

Student Science Policy Award Committee, Annual Report (2024-2025)

Committee Members: J. A. Cook, A. V. Linzey, M. C. Schlis-Elias (Chair), A. Shenko, Hannah Wilson, & Jyotsna Pandey (Ex officio)

Mission: This committee administers the Student Science Policy Award (SSPA), which can be bestowed upon multiple graduate students annually. This award was created to facilitate ASM student members' involvement and training in science public policy. The award would not be possible without collaboration with the American Institute of Biological Sciences (AIBS).

Information Items:

(1) This year, our committee advertised the ASM Student Science Policy Award to graduate student members a month earlier than usual (in December 2024 rather than waiting until January). We utilized social media and the Mammal-L listserv to advertise the 2025 award announcement. In addition to the formal text announcements we usually send, we also designed an illustrative flyer. Sharing the flyer increased social media engagement from other ASM members and likely helped increase the visibility of the award. As a result of the higher social media engagement and increased time between application announcement and deadline, we received over twice the typical number of applicants (5 compared to 2), most of whom were of high quality. The committee deliberated and came to a consensus on two applicants to support.

(2) Our 2025 award recipients were Nicole Gorman (Virginia Tech) and John Paul Williams Soriano (University of Michigan). Both students accepted the award and traveled to Washington, D.C., to participate in Congressional Visits Day (CVD) from April 28th-30th, 2025. Both students reported having a positive and impactful experience during the training and CVD events.

(3) In June 2024, Hannah Wilson (our 2023 SSPA award recipient) joined the committee. In February 2025, Sarah Smiley (long-time SSPA committee chair and member) stepped down from the committee. Otherwise, no changes have occurred to the SSPA committee's composition.

(4) Especially considering recent challenges to the governmental funding of scientific research, the SSPA committee members wish to continue offering this program, as long as it is supported by ASM and AIBS.

Action Items:

(1) At the time this report was due, AIBS was still tallying the expenses from this year's events. AIBS expects costs to be similar next year and advised that our committee maintain a request of \$6,000 to sponsor two students to attend Congressional Visits Day in Washington, D.C. in spring 2026. The award cost includes transportation, lodging, food, planning, logistical support, and a full day of policy training (Communications Training Boot Camp) provided by AIBS.

Given the current governmental funding disruptions to scientific research, it is a critical time to increase the visibility and engagement between scientists and policymakers at the science-policy interface. This award will continue to engage mammalogy students in direct conversations with policymakers on Capitol Hill. These interactions increase the scientific awareness of policymakers through discussions with awardees concerning the benefits of funding mammalian research, natural history collections, biological field stations, the National Science Foundation, and other programs critical to scientific infrastructure and progress. The awardees benefit from policy training, experiential learning, and interactions with federal scientists and respected policy decision-makers. This award is important for facilitating the connection between the future generation of mammalogists and Congresspeople, who can serve as an active voice for our community. We have had consistently positive feedback from awardees about the impact of this experiential award on their personal perspectives, research directions, career goals, and outlook.

(2) We ask ASM members to help promote the award to current graduate students who have an interest in science policy and encourage those students who may be apprehensive to consider applying anyway. We cannot over-emphasize how important it is to engage with policymakers at this crucial political moment. Many applicants apply from word-of-mouth advertisements. We anticipate next year's application deadline to be in late January 2025, contingent on funding renewal.

Respectfully submitted,

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