

Agronomic Science Foundation

Pathway Fund Helps Create Once-in-a-Lifetime Experience for Young Soil Scientists

Growing up in Illinois, I learned as a toddler playing in the backyard that soil or “dirt” as I called it back then was black. I didn’t know that the official name was actually called Drummer. When my family moved to Texas, my idea about “dirt” didn’t change because Houston Black, the official name of Texan soil, looked a lot like the prairie soils of Illinois. It wasn’t until my family moved to California and I played in the red clay-rich San Joaquin soil that I realized “dirt” wasn’t always black. Even further, I didn’t realize “dirt” was more properly called soil, until I moved to Wisconsin and attended the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at the University of Wisconsin–Madison.

I have worked with the Agronomic Science Foundation (ASF), ASA, CSSA, and SSSA for almost 10 years, and during this time, I have avoided the term “dirt,” which many people use to inaccurately describe the natural bodies made up of mineral and organic materials that cover much of the earth’s surface. I’ve also learned that a lot of people assume soil is more or less the same—as I once thought—and are unaware of the great differences that can occur as you travel around the globe. Many still take for granted the fact that



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soil is the foundation of our very being because it is utilized to actually grow the food that sustains life itself.

Recently, eight young soil science students on two U.S. teams represented SSSA at the 20th World Congress of Soil Science on Jeju Island, South Korea.

They were among the next generation of soil scientists who continue to help tell the story of soils to the world. In the competition, one of the teams coached by Dr. Christopher Baxter from the University of Wisconsin–Platteville took first place while the second U.S. team, coached by Dr. John Galbraith of Virginia Tech, took second place. What a spectacular feat for both teams! Members of the winning team included Tyler Witkowski, University of Maryland; Caitlin Hodges, University of Georgia; Emily Salkind, Virginia Tech; and Kyle Weber, University of Wisconsin–Platteville. Members of the second-place team included Bianca Peixoto, University of Rhode Island; Julia Gillespie, Virginia Tech; Nancy Kammerer, Penn State; and Brian Maule, Northern Illinois University. In individual competition, Tyler Witkowski took second place out of 45 contestants! Emily Salkind, Nancy Kammerer, Julia Gillespie, and Caitlin Hodges also placed in the top 10 individual winners.

In addition to the United States, students came from Japan, China, Korea, South Africa, Australia, Taiwan, Mexico, Hungary, and the United Kingdom. The competition gave these students the opportunity to describe soil profiles using standard field techniques, classify soil using either Soil Taxonomy or the World Reference Base, and provide interpretations for land use based on soil and site characteristics. Contestants were graded on the level of agreement between their descriptions and those made by a team of official judges from South Korea, the U.S., Australia, and Hungary.

continued on page 38



The U.S. International Soil Judging Competition teams (l to r): John Galbraith (coach), Tyler Witkowski, Kyle Weber, Emily Salkind, Caitlin Hodges, Nancy Kammerer, Bianca Peixoto, Julia Gillespie, Brian Maule, and Chris Baxter (coach).

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sion Center (PHREC) in Scottsbluff, NE. Tenure home for this position is the Department of Agronomy and Horticulture, with administrative assignment to the PHREC. Focus of extension and research programs will be on grazing management, rangeland health, ecosystem services and alternative uses of native rangeland, pastureland, and forage crops in western Nebraska. Research and Extension responsibilities: Incumbent will conduct research on the sustainable use and management of semi-arid rangelands, the integration of annual and perennial forage crops to supplement range and the ecological implications of grazing and sustainable livestock production on rangelands. Extension programming will be designed to help clientele enhance profitability, sustainability and ecosystem services of rangeland-based enterprises in Nebraska that may include forage production alternatives to supplement rangeland. The incumbent will provide research- and scientifically-based educational programs and products that are problem-solving oriented and quantifiable in terms of impacts, including training programs, decision-support tools, workshops, demonstration projects, and field tours to area producers. Expected scholarship includes communication of research results in peer-reviewed journals, book chapters, presentations at scientific conferences, and supervision of graduate student research. Contributions to extension publications and electronic educational resources is expected. Acquisition of grant funds to maintain an active research program is also essential for this position. Requires a Ph.D. degree or Ph.D. in place by date of hire in Range Management/Ecology, or closely related field, with training in forage production. To review the complete position details and apply for this position, go to: <http://employment.unl.edu>, search for requisition number F_140063. Click on: Apply to this Job. Attach a letter of application, a curriculum vitae, and an overview of research and extension experience and interests. Arrange for 3 letters of reference to be sent via e-mail to: kdanforth2@unl.edu. Review of applications will begin on September 1, 2014 and continue until the position is filled or the search is closed. The University of Nebraska has an active National Science Foundation ADVANCE gender equity program, and is committed to a pluralistic campus community through Affirmative Action, Equal Opportunity, work-life balance, and dual careers.

CV Tips *continued from page 36*

fied fit for their department. Be sure to develop this over time, have it reviewed, and be prepared to tailor it to the needs of the university to which you will apply.

Other Tips for Success

- Use standard fonts, sizes, and document styles—this is not the place for artistic freedom.
- Have peers review your submission materials.
- Google search other academic and research CVs of professors in your field. Look up the LinkedIn profiles of your co-workers/future employers.
- If you are in graduate school, ask your major professor for his/her CV as well as for feedback on yours. Keep an up-to-date record of your activities to better build your CV over time.
- Finally, proofread your documents and then proofread them again. Nothing undercuts your qualifications like a typo.

Development of an academic and industry CV is crucial for an early career member's success, just as keeping a CV up to date is crucial for advancement for people who are well-established in their career. Adhering to the differing styles of academic and industry CVs will ensure proper recognition of your qualifications. In today's competitive market, every professional advantage you can give yourself to stand out amongst other applicants needs to be utilized. The first step is in the development of a well-thought-out and well-organized document.

Pathway Fund *continued from page 34*

These students will soon join the ranks of thousands of soil scientists who use these skills every day to make judgments about land usage for everything from agriculture and construction to wastewater treatment and recreation among many other uses. By look and feel, they will be able to determine the health, carbon content, and drainage factors and may use their soil judging skills in other areas such as crop advising.

According to Dr. Baxter, who coached the first-place team, learning how to describe and evaluate soils in the field is an important part of training for soil scientists. He added that this once-in-a-lifetime experience provided these students with the chance to practice skills that a professional soil scientist uses every day. Dr. Galbraith, who coached

the second-place team, said that he was very proud of how the U.S. students represented themselves and their country, both in performance, character, and friendliness with other teams.

The eight students, who represent the future of soil science, were selected based on their performance during the National Collegiate Soils Contest held earlier this year. The contest encouraged team effort and individual knowledge in identifying, evaluating, classifying, and describing soil profiles. A joint program between the SSSA and ASF Pathway Fund helped to cover the students' trips to Korea to participate in the contest.

This contest is just one of many volunteer and giving opportunities offered by the ASF. To find out more about options that might interest you, call me at 608-273-8095 or email me at abarton@sciencesocieties.org. To make a monetary donation online, visit www.a-s-f.org.