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March 2007 Spotlight on the SRCD Policy Fellow: Erika Feinauer, Ph.D., Ed.D.

2006-2007 Federal Executive Branch Policy Fellow

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It was a surprise to me to note that I am nearly halfway through my first year of an SRCD Executive Branch Policy Fellowship. The year is really passing quickly. I have been placed at the National Science Foundation (NSF), where I work most closely with the Development and Learning Sciences Program (DLS), which awards grants to scholars who are conducting rigorous and transformative research in the area of child development. I also have been able to work with the Cultural Anthropology and Social Psychology Programs which, along with the DLS, are housed in the Division of Behavioral and Cognitive Sciences (BC) in the Social Behavioral and Economic (SBE) Directorate within the NSF. I think my first month of the fellowship was devoted to learning the various acronyms associated with navigating the executive branch of the federal government.

I came to this fellowship with an expectation of learning more about the grant review process and the funding mechanisms of the federal government. This expectation has been met. I have been able to attend

and assist at review panels in a variety of behavioral science programs and have worked closely with two different Developmental and Learning Science program officers to manage the various programmatic aspects of their portfolio. I have observed multiple conversations about current scholarship and about what constitutes 'good science', and have come to appreciate the evaluative process including the care with which funding decisions are made.

One unanticipated benefit of this fellowship experience, however, is the nuanced understanding that I am gaining of how the larger political and policy context influences the day-to-day realities of running programs at the NSF. This was highlighted to me during a two-day directorate-wide retreat where priority areas were discussed for the upcoming year. I listened and contributed to conversations about the ways in which the social sciences could better position themselves –inside the Foundation and out – as an essential voice in the conversations on global competitiveness and transformative scientific research.

Other unique experiences include the opportunity to contribute to cross-directorate activities and inter-agency workgroups. I have been working with an NSF crossdirectorate group on defining the Science of Broadening Participation, which is looking at the ways in which the different discipline sciences successfully reach out to and support minority scholars in their fields. I am also taking the lead on coordinating funding efforts between the Developmental and Learning Sciences program and various programs within in the Education Directorate. Further, I have been able to attend meetings held by the inter-agency work group on early childhood education for English Language learners.

As an SRCD Policy Fellow at the National Science Foundation, I am gaining a broad perspective on how scientific research is supported at the federal level. More importantly, I am gaining a sense for how federal policy impacts scientific research efforts and the impact cross-directorate and inter-agency efforts have on shaping those policies. I look forward to a continued rich experience in the research, practice and policy arena.