

Placement Report to the IEEE-USA Government Fellows Committee

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I am an IEEE-USA Engineering and Diplomacy Fellow of the Department of State. I am placed in the Office of the Science and Technology Adviser to the Secretary (STAS). My fellowship assignment location is the Government Accountability Office (GAO). I will focus on technology assessment with both national and international perspectives. My first day as an IEEE-USA Fellow was September 15. In this report, I provide an overview about the placement, initial responsibilities and activities, and the orientation.

Placement

My placement process was an enjoyable one due to the STAS leadership staff, which consisted of Dr. E. William Colglazier, Dr. Eric Bone, Dr. Lawrence Lin, and Mr. Andrew W. Reynolds. I also benefitted from the timely assistance by Ms. Erica Wissolik, program manager for government relations at IEEE-USA.

Prior to the fellowship start, I received my secret level security clearance approval. I also received a packet of available position descriptions for Fellows. Given how IEEE-USA public policy priority issues related to technology as well as my own interests around technology assessments and evaluation of federal programs, I took the initiative to seek the placement at GAO because it conducted thorough and unbiased technology assessments. Furthermore, Dr. Timothy M. Persons, Chief Scientist, who directs technology assessment at GAO, is a Senior Member of the IEEE. Therefore, I believed that under his supervision and mentorship, I would have a successful fellowship experience.

Both State and GAO were excited about this possibility and agreed that the fellowship would mutually benefit both agencies. Since GAO had not previously hosted a Fellow, IEEE-USA, State, and GAO signed a formal agreement to approve my fellowship assignment and location. I am honored and privileged to be the IEEE-USA Fellow of State and GAO.

Responsibilities and Activities

As an integral component of US science diplomacy, the mission of STAS is to globally promote developments in science and technology (S&T). For my fellowship, I will be given opportunities to build S&T partnerships with national and international communities. Since GAO, as an independent and nonpartisan agency, has a unique role in the government, my initial responsibilities and activities are to understand how GAO conducts technology assessments, evaluates federal programs, audits federal investments, and writes reports. Under the guidance of Dr. Persons, I am registered to participate in a series of training courses through the year. I have already completed a two-day course on “Developing the GAO Engagement” processes as part of my orientation. I have begun to

build partnerships with other GAO staff. I also have started to interact with STAS leadership to identify mechanisms for contributing to S&T assessment issues of importance to State. I will provide monthly reports of my fellowship activities.

Orientation

I started my fellowship after the two-week orientation organized by the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) Science and Technology Policy Fellowships staff for 255 Fellows in the executive branch and the legislative branch. I also participated in the orientation activities by the staff at both State and GAO.

While the AAAS orientation provided a wonderful introduction on bringing science into the policy process, State and GAO provided agency-specific orientations. I enjoyed each and every session I attended in these three orientations and was able to identify critical insights to guide me through this year. For example, Dr. Jane Lubchenco, Administrator of National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration as well as a former AAAS President, gave an inspiring speech on the challenges and rewards of public service. Her advice to Fellows included “know thy self, know thy audience, and know thy stuff.” She encouraged us to learn to translate the language of science by making it relevant, understandable, and credible to others.

In another example, Dr. Jonathan Pershing, Deputy Special Envoy for Climate Change at State as well as a former AAAS Fellow, encouraged us to provide best possible advice to help the decision makers in our respective offices. He ended his informal, yet motivational, presentation by reminding us that we now “speak on behalf of the US government.”

In yet another example, Mr. Gene L. Dodaro, Comptroller General of the United States, and other GAO executives, spent over an hour meeting with new staff, including me. In my previous experiences at other agencies, I had not experienced such dedication and interest of an agency’s leadership in welcoming new staff. Mr. Dodaro’s advice to us was “look for opportunities [to grow], learn the GAO way of doing things, and there is a place for everyone at GAO.” As I took the metro later that evening, I remembered a scene from the movie, Chariots of Fire, where a Master at Cambridge in a moving speech invited the new college class to “examine yourselves; let each of you discover where your true chance of greatness lies; ... seize this chance, rejoice in it; and, let no power or persuasion deter you in your task.”

I look forward to enjoying the IEEE-USA fellowship. I am thankful to the IEEE-USA Government Fellows Committee for their support.