back to her days at the USDA-NRCS (Shelby, OH) and USDA Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS; Washington, DC) where she was on the frontlines implementing agency policy initiatives. Through planning and executing on NRCS' on-farm conservation practices with producers in rural Ohio, and later managing a 12-country agricultural development portfolio in West Africa with FAS, Ivancic quickly gained an appreciation for research's role in the practical applications of agricultural policy across the landscape. Prior to coming to the University of Wisconsin, she moved away from government program implementation to begin research as a Fulbright Fellow in Uruguay where she investigated U.S. trade policy implications on land use change and subsequent soil loss. Ivancic is thrilled to return to the nation's capital and employ her skills of science translation and synthesis in the legislative sphere.

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