



Material Advantage Students Visit Washington

Tricia L. Niswonger

The Congressional Visits Day (CVD), sponsored by The Federation of Materials Societies (FMS) and the Material Advantage Student Program, is an event that gives students and faculty an exciting opportunity to visit on Capitol Hill with members of the U.S. Congress and congressional staffers from their own states. The 2007 event was held March 19–20. The goal of the event is to educate Congress about the importance of research in materials science, engineering, and manufacturing and the need to increase federal R&D funding. Approximately 60 Material Advantage students and faculty from 11 schools from around the country journeyed to Washington to participate.

CVD kicked off with a half-day orientation session to prepare the students for their visits with the legislators. A federal budget overview as well as a session on how to communicate effectively with congressional staff were two of the topics during the orientation. In addition, members of two panels, one focusing on the administration and the other on Congress, were available to answer questions before students headed to the Hill.

Training presenters included:

- Kei Koizumi, director, R&D Budget & Policy Program for the American Association for the Advancement of Science.
- Dan Byers, deputy associate director, Office of Science & Technology Policy.
- Lance Haworth, director, Div. of Materials Research, NSF.
- Raymond Orbach, undersecretary for science, DOE.
- William Jeffrey, director, National Institute of Standards & Technology.
- Jim Turner, chief counsel, House Committee on Science & Technology.

- Julia Jester, legislative assistant, office of Representative Vern Ehlers (R-MI).
- Colleen Shogan, legislative assistant, office of Senator Joe Lieberman (I/D-CT).
- Jack Wells, science fellow, office of Senator Lamar Alexander (R-TN).
- Deborah Koolbeck, policy advisor, Healthy Families & Communities Subcommittee, House Education & Labor Committee.

After the orientation session, students and faculty were divided into teams and, before heading to appointments with various legislators for the remainder of the afternoon, “practiced” the presentations that they would make. Later, in addition to meeting with congressional leaders, students had the opportunity to meet with leaders of scientific agencies and societies and attend congressional hearings.

The students finished the first day by attending the Materials Education Showcase, a grand display of exhibits that encouraged co-mingling of Congressional members, students, faculty, staff and exhibitors. Organized by the Federation of Materials Societies, this showcase included demonstrations, media displays, and poster representations of the community efforts that expose young people to the wonders and opportunities in science, technology, engineering and mathematics education using materials science and technology examples.

On the following morning, more congressional visits occurred followed by a wrap-up luncheon and evaluation session at Pizzeria Uno in Washington’s landmark Union Station.

About the Author

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