

WHA Webchat:
BUILDING A SCIENCE NETWORK OF THE AMERICAS

Wednesday, July 1, 2009

SKHall: Welcome everybody! We are thrilled you could join us for this webchat on Building a Science Network of the Americas. After brief introductions, we welcome your comments and questions. I'll act as the moderator for this discussion. My name is Suzanne Hall and I work as a public diplomacy advisor in the bureau of western hemisphere affairs at the U.S. Department of State.

Dr. Timothy J. DeVoogd, a Jefferson Science Fellow in the Western Hemisphere Affairs Bureau at the U.S. Department of State will be leading our conversation. Tim is at the head of our efforts at the Department of State to connect scientists, researchers and students across the Americas and create a network from which this community can benefit. Scientists throughout the hemisphere recognize that international cooperation stimulates novel insights and approaches. Governments throughout the hemisphere look for rapid progress on national concerns such as climate change and renewable energy created by scientific collaboration. Both they and the State Department also appreciate "science diplomacy", the lasting friendships between people and countries that come from such interactions. This webchat will be part of a dialog on rapid and longer-term ways to build such interactions.

Tim_DeVoogd: Thank you, Suzanne. I am a neurobiologist. I received my Ph.D. at the University of Illinois, did a postdoc at Rockefeller Univ. in NYC, and then accepted a faculty position in the Department of Psychology at Cornell University, where I've been for 27 years.

Like most faculty members at major universities, I do research—in my case on mechanisms that are used for learning in the brain, and how these mechanisms evolved. For the past year, I've been a Jefferson Science Fellow at the US State Department. Jefferson Science Fellows are senior scientists who join the State Department for a year to advise on issues related to science. After interviewing at many State Department offices, I joined the public affairs office of the Western Hemisphere Bureau.

I was excited by the task that John Dickson (the office director) outlined for me: to meet with scientists throughout the hemisphere at universities, in government, and in industry, and discuss science development and collaborations with US scientists, and look for ways to speed the development and improve the collaborations.

WHA_WebChats: What have you done so far?

Tim_DeVoogd: I've traveled to 10 countries (so far!) doing this, and have met dedicated creative hard-working scientists in each of them. As a result of this odyssey, I've realized both the huge differences in science capacity that exist in the hemisphere as well as commonalities that apply across boundaries. For example, virtually everyone to whom I've spoken has mentioned that a large increase in opportunities for short-term visits to US labs would be relatively inexpensive and would bring huge benefits both to the visiting scientists and to the US. One of my goals at this time is to try to find funding for such a program.

Philippoteaux_Claire: But the focus of the study is only in the US lab?

Tim_DeVoogd: No, we are interested in collaborations with the US, but also in building science links between other countries in the hemisphere. The State Dept. realizes that science development leads to prosperity, and prosperity brings friendship.

Csaenger: Are there links with any of the existing govt. presence in these countries? Science advisors in Embassies, for example?

Tim_DeVoogd: Each embassy has someone who is assigned to take care of science issues, but it is often on top of many other duties. Science became a lower priority over the last 8 years, and that is now changing

Jorge_Durn: Tim, FYI the DSTI of the OAS is here. Oscar and myself agree with the basic premise that science is essential to human endeavor and collaboration gov-university-industry is a required condition for prosperity.

Tim_DeVoogd: Welcome to my friends at the Org. of American States! In each of the countries that I've visited, the governments are excited about improving linkages. This is a priority for OAS too.

Gloria_Elena_Faus_Landeros: I'm a professor on the TEC de Monterrey, campus Guadalajara. I'm very interested in the participation of my students and become part of these science connection. What do we need to do?...

Tim_DeVoogd: Please send us email contacts and we will add you onto our information bulletins.

Gloria_Elena_Faus_Landeros: gloria.faus itesm.mx

Gloria_Elena_Faus_Landeros: + an @

Tim_DeVoogd: Thanks, Gloria

Csaenger: Does USAID connect more w/ scientists, maybe, since they might have projects specific to water, natl. rsrcs, etc? If not, should they?

