

Scientists must communicate more clearly

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Guest columnist

Every individual has a civic duty to serve their nation.

That duty could be as simple as voting and participating in the electoral process. Or it could be as complex as governing and informing laws and policies that are needed to improve and strengthen our nation.

As scientists, our civic duty becomes twofold. Not only must we better our understanding of the world through research, we also need to use our training and expertise to help inform who govern so they can craft policies that are scientifically sound.

In today's world, misinformation is rampant and a general distrust in scientific facts is evident. The election of several individuals with STEM backgrounds to the 116th Congress proves that Americans value scientific experts in the matters of policy. However, the trust is mostly toward practitioners and not necessarily to the researchers in the field.

This can easily be fixed.

As research scientists, we need to be able to communicate our research and findings effectively to not only our peers, but to the general public and policy makers as well. It becomes our civic duty to participate and jump outside our comfort zones to engage the community.

It becomes our civic duty to effectively communicate with a broad audience outside academia. It becomes our civic duty to help inform and direct policies that shape our nation.

Science policy combines public policy and scientific expertise to promote and advocate for policies regarding science, research, technological advancement, and health care.

Over time, science policy has taken on increased importance as our country continues to advance. Legislation has become more complex and typically involves some type of scientific component. Thus it becomes imperative that scientists to participate in science policy discussions and initiatives at the national and local level as part of their civic duty.

I founded the University of Rochester Science Policy Initiative with these goals in mind. UR SPI allows for scientists to build the skill sets necessary to become active participants in both the academic and science policy realms.

An increase in the presence of scientists at the local and federal level requires targeting early career scientists. UR SPI consists of graduate students and post-doctoral fellows who are interested in engaging the Rochester community and its policy makers in order to create a better Rochester. We have held successful meetings with both Sen. Charles Schumer's office and with Rep. Joseph Morelle.

We hope that the community will use us as a resource in the future as we all work toward creating a better Rochester.

Nazish Jeffery is a Rochester native who received her bachelor of science degree in biology from St. John Fisher College and is now pursuing her doctorate in biochemistry and molecular biology at the University of Rochester.