

US EPA ARCHIVE DOCUMENT

GRO The Forum

Environmental Protection Agency Greater Research Opportunities (GRO) Undergraduate Student Fellowships Newsletter Issue 2, 2005

GRO Fellow Sacoby Wilson

Sacoby Wilson was focused and determined when he started his undergraduate work. He had a master plan. He knew that he wanted to pursue an academic career beyond undergraduate school and, to do this, he needed a multi-tiered approach to getting the skills he would need. Sacoby created his own program at Alabama A&M. He was a Biology major with a focus on Ecological Toxicology and a minor in Environmental Science. Academically, Sacoby's course of study was focused enough to be relevant and broad enough to provide him with a range of skills. The second part of his plan was to get an internship every year so that he could meld his academic pursuits with practical applications. When he ran across information on the EPA's GRO program, it made sense for him to apply. Given the opportunity to get funding for school – combined with a guaranteed summer internship after his junior year – this program was perfect for Sacoby. In the summer of 1996, Sacoby interned with the Air and Toxics section of the EPA's Region 4 in Atlanta, GA. His main project was a risk assessment of non-methane organic compounds in the region. He also worked on a study that assessed heavy metals and health effects in Tennessee.

During his internship, Sacoby gained a deep respect for those working on risk assessments and health exposure risks at the EPA. He saw firsthand how difficult it is to work at the EPA when the burden of proof is on the scientists, and all too often the offices

doing this work are understaffed and overburdened. Despite these challenges, there are a dedicated many who come in to work everyday because they believe in their work and their Agency.

For Sacoby, this internship was an opportunity for him to learn more about air pollutants and sources of air pollution. He also gained the skills needed to do health exposure and risk assessments, skills that he continues to use today.

This summer, Sacoby gained his MS/PhD from the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill in Environmental Science and Engineering Environmental Health Sciences. During part of his graduate studies, Sacoby had a different EPA fellowship from the Science to Achieve Results (STAR) program. Going back to the EPA for funding, Sacoby was awarded a STAR fellowship for part of his graduate work. He studied environmental monitoring and spatial temporal mapping and estimation of atmospheric ammonia near industrial pork operations. For his dissertation, he measured ammonia (a major air pollutant) emitted from confinement houses and the storage lagoons near where people live and work. Most work in this area has been done on the pork farms



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The Fellowship Information Inventory

What Is It?

The Fellowship Information Inventory was recently created to help the EPA stay connected to its former and current fellows in the STAR and GRO Fellowship programs. In response to Congressional inquiries about the success of these two fellowship programs, this online information database helps track important measures of success for the fellows and the program.

Using information from the fellow's application and file, EPA staff have created individual pages that can be accessed via the Internet only by a specific fellow. To access and update their inventory pages, fellows can visit the Information Inventory website at <http://www.scgcorp.com/fellowship/index.asp> and/or the new users page at http://www.scgcorp.com/fellowship/new_fellow.asp.

GRO Fellows in the Information Inventory

At the New Users Page, fellows use their fellowship identification number (GAD ID) beginning with "U" and followed by six numbers to retrieve their records (i.e., U916000). Then, fellows create a personal username and password to login and access their individual data pages. The New Users Page also provides specific instructions for updating information and obtaining additional references on using the Information Inventory.

Within an individual record, different sections contain fellowship, biographical, and contact information from the fellowship file. More importantly, the EPA needs all GRO fellows to update information on their post-fellowship activities, such as graduate studies, employment, and scientific publications or awards. There is also room to add or edit termination comments on the administration of the program and retrospective comments on the fellowship.

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1 Introduction to the Fellowship Information Inventory

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themselves and not in the surrounding areas and towns around the farms where people work and live. Sacoby used passive diffusion tubes to monitor areas around schools and homes near the pork operation. He mapped out the data using Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to look at the distribution of ammonia in space and time.

Never one to limit himself, Sacoby worked with The West End Revitalization Association on Environmental Justice during his time in graduate school, where he dealt with health disparity issues for communities of color in Mebane, NC. In addition, he worked with Dr. Steve Wing's National Institute of Environmental Health Science, funded on a grant that looked at community health effects of intensive hog operations (CHEIHO). In 2005, Sacoby was chosen as an Environmental Leadership Fellow with the Environmental Leadership Program (ELP). ELP is an organization that brings leaders from diverse backgrounds to work for a just and sustainable future.

In September, Sacoby begins his post-doctorate work as a fellow with the Robert Wood Johnson Health and Society Scholars program at the University of Michigan's School of Public Health. He will be working on community-based participatory research for environmental public health.

Sacoby is inspired by what he does, because his work allows him to focus on the ideas of diversity, equity, and justice. If this is a goal to which you aspire, Sacoby recommends that when you go into your internship experience, pour your soul into it. This will allow you to maximize your experience. Internships are all about exposure and relevance; finding this balance will help to provide a foundation for your career. Sacoby also recommends that if you are planning to go to graduate school, look for your own external funding sources (such as the EPA's STAR fellowship program). Having your own external sources of funding allows you to do innovative, creative, multidisciplinary, out-of-the-box research, and allows you to create and design the program you want. 

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The Information Inventory and You

Whether you are an alumni or current GRO fellow, it is imperative that you login to the Fellowship Information Inventory and update your information as soon as possible. This information is crucial for helping EPA staff keep in touch with you in a timely manner. It will also help us respond to requests from other offices or Congress. Updated information on your post-fellowship activities and contributions to the environmental field serve as important performance measures for the GRO Fellowship program.

Under the Fellowship's terms and conditions, you are required to provide updated information during and for a number of years after your fellowship ends. We hope you will look beyond the requirement aspect and update your information to help continue this program. If you have any questions about the Fellowship Information Inventory, please consult the Web site for more information or e-mail fellowsinventory@epa.gov for assistance. 