Tim_DeVoogd: USAID has project specific contacts. In recent years, however, they have had few programs building science more generally.

Philippoteaux_Claire: So Tim, how do you contact the lab, or, what is your primary contact in each country? To what e-mail should we send the contact info?

Jorge_Durn: Claire, each country has a ministry of science and technology or a national council (like NSF) on this matter. Initial approaches may be done through them or directly through universities

Philippoteaux_Claire: ok

Carlos_Ramirez: Here Carlos from Manaus, I'm in but, how this chat is controlled?

Tim_DeVoogd: We at the State Dept. will read and try to answer your questions, Carlos

Carlos_Ramirez: ok thanks

Gloria_Elena_Faus_Landeros: could you send me your mail please?

Philippoteaux_Claire: claireATmakaia.org

Csaenger: Are you looking at projects/programs within the region in addition to more funding for exchanges?

Tim_DeVoogd: Yes. This year, we will take the "Science Corners" concept that was started several years ago in Santiago, Chile and will create similar places in several additional countries. We have fostered links between CDC and the Ministry of Health in Paraguay that will lead to close cooperation in health and health education. We have encouraged science ministries in several countries to place money into Fulbright that will be dedicated to scholarships for study in science disciplines. We are building a science network website that will provide for scientists of the Americas information on conferences, grant and fellowship opportunities, as well as an interactive section, and we are assisting some specific science programs in a few countries.

WHA_WebChats: WHA-Webchats AT state.gov is the address to which you can direct your emails and other contact info. Also, I'd like to let everyone know that if there are any questions which we are unable to respond to during this chat--or if you want to continue this conversation afterwards. We encourage you to post your questions and comments on our discussion thread: "Building a Science Network of the Americas".

Allison_Bland: Do you think health will play an important role in these efforts?

Tim_DeVoogd: We hope to have a health piece. Several countries have identified cooperation in medical teaching as desirable. With advances in internet tech, it is now possible to have video conferences between US and Latin American medical schools, so each could potentially teach the other.

Philippoteaux_Claire: an all this information will be available on line? are you planning to create a web platform or something similar?

WHA_WebChats: You can access this by clicking on the Forums tab and simply looking for the discussion thread by that name. We look forward to hearing from you.

Jorge_Durn: Oscar will be in Cornell on the 22 and will look you up. Gotta go, but feel free to mention our regional initiatives. here is our website in case anyone is interested <http://www.sedi.oas.org/dct>
Cheers

Tim_DeVoogd: Bye, Jorge!

WHA_WebChats: Tim, what do you see as potential challenges which could impede the development of this Network?

Tim_DeVoogd: Money, as always. More than that, bureaucracy--facilitating getting visas, for example. And having sufficient opportunities in the home country, so that people work within the country and don't leave.

Alan_Hernandez: Hello Dr. I'm a student of Gloria Faus. We are working on several projects related to climate change and its impact on life. And we are very interested that scientists take a look to our projects in order to have better results. We had worked with some scientist and the results were excellent. We want to know if there are some ministers or scholarships available for Mexico?

Tim_DeVoogd: Alan--it's often a problem to have projects outside the US receive the attention they deserve. Contact with US scientists can help.

Carlos_Ramirez: Carlos from Manaus. I don't have a question but also an idea. Maybe people need to show the impact of some system (biological, physical, technological) in the world, but we don't have a robust simulator for predictions of several processes, i.e. climate changes, renewable energy. Can USA help to build such grid?

Tim_DeVoogd: Carlos--that sounds like a perfect idea for collaboration with people who can model complex systems. Such a group makes up a "Millennium Foundation" in Santiago, Chile.

Carlos_Ramirez: do you have the link?

