

MEETINGS

International Capacity-Building in Monsoon Science

Advanced Institute on the Asian Monsoon System: Prediction of Change and Variability; Honolulu, Hawaii, 2–11 January 2008

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More than 3 billion people in Asia rely on monsoon precipitation for water, and changes in this precipitation influence agriculture, economic activity, and public health. Given trends of population growth, rapid industrialization, and urbanization, it is important for scientists in the Asia-Pacific region to both stay abreast of advances in monsoon science and develop collaborations to understand and predict the variability of monsoons.

Twenty early-career meteorologists from across the Asia-Pacific region and North America met 2–11 January 2008 to attend a series of lectures on the Asian monsoon and to explore possibilities for collaboration. The participants were selected from more than 70 applicants from universities, government labs, and meteorological forecast centers in more than 10 countries. Invited faculty from China, India, Japan, Korea, and the United States gave the lectures, with the largest group of lecturers coming from the International Pacific Research Center (IPRC) of the University of

Hawai'i. The meeting was held at the East-West Center, adjacent to the campus of the University of Hawai'i at Manoa.

Lecture topics included the fundamental physics of monsoons, the variability and predictability of the Asian-Australian monsoon system, advances in satellite observations, and numerical modeling of monsoons. Monsoon variability on intraseasonal, interannual, and decadal timescales was discussed, with focus given to the roles played by land surface hydrology and ocean coupling, including Indian Ocean dynamics and the El Niño–Southern Oscillation. Various modeling studies were reviewed, especially projections from the Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) for the Asia-Pacific region. Participants were introduced to multimodel ensemble seasonal forecasts produced by the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Climate Center and to climate data available from the Asia-Pacific Data Research Center at the IPRC.

One major goal of the institute was to foster international collaboration on both fundamental research and the operational pre-

diction of monsoon variability. To this end, participants presented summaries of their own work, received constructive comments, and identified needs for collaboration or research support. By the end of the program, participants had gathered into four smaller groups focusing on the topics of intraseasonal variability, interannual variability, decadal variability, and the prediction and predictability of the Asian monsoon. Some of these focus groups intended to maintain contact for a few years, and one group even presented an idea for a collaborative study on interannual variations of monsoon onset in Southeast Asia. An e-mail list server was established for continued interaction among all participants.

The institute was directed by Bin Wang of the IPRC and the Department of Meteorology, School of Ocean and Earth Science and Technology, University of Hawai'i. Hassan Virji, deputy director of the Global Change System for Analysis, Research, and Training (START; <http://www.start.org>), organized the institute. The institute was sponsored by the Asia-Pacific Network for Global Change Research (APN), with additional support provided by IPRC, START, and the East-West Center. Information on the lectures, along with participant presentations and plans for collaborative research, can be found at <http://www.start.org/Monsoon2008/home.html>.

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ABOUT AGU

AGU Mass Media Fellow Discovers “Wow” Factor

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I clearly remember the first time I realized that something was amiss with my perception of science.

It was the summer of 2001. I was a second-year graduate student studying hydrothermal chemistry at the University of Washington, in Seattle. At the moment of my realization, I was in New York exploring an exhibit about hydrothermal vents at the American Museum of Natural History. As I was inspecting an intricate diorama of a remotely operated vehicle diving on a vent field, my younger brother, fascinated by the setup, asked, “How come when you talk about this stuff, it always sounds so complicated and boring?” I didn't have a good answer.

The AGU-sponsored mass media fellowship for young geoscientists aims to address this disconnection between a scientist's approach to studying the natural world and the public's intrinsic fascination with it. Each year, through a program administered by the American Association for the Advancement of Science, AGU and other sponsoring organizations send a handful of science students and recent graduates to work as science writers at major media outlets across the United States. During the summer of 2007, AGU sponsored me to work at *The Oregonian*, a newspaper in Portland. My job was to write about environmental science in a manner that was fun and accessible to the public.

Although I had written a few lively blog entries about life aboard a research vessel, for

the most part my concept of science had always been somewhat antiseptic. As a child, I had steered clear of zany television scientists like Bill Nye the Science Guy, preferring instead the detached approach of *Star Trek's* stoic science officer, Mr. Spock. Ultimately, my meticulous side was drawn to the details inherent in scientific research. Thus, this new task of writing about science in concise and colorful terms that would appeal to a nonscientific audience was a bit intimidating.

Fortunately, the fast pace of the newsroom provided little time to indulge my anxiety. My first assignment was the opening of a revamped insect exhibit at the Oregon Zoo. I interviewed staff, looked at the bugs, and had a notebook full of fun facts and details. But the stuff lacked zing, and I knew my editor would not publish a laundry list of facts just because I assured her they had scientific merit.

As I sat on a nearby bench wondering what to do, a child sprinted toward the exhibit with his hand outstretched and his finger pointing at a giant wooden spider climbing the wall. As he ran, he shouted with glee.