

Material Advantage Students Visit Washington



By **Tricia L. Niswonger**

The Congressional Visits Day (CVD), sponsored by The Federation of Materials Societies (FMS) and the Material Advantage Student Program, is an event that gives students and faculty an exciting opportunity to visit on Capitol Hill with members of the U.S. Congress and congressional staffers from their own states. This year's event was held March 19–20. The goal of the event is to educate Congress about the importance of research in materials science, engineering, and manufacturing and the need to increase federal R&D funding. Approximately 60 Material Advantage students and faculty from 11 schools from around the country (see sidebar) journeyed to Washington to participate.

CVD kicked off with a half-day orientation session to prepare the students for their visits with the legislators. A federal budget overview as well as a session on how to communicate effectively with congressional staff were two of the topics during the orientation. In addition, members of two panels, one focusing on the administration and the other on Congress, were available to answer questions before students headed to the Hill.

Top: Material Advantage students take part in orientation program conducted by Washington insiders.

Material Advantage



Students from Penn State and Drexel University Material Advantage Chapters with Senator Arlen Specter (R-PA) (second from left) during their visit to Washington.

Training presenters included:

- Kei Koizumi, director, R&D Budget & Policy Program for the American Association for the Advancement of Science.
- Dan Byers, deputy associate director, Office of Science & Technology Policy.

- Lance Haworth, director, Div. of Materials Research, NSF.
- Raymond Orbach, undersecretary for science, DOE.
- William Jeffrey, director, National Institute of Standards & Technology.
- Jim Turner, chief counsel, House

Committee on Science & Technology.

- Julia Jester, legislative assistant, office of Representative Vern Ehlers (R-MI).
- Colleen Shogan, legislative assistant, office of Senator Joe Lieberman (I/D-CT).
- Jack Wells, science fellow, office of Senator Lamar Alexander (R-TN).
- Deborah Koolbeck, policy advisor, Healthy Families & Communities Subcommittee, House Education & Labor Committee.

After the orientation session, students and faculty were divided into teams and, before heading to appointments with various legislators for the remainder of the afternoon, “practiced” the presentations that they would make. Later, in addition to meeting with congressional leaders, students had the opportunity to meet with leaders of scientific agencies and societies and attend congressional hearings.

The students finished the first day by attending the Materials Education Showcase, a grand display of exhibits



Students pause for a photo during the orientation session on the first morning.

that encouraged co-mingling of Congressional members, students, faculty, staff and exhibitors. Organized by the Federation of Materials Societies, this showcase included demonstrations, media displays, and poster representations of the community efforts that expose young people to the wonders and opportunities in science, technology, engineering and mathematics education using materials science and technology examples.

On the following morning, more congressional visits occurred followed by a wrap-up luncheon and evaluation session at Pizzeria Uno in Washington's landmark Union Station. ■

About the Author

Tricia L. Niswonger is The American Ceramic Society liaison to the Material Advantage Student Program.



L-r: Arden Bement, director of the U.S. National Science Foundation, with Erin Robertson, a student from the University of Maryland; Bob Shull, 2007 TMS president; and Bowen Li, a student from Michigan Technological University.

The Material Advantage Chapters that participated in Congressional Visits Day 2007 included:

- Drexel University
- Iowa State University
- Johns Hopkins University
- Massachusetts Institute of Technology
- Michigan Technological University
- The Pennsylvania State University
- University of Maryland
- University of Missouri-Rolla
- University of Tennessee
- Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University
- Washington State University



Students from Iowa State University Material Advantage Chapter and their faculty advisor, Iver Anderson, with Senator Tom Harken (D-IA) (fourth from left).