

UAMS Graduate Student Advocates on Capitol Hill

May 14, 2015 | Rachel Hendrix, a graduate student at UAMS, was among 52 members from the Society for Neuroscience to meet March 26 with members of Congress to express support for increased federal funding for scientific research.

The meeting was part of the society's ninth annual Capitol Hill Day. Hendrix met with five legislative offices representing Arkansas and Mississippi to discuss the latest advances in the field of neuroscience and share the economic and public health benefits of investment in scientific and biomedical research. In total, Society members met with 81 offices representing 26 states and the District of Columbia.

"It was an eye-opening experience being on Capitol Hill, and having the opportunity to speak directly with Sens. John Boozman and Tom Cotton outside the Senate floor was a major highlight of the event," said Hendrix.

Hendrix said she hopes the time spent speaking with the senators and Rep. French Hill's staff about the need to foster research in Arkansas will allow UAMS to continue its leadership as an innovative medical center.

Hendrix participated in the event as one of 10 fellows in the Society's 2105 Early Career Policy Fellows Program, which is designed to teach early career neuroscientists how to become effective advocates for science and how to encourage others to do the same.

Because many neuroscientists may not be particularly comfortable in an advocacy role, the fellowship aims to help younger scientists learn how to communicate the importance of federal funding for scientific research.

"In 2013, across-the-board spending cuts called sequestration lowered the budgets of the National Institutes of Health by \$1.5 billion and the National Science Foundation by \$356 million. While the Ryan-Murray Bipartisan Budget Act of 2013 provided a two-year reprieve from sequestration, it could make a return later in 2015, and, even if it doesn't, the NIH budget has already lost almost 25 percent purchasing power over the past decade, after factoring in inflation," said Hendrix.



**Graduate student Rachel Hendrix with Senator John Boozman outside the Senate chamber
Photo courtesy of the Society for Neuroscience**

Hendrix said her major motivation for applying for the fellowship stemmed from witnessing first-hand the effects the budget cuts have had at UAMS and other institutions around the state.

In addition to Hill Day, fellows commit to engaging in at least three additional advocacy-related activities at their home institution over the course of the year. They are paired with previous fellows and faculty members from the society's Government and Public Affairs Committee to guide them through their activities during the year.

This year Hendrix helped organize Brain Awareness Day activities at the Museum of Discovery on March 20. She plans to continue her fellowship by hosting a laboratory visit for U.S. legislators and staff at UAMS. She also plans to open up discussion about the benefits of funding of scientific discovery by organizing a public forum for legislators, researchers and the general public.