

UC SANTA BARBARA

THE Current

September 24, 2008

Gail Gallessich

UCSB Grad Lands Prestigious National Fellowship

A University of California, Santa Barbara graduate will contribute to national science policy as part of a prestigious fellowship program.

Heather Evans, who completed her Ph.D. in materials science at UCSB in 2005, has been named to a fellowship with the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS). Evans has just begun her fellowship at the National Science Foundation in the National Nanotechnology Coordination Office. Her policy interests are biomedicine; basic research; science education; funding; energy policy; energy technology; and disease prevention and treatment.

The AAAS Fellows are scientists and engineers from early to senior career stages who spend a year working in federal agencies or congressional offices. They learn about science policy while providing valuable expertise and analysis in science and technology to the executive and legislative branches of government.

Evans completed her bachelor of arts in physics from Macalester College in Minnesota, where she also pursued a variety of other subjects that filled out her liberal arts education. After spending a year as a research assistant in both the physics and materials science departments at the University of Wisconsin in Madison, she started her graduate program in materials science at UCSB.

Following the completion of her doctorate at UCSB, Evans went to the Max Planck Institute for Dynamics and Self Organization in Germany to pursue a post-doctoral fellowship.

The interdisciplinary approach of the UCSB research group combined biology, chemistry, and physics -- in the search to improve non-viral molecular delivery of DNA for therapeutic purposes. Her supervising professor was Cyrus Safinya, professor of materials as well as molecular, cellular, and developmental biology, and physics.

"Heather Evans made many outstanding scientific contributions during her graduate years in my group," said Safinya. "As a recipient of a prestigious NSF graduate student Fellowship, Heather had already distinguished herself even before joining the materials department. At UCSB, she pioneered sophisticated techniques critical to her research. Most notable were her contributions at the Stanford Synchrotron Radiation Laboratory to X-ray studies of the structure of lipid-DNA complexes used in gene delivery."

The Fellows are taking up their posts at a time of political transition. There is a renewed emphasis on the need for well-informed decision-making. "This election cycle has highlighted the important role of science and technology for U.S. competitiveness, economic strength and the well-being of the American public in addition to the health of the global environment," said Cynthia Robinson, director of the AAAS Science & Technology Policy Fellowships.

Funded by science societies and government agencies, the Fellows complete their yearlong fellowship in congressional offices or federal agencies such as the National Institutes of Health, the U.S. Department of State, the U.S. Department of Defense, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

"For 35 years, the Science & Technology Policy Fellows have provided critical scientific expertise and analysis to policy makers and regulators," Robinson said. "The Fellows help policy makers address challenges and opportunities to produce scientifically-informed policies and programs for the benefit of U.S. citizens as well as people around the world."

There are 165 Fellows in the 2008-2009 cohort -- the largest in the history of the program. The program has more than 2,000 alumni. Many Fellows return to academia, where they teach and mentor a new generation of scientists to

understand the policy context of research, and the importance of communicating science to non-scientific stakeholders. Others transition into policy positions at the local, state, regional, federal and international levels, and some apply their new policy skills in the non-profit and private sectors.

Related Links

[Science/ AAS](#)

[AAAS Science and Technology Policy Fellowships](#)

About UC Santa Barbara

The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.