

Another Successful Congressional Visits Day

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

Congressional Visits Day (CVD), organized each year by the Material Advantage Student Program, was held on April 10 and 11, 2013, in Washington, DC. The CVD is an annual event that brings students to Washington to raise visibility and support for science, engineering, and technology.

Thirty seven students and faculty from 13 universities attended this year's CVD event. CVD is a unique opportunity for materials science and engineering students to advocate for long-term funding for science, engineering and technology through meetings with Congressional decision makers. Security was tight due to sequestration, and the students witnessed thousands of people rallying for immigration on the Capitol lawn which made getting around DC very busy and hectic, but the weather was great, and the cherry blossoms were in full bloom.

The CVD experience began with an opening reception on Wednesday, April 10. The following three talks were presented to help prepare the students for the next day:

- **Effective Communication with Hill Staff**
Deborah Koolbeck
Vice President
Council on Competitiveness
- **Materials Genome Initiative and How Various Programs are Responding**
Dr. Ashley White
Directorate for Mathematical & Physical Sciences
Division of Materials Research, National Science Foundation
- **Life in an Office on the Hill**
Dr. Andrew Steigerwald
2012-2013 MRS/TMS Congressional Science & Engineering Fellow
Office of Senator Sherrod Brown (D-OH)

The reception also included an active learning session led by Dave Bahr from Purdue University. This exercise was valuable for the students and professors to 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.

Most of the students' appointments with legislators were scheduled for Thursday, April 11. Students were tasked with contacting the offices of their Representatives and Senators to arrange these visits, and they proved to be very productive in setting up these important meetings. An optional event was available to the students on Thursday evening at a local bistro where they had the opportunity to share their CVD experiences.

New universities were represented at CVD as well as some veterans. Here is what students said about their experience...

"The Washington State University Material Advantage Club prides itself in sending students to every Congressional Visits Day (CVD), and this year was no different as we were able to send two students to the 2013 CVD. These students had the opportunity to travel to Washington DC to advocate about the importance of government funding in basic scientific research. This conference is a great opportunity for students to experience the government role in academia and to see where much of their undergraduate research is funded from. It also allows the students to put a face behind some of the research going on in the country and to thank our government for their continued support."

Kassi Smith
Washington State University

“Trying to take a more active role in policy and legislation made me realize that as much as our representatives are helping us, they also need our help a lot. We are responsible for reminding them what is important to us so they can make the informed decision. They represent us, but without active communication, the representation is lost. From the two days spent at Congressional Visits Day, I feel more responsible for my role in the government as a tax payer and as a leader.”

Sean Fackler
University of Maryland College Park

“Prior to the visits, I was a total stranger to Capitol Hill and Washington D.C. It was a wonderful experience for me to actually get a close-up view of how things work on the hill and tell my stories of materials science education/research to Members of Congress and their staffers.”

Qing Yang
Michigan State University

“The Material Advantage Congressional Visits Day gave me the opportunity to make a difference in a big way. I got to meet with and try to persuade people who influence policy that what I, and thousands of other engineers and scientists, do is worth continuing to support.”

Alison M. Gatons
Purdue University

“I enjoyed advocating for science and gaining insight into the legislative process through meetings with Senators, Representatives, and their staffs. Through engaging with leaders in Washington, scientists can promote the economic benefits of having a competitive workforce and the innovative businesses that arise from consistent investments in scientific research and STEM education.”

Erin Donohue
University of California, Santa Barbara

“Attending this year's Congressional Visits Day was an extremely rewarding experience, and I would recommend any student to participate in an event like this.”

Tyler Dietrick
Virginia Tech

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). Material Advantage would like to extend a special thank you to Dave Bahr of Purdue University and Iver Anderson of Iowa State University and Ames National Laboratory for their continued support and dedication to Congressional Visits Day.