

Mid-Year Report

Fellowship Activities

-Please describe any major projects you have taken the lead on as a Fellow.

I have been given the following portfolio: Defense, Transportation, Cybersecurity, and STEM education.

-Please describe any major projects you have assisted with as a Fellow.

I have handled these issues, with additional review, as a Legislative Assistant. I have made voting recommendations on questions before the House; responded to constituents; and met with stakeholders in the Office.

-Please describe any other activities you have worked on as a Fellow.

I have evaluated proposed amendments on bills in my area: cybersecurity, COMPETES and NDAA. These evaluations are primarily focused on the content of the issue, but must be informed by the history of the office, and the potential impact on the district. In addition to amendments, I prepare recommendations to sign onto bills, letters and other legislative artifacts.

Early on I participated in an all-day staff retreat which was extremely educational. I participate in weekly staff meetings.

When possible, I attend briefings on the issues. I address correspondence, and met with stakeholders on issues. I have made two amendment recommendations, one of which was approved in the House as part of the National Defense Authorization Act.

-Please describe the significance of your work to your office/agency.

There are three primary sources of significance from my activities. The first source of significance is the substantive, observable policy work. This includes the previously-mentioned amendment and recommendations mentioned above. The second is my support of my mentor and Legislative Assistants to address other task. For example, I am handling education which meant more free time for the health LA in the spring. By handling transportation, I reduced the load of the LA who handles taxes, and unemployment. The third of these is my own education and understanding, which I hope to bring to students at Indiana University.

-Please share any highlights of success (e.g., awards, honors, articles, reports, seminars, conferences, workshops, committees formed, partnerships, media coverage).

Carnegie Mellon University Department of Engineering and Public Policy as well as the School of Informatics and Computing at Indiana University have

included information on me and the Fellowship in their communications to supporters and alumni.

Supervisors/Advisors

-Are you benefitting from the interactions with your supervisor and/or advisor? If yes, what is most valuable? If no, what might help improve the situation?

I am benefitting from having a thoughtful mentor. He has provided structure for my experience. For example, my first assignment was to create a listing of Key Votes. This listing provided a framework for me to consider evaluate bills as they came up on the floor, a grounding of the political nuances of the office, and a feeling for the annual calendar. Since then he has walked me through various issues, and provided the level of review necessary for me to act as an effective legislative fellow. I had some early difficulty with the style of interaction with other office leadership, and addressed this with my mentor.

-What type(s) of additional supervision and/or mentorship would be helpful?

One of the advantages and disadvantages of being in the Etheridge Office is that I am treated in many ways as if I were a Legislative Assistant. This means handling the quotidian as well as the exciting. I have had more difficulties with the daily mundane constituent communications than the more exciting issues, such as the MTR. In the first, I have to overcome my professional instincts to help writers work through potential logical inconsistencies, and just accept the information as unfiltered feedback on the issues of the day.

-Any other thoughts you'd like to share about either your supervisor or advisor?

My mentor, David Weinreich, was originally an AAAS legislative fellow so he understands the program and works to provide a good experience. He is also the LD which gives him the authority to implement a thoughtful plan. The office is hierarchical, so I do have quite a bit of feedback and structure. Given the difference between the Hill and the proverbial ivory tower, this structure has been helpful.

Challenges/Opportunities

-What challenges have you encountered during the first half of your fellowship year?

I echo the experience of other Fellows in that ownership and interest are a difficult balance. I was not particularly interested in Congressionally Requested Appropriations; for example, sharing the national disdain for 'earmarks'. However, with the prohibition on for-profit requests, I found that there was not one that I would not personally support: libraries for unincorporated communities, sidewalks for poor towns where people walk in the dirt on the side of state routes,

and support for innovative educational opportunities for veterans. So while it is not what I would have chosen as a task, I did learn quite a bit and changed my opinion in a fundamental way. I was also given ownership, with review, because of the thoughtful time I was able to invest.

I choose to be a Fellow during sabbatical as opposed to at the beginning or end to my career. This has its own set of difficulties, primarily temporal. I have effectively two jobs: maintain my professional status and perform well on the Hill. When combined with parenting this has been difficult. There is nothing to be done about this, yet it is my single most substantive difficulty.

One of the challenges were in expectations. Starting in January are we expected to match before January 1st? Or should I have moved and then matched? Now that I am matched the level of concern I had seems unreasonable; however, additional feedback at that time would have been helpful.

-What recommendations do you have to address these situations?

Matching was difficult. I realized afterwards that offices had made preliminary offers which I had thought were polite discouragement due to my only employment experience in the past two decades being academic. We are rather blunt in the academy; hiring is more of a contact sport and less of a dance. Better clarification on what might appear to be in an offer, what has caused difficulty in matching in the past, and what are reasonable expectations would be immensely helpful. More clarification of the expectations in terms of timing and matching would be ideal for January Fellows. Also, see my recommendation for more one-on-one mentoring and encouragement of cross-class connections.

-Do you feel the presence of a Fellow is benefitting your host office? If yes, how so? If no, why not?

Yes, I do. I believe have shouldered a reduced but nontrivial portion of the load, particularly during appropriations season. I do not think any other person in the office would have put the time into building relationships and optimizing the amendments as I have done. All that I have done, someone else would have had to do or it would not have happened by definition.

-Do you feel your current office would be a good choice for future Fellows? If yes, why? If no, why not?

Recall my comment above that the office is hierarchical. I am in the office, structurally, as an employee. Some Fellows receive their own discrete projects (e.g., organize a hearing on this, you can make this idea into a bill) as opposed to functioning more like a Legislative Assistant. My primary goal was an educational experience, as opposed to a particular awareness-raising or programmatic outcome. So I would recommend this office to someone seeking such an experience, but not to someone seeking a particular policy outcome of tighter focus. In the later case, I would strongly recommend a committee or an

office that has championed the policy the Fellow seeks. In the second case, it is important to realize that in this case, the Fellow would not take the lead. Again, the balance of individual ownership and office support is the issue.

Suggestions for Program Enhancement

-How might the Fellowships staff help to enhance the overall fellowship experience?

The IEEE Fellows have recently begun self-organized small lunches every other Thursday for just the three of us. We have invited particular third parties we all want to meet. If that were organized at the beginning, this would have been an improvement for the year. Particularly if such lunches with the small group of departing Fellows could happen at least once during orientation, that would be excellent. For example, if each society Fellow could meet the out-going Fellows from that society in person at least once for a lunch during the orientation this could provide real grounding. I would recommend this over the large reception. The meeting at the reception in the end is not adequate for the purpose of introduction and mentoring.

-Do you have comments/suggestions regarding the orientation program, the professional development workshops, and/or other Fellowships events?

Yes, and this is one that I have heard from other Fellows. An optional weekend group outing on how to dress for Fellows would be helpful. This should include reasonable expectations of casual wear, dressing for dinner events, different types of staff delegations, and frankly cost. This should include identification of recommended locations, particularly high-end consignment or affordable office-wear. We come from laboratory and classroom cultures, not office cultures. We are primarily from the sciences and engineering. This is not a pool of women who have mastered the art of accessories. While this may seem trivial, it is critical in terms of first impressions and creating an image of competence. For many female Fellows, it would be easier to write a book analyzing the performance of femininity in a political context than it is to know what to wear. Wardrobe matters, and there is strong culture on the Hill about self-presentation. Not that I would exclude men, but I would focus on the greater and more subtle demands on the professional self-presentation of women.