

# An Opportunity That Should Not Be Passed Up

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A few years ago, I came across an article similar to this one, describing an internship that offered “hands-on experience in public policy at the national level.” I immediately

became interested in the position as a way to learn more about agricultural science public policy, but little did I know that this service experience was going to impact my career in such a profound way.

I began my two-year term as the Public Policy Board (PPB) early career intern at the 2014 Annual Meeting in Minneapolis, MN, and from the get go, this position has given me numerous opportunities to advance my professional career. In fact, it was at my first annual board meeting that I met a board member who later became my post-doc advisor. At that first meeting, I also realized how well-regarded APS is as a scientific society, considering the large list of representatives from multiple agricultural funding and government regulation agencies, who every year attend the meeting to inform the board about relevant policy issues.

As part of the internship, I participated in monthly conference calls with the board, which gave me significant exposure to the most relevant policy issues affecting agriculture and scientific research. I tried to maintain an active role during our conference calls, and I frequently volunteered to collaborate with other board members on specific projects. For

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example, I coauthored a *Phytopathology News* article highlighting the value of incorporating phytobiomes into plant pathology curricula (“Phytobiomes in the Classroom,” April 2015), and coorganized the “Phytobiomes and Plant Health” symposium that was held during the 2015 APS Annual Meeting in Pasadena, CA. My involvement with PPB grew over time; by the beginning of my second year, I was eager to experience the high-level advocacy work that PPB does at the national level.

One of the highlights of my internship definitely was the PPB governmental outreach meeting in Washington, DC. It was fascinating to see how the board manages to plan and schedule meetings with key people with roles in agricultural funding and government regulations. It was very interesting to see how at the planning meeting the entire board gets together to design a strategy to allocate people to specific meetings in order to minimize the logistic problems and to tailor the message that will be delivered at each

meeting, prioritizing the most relevant topics and ideas for each target audience.

The level of engagement of the PPB members to promote the importance of plant pathology research for environmental and agricultural benefits was contagious and motivating. Through our visits, I promptly found myself becoming an advocate for outreach, education, and training programs to help prepare the next generation of phytobiome scientists and to attract, engage, and excite a broader audience, including under-represented minority students, to agricultural sciences and engineering fields. The conversations that we had with NSF and NIFA representatives motivated me to organize the Hot Topic symposium “Intro to Phytobiome Competitive Grants” (2016 APS Annual Meeting, Tampa, FL). This session informed APS early career scientists and established researchers about agencies and funding programs that welcome phytobiome-related proposals and provided insights into strategies for developing competitive grant proposals from the perspectives of experienced grant review panelists and national program directors. These experiences have already opened up further opportunities for me to engage in different initiatives related to post-graduate training and broadening participation in sciences.

In retrospect, I can say that the internship fulfilled all my expectations. It was with no doubt a great opportunity to learn about advocacy, public policy, and science communication. Most importantly, it was a one-of-a-kind opportunity for networking and meeting a new group of scientists, professionals, and funding agency representatives, and I look forward to future opportunities to work together again. I strongly encourage all early career APS members to apply for this internship. Applications open every year in early summer, so stay tuned for more information. ■



J. P. Dundore-Arias (far right) presented the *Phytobiomes Roadmap* to NSF program leaders.

Dundore-Arias at USDA Headquarters in Washington, DC.