

NCAR Fellows News

AUGUST EVENTS

September 8: ASP Seminar

11:00 am, ML Main Seminar Room

Jeffrey Kiehl, NCAR

Temporal Characteristics of Earth's Climate System

Lunch immediately following the seminar in the Chapman Room.

September 24: Family Picnic

4:30—6:30 p.m., Martin Park Shelter

September 29: Research Review

The first Research Review of the year will be given by Chris Davis.

Details will follow.

Interacting with the Media: Rewards, Pitfalls And Lessons Learned by Jasper Kok

Communicating our research to the general public through the news media is arguably our duty as tax dollar-funded scientists. It can also be very rewarding, since it will finally give your mom an idea of what on earth you do for a living. And media coverage can even be a good way to expose your work to scientists outside of your immediate research field.

Because my research is easily translated to a general public, I have been fortunate enough to have had several interactions with internet, print, and radio media. Last February, I published an article indicating that wind-blown sand, the mechanism behind processes as varied as sand dunes, beach erosion, and dust storms, can be sustained at much lower wind speeds than previously thought on



Mars. This seemed to explain several mysteries in the Martian landscape, and because the media often goes haywire over anything having to do with the possibly-alien-life-harboring red planet, the article generated a fair amount of media attention. First, the science magazine ScienceNews did an online story on the article, which was picked up by the popular journal Wired. This story in turn alerted an editor on the National

Public Radio (NPR) show All Things Considered, and they interviewed me for a radio segment on the article. I'll try to share some of the lessons I've learned from these experiences.

First, the story is likely to come out much more to your liking if you prepare for an interview. UCAR's excellent Communications Office can help you with this. Think of concise descriptions that use analogies to everyday

Continued Page 2

Family Picnic: September 24th, Martin Park

To celebrate National Postdoc Appreciation-Day, ASP is sponsoring a family picnic at the Martin Park Shelter from

4:30-6:30 p.m.. We'll provide food and drinks for you and your family. Martin Park is on the northeast corner of Ta-

ble Mesa and Broadway. All NCAR postdocs and grad students are invited. More details will follow by email.



The National Center for Atmospheric Research is sponsored by the National Science Foundation

SEPTEMBER NEWS

The ASP is pleased to welcome Brian Tang on September 13th. Brian will begin on a Monday and head off to St. Croix to join the PREDICT field project later that week. Be sure to stop by and say hello later in the month.

September is a good month to update your curriculum vita because soon you'll be reporting all of your activities for the 2010 fiscal year (October 1, 2009—September 30, 2010) to your program. Your publications, collaborators, and presentations are just a few of the categories on which you'll be reporting! ASP will request updates from ASP postdocs later this month.

Interacting with the Media (continued)

things to explain your research. You can then work these “talking points” in when answering a journalist's question, much like what politicians tend to do. It also pays to rehearse the answers to obvious questions such as “What do your results mean?”, such that your answers come out in a fluent, clear, and concise manner (unlike what politicians tend to do).

Second, be careful not to overextend your results! Although journalists usually portray you in the best possible way in order to make the story more appealing, they also often attempt to present your results as much more important than they really are. For example, the All Things Considered host tried to get me to say that my research explains why the red planet is red – this is bogus! It's thus important to be careful what you say, especially when speculating about implica-

tions of your work. If a question is outside of your field of expertise, it is usually better to say “I don't know” and refer the journalist to another expert than it is to speculate.

Third, try to get some control over the article. Suggest other scientists for the journalist to talk to that you know will provide a balanced perspective of your results. Also be sure to ask if you can fact-check the article before it goes to press – this can prevent mistakes in the portrayal of your science. Unfortunately, this is not always possible. For example, I was rather shocked to find out that the title of the NPR story was “Dunes on Mars: How sand shifts without wind.” Although the story itself was accurate, this title was plainly misleading; my research had indicated that you need less wind than previously thought to shift sand on Mars, but most definitely not that

you need no wind at all! Errors like that can be difficult to avoid with higher profile media such as NPR, because they are less likely to let you fact-check the story before publication. On the other hand, most other researchers are aware of this danger, and will generally not hold such a story against you.

But finally, and most importantly, be sure to cherish the opportunity to get others as excited about your results as you are by communicating your results to the general public! Ultimately, that is the best way to ensure public support for increased science funding. It also is your chance to inform public opinion on important and controversial issues such as climate change. And, on a personal level, it's just really cool to be able to send your family and friends a news article or clip of your latest research results!

 Join up with CU's Postdoc Association

The Postdoctoral Association of Colorado (PAC) invites any and all NCAR postdocs to join them for their activities and events.

To learn more about the PAC, be sure to visit their website at www.colorado.edu/pac/ You will find links to other resources and job post-

ings as well. You can also find the PAC on Facebook. Upcoming events include:

September 16th
From Lab to Entrepreneurship

October 21st
Legal and Immigration Issues for International

Postdocs

November 18th
Applying and Interviewing for Faculty Positions

Please note that the OPAC requires an RSVP to attend their events and, sorry graduate students, their events are open to postdoctoral fellows only.