

## ***Be a toxicology ambassador to undergraduates!***

### **Guide to Participating in the ToxScholar Outreach Grants Program**

Did you know that the Society of Toxicology sponsors SOT members to visit undergraduate institutions wherein they serve as toxicology lecturers? To maintain the growth of toxicology, it is imperative that we, as members of the Society of Toxicology, actively recruit the best and brightest into our ranks. Unfortunately, many undergraduates overlook the field of toxicology while making decisions about the value and availability of postgraduate education due to a lack of knowledge about opportunities and careers in our field. Nurturing the growth of toxicology is an important tenet of the Society's new strategic plan, and the Domestic and International ToxScholar Outreach Grants are important, Society-sponsored programs that help educate undergraduates about our profession. The Education Committee and Committee on Diversity Initiatives sponsor the Domestic ToxScholar Outreach Grants with visits to minority institutions and those lacking toxicology curriculums. These opportunities are open to all SOT members, those established in a career as well as graduate students and postdocs. In addition the Education Committee funds the International ToxScholar Outreach Grant Program, which is a competitive grant to fund visits to institutions in developing nations. Funding preference is for Full and Associate SOT members.

I first learned of these lectureship opportunities through my work with the SOT's Committee on Diversity Initiatives (CDI), which sponsors the lectureship programs to minority institutes. I have been lucky enough over the past few years to speak to students through all three programs and encourage other SOT members to look for opportunities to serve as a lecturer in one of these programs. For example, you can visit universities in your local community, as I did to Shaw University and St. Augustine College both in Raleigh, NC. Other great ideas include visiting your alma mater, or a college or university in a community that you are visiting for a work trip or a conference. You can contact former graduate school classmates who are now faculty at undergraduate universities and may be looking for lecturers at their institutions; I visited Eckerd College in Florida through this type of relationship. Another option is to offer a presentation at a qualified institution in your hometown when you visit family.

My most recent travels took me to Peru with the International ToxScholar Grant Program, where I was able to visit five universities, a medical school, and three public health groups in two cities. The students and faculty were excited to hear about educational opportunities in the US and about my research and work. SOT's ToxScholar Grant funded a large portion of this trip, and I also received support from my employer, the US EPA. One of my Peruvian connections, a Professor in Trujillo, Peru, was a former lab mate in my postdoctoral work. Other Peruvian university connections were through collaborators who have Peruvian connections. I was also able to visit a Peruvian university that a friend and peer mentor in the SOT Minority Undergraduate Student Award Program recommended as it is her alma mater. Although I am not fluent in Spanish, this trip was a booming success due to translator support from my colleagues in Peru.

The time commitment for any of the programs is minimal and can require as little as an hour of your time to make a difference in a young person's career track. Many undergraduates know nothing about opportunities that are available to them as toxicologists and specifically that they can receive graduate education at no cost to them. I always emphasize to students that statistics show that the more education

that you receive, the more earning potential you have. The students also do not realize the vast expanse of job opportunities that await them upon completion of their graduate degree.

I hope that my experiences can help serve as examples about what you might do to stimulate even one bright mind to enter our profession.

--Erin Hines, PhD

## **I. Types of visits**

### **A. [Domestic ToxScholar Outreach Grants](#)**

1. This program increases information available to undergraduates about educational and career opportunities in toxicology by providing travel support for campus visits by a professional toxicologist and/or advanced graduate student in the discipline.
2. The Committee on Diversity Initiatives (CDI) funds Diversity ToxScholar Grants to increase diversity and inclusiveness of SOT. The CDI will fund travel costs for toxicologists to visit undergraduate institutions (student body predominantly minority or groups otherwise underrepresented in the sciences) to present lectures and career information, especially at institutions near Regional Chapter or upcoming national SOT meetings.
3. In addition, the Education Committee funds domestic grants to institutions including community colleges, which lack toxicology programs.

Provision of matching funds from the Regional Chapter, the academic institutions involved, or the business employing the visitor(s) is encouraged.

### **B. [International ToxScholar Outreach Grants](#)**

1. The International ToxScholar Outreach Grants program is intended to bring toxicology to institutions in underserved nations outside of North America.
2. This is a competitive application process with a formal deadline. Inquire with SOT for details.