Tim_DeVoogd: Carlos--we will be happy to introduce you to these people

Carlos_Ramirez: great

Tim_DeVoogd: Send us your email to the address above

Carlos_Ramirez: ok. cramireb@hotmail.com

Gloria_Elena_Faus_Landeros: this is a great opportunity. I can talk with the government in my country for the help my students with grants

WHA_WebChats: What's the most surprising interaction you've had so far?

Tim_DeVoogd: The most surprising interaction that I've had so far came when I visited the Maloka Science Museum in Bogota several weeks ago. Elisabeth Hoyos, the director, had asked me to speak to some students. I came into the lecture hall to find 150 kids about 11 year old kids!! I threw away the formal notes and did the presentation as a series of demonstrations, using the kids. Both they and I had a great time.

Alan_Hernandez: Yes I can imagine that, and also we have already some contact with US scientist within our country (Mexico) and those experiences had been very grateful for us. I really appreciate your answer.

Jorge_Durn: Tim, as you know OAs sponsors several networks: competitiveness, metrology, education, etc. and upcoming are engineering education <http://www.efta.oas.org> science journalism, among others. we would love to synergize if anyone is interested.

Tim_DeVoogd: Part of what we can do is to have more such interactions between US scientists and interested people in the Americas.

Gloria_Elena_Faus_Landeros: What is the procedure that we would have to follow in order to generate some links in between scientists and my students from Guadalajara?

Tim_DeVoogd: The Mexican national science agency has programs for bringing scientists to Mexican universities, and sponsoring visits that go the other way. I met with Dr. Romero Hicks several months ago, and he is very interested in funding such exchanges and building more.

Jorge_Durn: Gloria, en efecto el CONACYT podría apoyar a los estudiantes de manera directa, es decir cada quien tiene que mandar aplicaciones...sorry I just realized the language jump

Tim_DeVoogd: Podemos hablar (un poco) en español también

Alan_Hernandez: Tim, do we have the opportunity to be informed about some programs or conferences from the US council?

Tim_DeVoogd: Alan--much of what we can do is to link people, both within Latin America and to US scientists

Alan_Hernandez: thank you very much Tim

Diana_Milena_Arango: Hi Tim this is Diana from SENA in Medellin ' Colombia. Thanks for the invitation.

Tim_DeVoogd: Welcome Diana. I had a wonderful time in Medellin several weeks ago!

Philippoteaux_Claire: Hello Diana, I am Claire form CreaMe the business incubator, in Medellin as well

Tim_DeVoogd: I was especially impressed with the ways in which the province of Antioquia was using science training and research in its development effort. I think other places could benefit from their programs.

Philippoteaux_Claire: And I am sure the Antioqueñan people will be happy to share information

Tim_DeVoogd: One of the goals of this program is to put people in touch who have similar problems, or are coming up with creative exciting solutions.

WHA_WebChats: What countries do you see potentially involved in this network?

Tim_DeVoogd: ALL! But we recognize, of course, that there are differences. For example, Chile, Mexico and Brazil have much to teach the US as well as other American countries. Many countries have research and scientific opportunities that we in the US don't fully recognize. Ecuador and Colombia have immense, unexplored biodiversity, etc.

Diana_Milena_Arango: Of course we can exchange emails and get in touch to come up with specific ideas for the region.

Gloria_Elena_Faus_Landeros: Could students from High school participate in these exchanges as well?

Tim_DeVoogd: Gloria--yes, we already support a program of sending bright kids to a summer science camp and want to expand it. Another high school program is the Summer Leadership Program, and students from throughout the hemisphere are participating as I type.

Philippoteaux_Claire: so what would be the next step in the development of such a network?

Tim_DeVoogd: Claire--next steps include adding to our contact list and getting our website up

Philippoteaux_Claire: OK, perfect

Diana_Milena_Arango: I spoke with the general director and he said that we count with all his support to put something together with you. The health area - medical advances could be an option of investigation.

