

Communicating Polar Research: The APECS Antarctic Treaty Summit Essay Contest

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1. Introduction

The changing climate in and beyond the polar regions instigates a greater need for scientists and policy makers to work together. Being an excellent scientist alone is not enough. Scientific expertise has to be accompanied with skills in communicating research results to policy makers and the wider public in general. These communication skills require practice, which does not often form part of the training early-career researchers undergo. To stimulate early-career researchers to practice their communication skills while sharing their ideas on contentious issues on the science-policy interface, the Association of Polar Early Career Scientists (APECS) and the organizers of the Antarctic Treaty Summit, held in Washington, DC in late 2009, coordinated an essay competition to encourage young researchers to ponder questions of environmental change and other challenges facing the polar regions from a policy perspective.

2. Approach

Through announcements on the APECS website and various listservs, early-career researchers were invited to participate in this essay competition by sharing their thoughts on one of five topics (see Table 1), all of which address pertinent issues in the realm of polar politics.

Sponsored by the Explorers Club, the first prize in the essay competition was a full travel fellowship to the Antarctic Treaty Summit in Washington, DC, where the winner would represent the new generation of polar researchers.

Four reviewers from different disciplinary backgrounds were given the responsibility of judging the 1000-word essay contributions and, based on brief biographic sketches that had to be provided by the participants, consider the participants' interest in integrating science and policy as well as their career stage and origin.

Table 1. Essay topics which the participants could chose from.

No.	Topics
1	Major lesson from the Antarctic Treaty (AT) applied to another global commons
2	Biggest challenge facing the AT in the next 50 years
3	International science-policy interactions that hold lessons for Antarctica
4	Most significant aspect in the Protocol on Environmental Protection to the AT
5	Steps by scientists and policy makers to increase collaboration and data sharing

3. Participation

Fifteen high-quality submissions had been received, with participants coming from a variety of disciplines and countries. Of these, nine participants had natural science backgrounds, and the remaining six came from the social sciences (including law and policy). The participants' career stages varied from high-school level through to post-graduate researchers. Nationalities also varied as illustrated in the following table.

Table 2. Number of participants and their citizenships.

Citizenship	Number
South Korea	4
USA	4
Australia	2
India	2
Canada	1
Israel	1
New Zealand	1

5. Conclusion

This essay competition and the subsequent presentations of their papers by the three top contestants, which were rated highly by the participants of the Antarctic Treaty Summit, highlights how readily early-career researchers embrace and appreciate opportunities to present their ideas on polar policy matters. The reviewers and participants of the Antarctic Treaty Summit were surprised by the creative approaches these top three contestants had taken to addressing pertinent policy "problems". Solid platforms need to be established that allow and encourage early-career researchers to voice their opinions and suggestions. Opportunities such as this essay competition may help to build such platforms that foster science-policy communication itself as well as the training of early-career researchers in the relevant communication skills. Institutions and stake-holders involved in polar governance are encouraged to invite and provide incentives for the participation and contribution of polar early-career researchers, who may view existing issues from new and creative angles.

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4. Selection and Results

The reviewers were amazed by the thoughtfulness and quality of all contributions, but three essays were particularly creative. The winning essay dealt with the principles of the Antarctic Treaty's Article IV to the Siachen Glacier in the disputed region of Kashmir. Honorary mention was given to a young researcher analysing the spread of commercial exploitation into Antarctica through bioprospecting, and a high-school student applying the Convention on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR) principles to the high seas. All top three contestants were supported to attend the Antarctic Treaty Summit (see Figure 1).



Figure 1. The three top contestants with members of the review committee at the Antarctic Treaty Summit.

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