

IGERT Fellows Attend Congressional Visit Days
by Dorilona Rose and Holly Burnside, Program Coordinators

Drexel/UPenn IGERT Program in Nanoscale Science & Engineering
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PI: Yury Gogotsi, Drexel University, Department of Materials Science & Engineering, Chemistry, and Mechanical Engineering and Mechanics
Co-PI: Dawn Bonnell, University of Pennsylvania, Department of Materials Science & Engineering.

IGERT Fellows Kristopher Behler and Michael Birnkrant received grants through the Material Advantage Student chapter to participate in Congressional Visit Days (CVD) in Washington, D.C., May 10th and 11th, 2005.

The annual event provided Behler and Birnkrant with an opportunity to discuss their experiences in engineering academia with representatives and senators from their voting district.



IGERT Fellows Kristopher Behler and Michael Birnkrant pose with Representative Rush Holt (Democrat, NJ), Dr. Veljko Samardzic of New Jersey Institute of Technology, and Vincent Fratelo of Integrated Photonics, Inc.

Behler joined Drexel in the fall of 2003, after receiving his B.S. degree in materials engineering from Rutgers University. He was awarded the IGERT fellowship for his first two years of graduate study and is currently supported by an NSF Graduate Research Fellowship. His research, advised by Dr. Yury Gogotsi, involves the development of nanotube- and nanodiamond-reinforced composites.

Birnkrant joined Drexel in the fall of 2004 after receiving his B.S. degree in chemical engineering from Rutgers University. He is a second year IGERT fellow working on holographic patterning of block copolymers into Bragg reflectors, advised by Dr. Christopher Li.

The CVD program began with an overview and training about how to interact with members of Congress to properly deliver the important scientific message at hand. Behler and Birnkrant met with Representative Rush Holt (Dem. – NJ), Senator Jon

Corzine (Dem. – NJ), Representative Mike Ferguson (Dem. – NJ), and Senator Rick Santorum (Rep. – PA).

“The trip showed us a new side of D.C. and gave us an overview on policy making,” Behler said. “Not only does it take good science to succeed in gaining funding for research, but also a strong economy, lobbying, and a talented staff.”

Added Birnkrant, “Observing CEOs and high powered academicians from important scientific societies and academia interact with top level policy makers, many of whom hold degrees in science and engineering, was a fascinating learning experience for us.... Our experience with CVD showed us the important role scientists and engineers play in the political arena.”