Karina_Reyes: hello, I am from Bucaramanga, I am so much interesting in know everything about this programs, and be part of this.

Alejandra_Muoz_S: Hi Tim we're Rosa and Margara of Sabana University, Chia Colombia. Do you remember us?

Tim_DeVoogd: Yes, of course. Rosa and Margara [and do you remember the cow?]

Alejandra_Muoz_S: :D, is nice!

Tim_DeVoogd: Any recommendations for other universities (or countries) that I should visit? Perhaps it would make sense to visit scientists in some countries for which our governments cannot talk very easily. In general, while governments can create programs and smooth interactions, finally they have to get out of the way. Then, individual scientists in different countries can find the collaborators and projects that will be most productive, and take off with them.

Philippoteaux_Claire: well, I would have said Colombia, but you already know us and the potential of the country!!:)

Tim_DeVoogd: And yes, Colombia clearly is moving quickly.

Alejandra_Muoz_S: Do you know if exist a program specific to spinal cord injury therapy?

Tim_DeVoogd: Yes, there are teams working on injury therapy in a number of countries, including U. de la Sabana in Colombia. Please write off line for emails. When our website goes up, we will put a link to it on this forum.

Luisa_Restrepo_Bernal: Hi everybody I'm Luisa from Medellín. I'm so happy for this meeting because i think there are a lot of things to work together. Tim do you remember me? the girl who can't remember names easily :)... it's a pleasure to be here sharing with you.

Tim_DeVoogd: And have you tried my advice, Luisa?

Luisa_Restrepo_Bernal: Yeah!! Really I have a list with names and every night I read and play with faces and names. I think is better now. Thanks.

Gloria_Elena_Faus_Landeros: I don't know how connected you are here in México, but we have amazing scientist working on Jalisco, and very bright professors as well. In any case, you are welcome to visit us. Do I have to talk with Dr. Romero Hicks about these programs for the young ones?

Tim_DeVoogd: Thanks, Gloria. I spoke to a few people at the Autonomous University when I visited, but clearly should meet more. We're happy to tell you about the State Dept. programs. CONACYT would be the source for info about their programs.

Tim_DeVoogd: Forging science links like this has not been a major goal of public diplomacy arms of the State Department in the past. It has happened around focused programs sponsored, for example by USAID, or the Department of Energy, or NIH. Within North America, CONAHEC has been active in forging links between universities. In April, I attended a conference in Guadalajara co-sponsored by CONAHEC at which I was very impressed at the number and variety of associations that they have fostered. I hope that we can work with them on building additional ones in science.

SKHall: We're in the last few minutes, does anyone have a final question for Tim?

Gloria_Elena_Faus_Landeros: sure thing, you have my mail, so we will be in touch. :D

Alejandra_Muoz_S: Do you know other entities that work in spinal cord injury, in America?

Tim_DeVoogd: I will try to send you some info on labs that do such research.

Tim_DeVoogd: Thanks to all who have participated (and to the lurkers too--I see you, RB and JH!)

SKHall: Thank you to everyone for your participation and questions. This has certainly been useful for us and we hope that this has been useful for you. We encourage you all to continue the dialogue, post thoughts, and ask questions on another discussion thread. Here is the link to the thread:

<http://townhall.howcast.com/topics/Building-a-Science-Network-Of-the-AmericasConstruyendo-Una-Red-De-Intercambios-De-Ciencia-En-Las-Americas>

Tim_DeVoogd: This is the first of we hope many such discussions--we look forward to future interactions.

SKHall: Thanks so much everybody! Mil Gracias! Buen dia a todos!

Alejandra_Muoz_S: thanks you Tim, we hope in touch. Rosa and Margara

Luisa_Restrepo_Bernal:thanks for this invitation

Alejandra_Muoz_S: Gracias a todos esperamos contactarnos nuevamente. Rosa y Margara U Sabana Chia Colombia

Carlos_Ramirez: Thanks a lot