## **II. Where to visit**

- A. Visit universities that invite you or your employer to come lecture
- B. Your alma mater
- C. A university near where you work or live
- D. A university in a city that you are visiting for work or a conference
- E. A university in the city where your parents/family reside, i.e., your hometown
- F. A university where a colleague, former labmate, or graduate school classmate works

## **III. How do I contact the institution?**

- A. Email the department chair, dean, or director of the STEM program
- B. Ask a friend who is an alumnus who would be best to contact
- C. Often there is a point person for seminar speakers to whom you will be directed for future communication.
- D. Once you establish contact, ask the best way to reach the person in the future (email, phone, etc.) and if the person with whom you are speaking is the point person for the lecture or if you should also have contact information for someone else.

## **IV. How do I apply for funding?**

- A. SOT has a formal process for each of the programs (Domestic and International ToxScholar Outreach Grants). See the links above.
- B. For more information and application forms see the SOT website.
- C. Contact
  - 1. For Education Committee funding: Betty Eidemiller, [bettye@toxicology.org](mailto:bettye@toxicology.org), P: 703.438.3115 x 1430
  - 2. For Committee on Diversity Initiatives funding: Rachel Woodson, [rachelw@toxicology.org](mailto:rachelw@toxicology.org), P: 703.438.3115 x 1602

#### V. The Campus Visit

- A. How do I get there? SOT provides limited travel funds for your trip. Be cognizant of your budget when planning.
- B. Know which building on campus you are visiting. What does it look like, where is parking, etc.?
- C. Have contact phone numbers for your campus visit date, i.e., in case you get lost or there is a traffic jam, etc.
- D. What do I say during the campus visit?
  - 1. Tell them about your educational experience. How did you get from A to B. Where did you grow up? What are your interests outside of work?
  - 2. How did you end up going to graduate school?
  - 3. SOT has great toxicology slides to use in your presentation that you can personalize with your own work.
  - 4. Tell them about your graduate school research. A picture is worth a thousand words.
  - 5. Tell them graduate school is free and that you receive a stipend to live, i.e., a PhD for free. If it's not free, you shouldn't go to school there.
  - 6. Tell the students that it is easier to pursue higher education while you are younger, before your life becomes complicated with relationships, children, family, expenses, etc.
  - 7. Tell the students that it is not cheap to live. Many students have their parents or student loans paying for living expenses and they do not understand that living outside of a cardboard box is expensive.
  - 8. Tell students that statistics show that the more education that you have, the more money you will earn over your lifetime. Consider this: The current unemployment rate (at time of this writing) is 9.1 percent. But the unemployment rate for college graduates (bachelor's or higher) is 4.3 percent, a number that has actually dropped from 5 percent a year ago. Unemployment for high school grads stands at 9.6 percent, while high school dropouts must contend with a 14.6 percent jobless rate. Also, pay scales like those in the federal government (GS system) are based on education. The more education you have, the higher your potential earning ceiling can be.
  - 9. Tell students about all of the cool jobs that are available with a PhD in toxicology. You can work for a university, a medical school, a pharmacy school, a nursing school, oil companies (Exxon, Shell, BP, etc.), pharmaceutical companies (Pfizer, Astra Zeneca), big corporations (Kraft, Kimberly Clark, Loreal), the federal government (NIH, EPA, CDC, NIOSH, etc.), state government, health departments, tobacco companies...the possibilities are limitless.
  - 10. Take a picture of you and your audience. Get the approval of those in the photo to publish the photo in the *Communiqué*.
  - 11. Get a count of the number of attendees and a description of who is in the audience for SOT book keeping.
  - 12. If you are driving, keep up with your mileage. If you are flying or staying in a hotel, keep up with your receipts for reimbursement.
  - 13. Provide students with your contact information, if you are so inclined.
  - 14. Provide faculty with a flash drive from SOT that has a list of universities that offer summer internships or graduate school opportunities and ask the director to provide that information to the students.
  - 15. Provide students and faculty with fliers and brochures that SOT has mailed to you.

#### VI. What to do after the campus visit

- A. Fill out the [SOT report](#) and [reimbursement form](#) and return it to SOT.
- B. Detail the number of students and what type of class you visited.
- C. Send; photos that are cleared for SOT distribution.