

Mass Media Fellowship Program: an innovative way to communicate science

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The Mass Media Science and Engineering Fellows Program, administered by American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) and supported by a collection of science and media funding sources, is designed to further public understanding of science and technology by getting more accurate coverage of science and technology in the news. Post-doctoral, graduate and undergraduate (seniors) students from a variety of scientific disciplines are given the opportunity to serve as reporters, researchers, and production assistants in mass media organizations nationwide. Fellows collaborate with media professionals at radio and television stations, newspapers and magazines. Current host-sites include National Public Radio (NPR), CNN, the Chicago Tribune and Newsweek.

During the 10-week program, fellows have the opportunity to observe and participate in the process by which events and ideas become news, improve their communication skills by learning to describe complex technical subjects in a manner understandable to the public, and increase their understanding of editorial decision making and the way in which information is effectively disseminated. The program's impact extends beyond the 10 weeks Fellows spend at their sites. Over the fellowship's 28-year history, fifty percent of the over 400 alumni have continued in careers in science journalism. As a result, the media gains a fresh perspective that scientists can lend to a complex story and the public benefits from the enhanced coverage of science and technology issues in the mass media. Others who continue in science do so with an enhanced understanding of the role of media and the importance of communicating ideas and advances in science and technology.