

## **Material Advantage Students Participate in Congressional Visits Day**

By Tricia L. Nicol, ACerS Liaison to the Material Advantage Student Program

Material Advantage Student Members were invited to join the [Science-Engineering-Technology Congressional Visits Day \(SETCVD\)](#) on April 6 – 7, 2011, in Washington, DC. The CVD is a two-day event, hosted by The Science-Engineering-Technology (SET) Working Group, that brings scientists, engineers, researchers, educators, technology executives and students to Washington, DC, to raise visibility and support for science, engineering and technology. The objective of SETCVD is to underscore the long-term importance of science, engineering, and technology to the Nation through meetings with congressional decision makers. Uniquely multi-sector and multi-disciplinary, the CVD is coordinated by coalitions of companies, professional societies and educational institutions.

Even though the threat of a government shutdown loomed on Capitol Hill, 39 students and faculty from 15 universities attended this year's CVD event. Their CVD experience began with a brunch Wednesday morning that included a fun, role playing session led by Prof. Dave Bahr, from Washington State University, and Prof. Iver Anderson, from Iowa State University and Ames National Lab. Some "CVD veterans" joined in the role play, including Dr. Robert Shull, from NIST, and Prof. Kevin Hemker, from Johns Hopkins University. This "warm-up" event also was a valuable time for the students and professors from around the country to meet and share their perspectives and motivations for raising the funds needed to travel and conduct face-to-face meetings with their elected officials, many of them for the first time. The students also received a packet of information that contained, among other things, talking points and a one-page leave-behind document to give to Congressional office staff.

After the brunch, the group joined the other 30+ societies which make up the SET Working Group at the Reserve Officers Association Minuteman Memorial Building for briefings from Administration officials and Congressional staff, focusing sharply on both the 2011 and 2012 budgets and congressional perspectives. Speakers during this afternoon briefing were:

1. Kei Koizumi, Assistant Director for Federal R&D, Office of Science and Technology Policy
2. Patrick Clemens, Director, AAAS R&D Budget and Policy Program
3. The Honorable Sherwood Boehlert, Former Chair, U.S. House Science Committee
4. Chris Martin, Ph.D., AAAS Science and Engineering Policy Fellow, Science and Space Subcommittee, Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee
5. Dahlia Sokolov, Ph.D., Minority Staff Director, Subcommittee on Research and Education, House Committee on Science, Space and Technology
6. Julia Jester, Ph.D., Majority Staff Director, Subcommittee on Technology and Innovation, House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology
7. Jonathan Epstein, Ph.D., Majority Counsel, Senate Energy and Natural Resources Counsel

Wednesday events concluded with The 2011 George E. Brown, Jr. Science-Engineering-Technology Leadership Award Reception and Exhibit. This award, given to a member of Congress who has shown active leadership in the determination of SET policy, strong public advocacy in support of a role for the federal government in research, and specific actions taken to advance SET public policy, was presented to two members of Congress: The Honorable Kay Bailey Hutchison (R-TX) and The Honorable Daniel Lipinski (D-IL).

Thursday activities began with a congressional breakfast where four members of Congress spoke to SETCVD participants. The speakers were: The Honorable Paul Tonko (D-NY), The Honorable Judy Biggert (R-IL), The Honorable Donna Edwards (D-MD), and The Honorable Frank Wolf (R-VA), and their presentations helped motivate participants for their upcoming meetings. At the conclusion of the breakfast, participants began their scheduled visits with legislators and staff members on Capitol Hill.

It is important to note that prior to the SETCVD event, the student participants were tasked with contacting the offices of their Representatives and Senators to arrange these visits for their groups. The students took this assignment very seriously and were very productive in setting up these important meetings. In fact, the three students from Iowa State managed to secure meetings with both Iowa Senators and with all 5 Representatives, a feat that had rarely been accomplished before. Many of the other groups also were very active and carried out over 50 office visits were accomplished by our Material Advantage groups before the CVD was concluded. Students reported that they preferred setting up their own appointments since it allowed them to take ownership of their trip to Washington.

Based on feedback from this year's participants, the 2011 CVD was a great success. As Mahmood Shirooyeh, graduate student at the University of Southern California, said: "The CVD program provided me with a unique opportunity to meet with our Senators and Representatives on Capitol Hill. It let me point out to them how crucial the strong federal investment in scientific research and technology, in the midst of deep budget cuts, is in creating jobs and building a better future."

Travis Graham-Wright, undergraduate student from Colorado School of Mines, added: "All three staff people were very excited to meet with us. They were pleasantly surprised that a group of students would take time out of their busy schedules to meet with them. It definitely left an impression that we thought funding for research was important enough to merit taking a trip to DC, especially getting toward the end of the semester where things get even busier with finals just around the corner. One mentioned that it definitely opened his eyes to a new perspective of where federal funding goes and was very appreciative to talk to people directly affected by that funding."

"I think that the sense of empowerment that came from each student group arranging their own Congressional meetings gave this SETCVD event a special enthusiasm that I have not seen before," according to Prof. Anderson of Iowa State. "I also found that my students from Iowa State spoke with a great deal of professional polish at their visits and made an excellent impression on all of the offices that we visited."

The universities that participated in SETCVD 2011 included:

**Colorado School of Mines  
Drexel University  
Florida International University  
Iowa State University  
Johns Hopkins University  
Lehigh University  
Michigan Technological University  
Pennsylvania State University  
San Jose State University  
University of California, Santa Barbara  
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign  
University of Southern California  
University of Tennessee, Knoxville  
Virginia Technological University  
Washington State University**

The partner societies in the Material Advantage Student Program are The American Ceramic Society (ACerS), the Association for Iron & Steel Technology (AIST), ASM International (ASM), and The Minerals, Metals and Materials Society (TMS).