Programs for Young Scientists

IIASA’s Young Scientists Summer Program (YSSP) brings talented PhD students to Laxenburg, Austria, to work on independent research projects in collaboration with top researchers in their fields. The success of the three-month Laxenburg program spurred the foundation of the Southern African YSSP (SA-YSSP), held annually in the southern summer since 2012-2013 in South Africa. IIASA runs a thriving postdoctorate program of 12–24 months’ duration; it also conducts many capacity-building events and workshops for scientists and policymakers worldwide.

Background
The YSSP has taken place annually since 1977. Some 1,773 students have attended the YSSP in Laxenburg and 55 in South Africa. While, from the outset, IIASA concentrated on building international interdisciplinary research teams, there was a scarcity of researchers with practical experience in IIASA-style systems analysis. IIASA thus established its own fully fledged summer program for graduate students with the aim of building an international cadre of young researchers to invigorate and develop the interdisciplinary paradigm. IIASA’s postdoctorate program follows the same principles, and the SA-YSSP is adding a new geographical dimension to policy-relevant systems thinking.

The learning experience
Young researchers work within the Institute’s research programs, mentored and guided by IIASA scientific staff. Individual research projects are undertaken on topics corresponding with—and often extending—IİASA’s research on global environmental, economic, and social change. Successful applicants are funded through IIASA’s National Member Organizations and through scholarships and come from around the world. Participants also learn through seminars and lectures given by scientific experts from within and outside IIASA. They take part in a special recreational program and in events organized as part of the Institute’s social schedule.

Further information:
www.iiasa.ac.at/impacts/capacitybuilding

Impacts

- Programs for young scientists often provide a “first-in-a-lifetime” opportunity to live and work in a foreign country and meet experienced and peer-group researchers from different cultural backgrounds. As knowledge develops, so too do personal horizons, and many former participants speak of YSSP as being a defining moment in their lives.

- The common language of systems analysis, learned by young scientists through the YSSP Program and by scholars working at IIASA, has helped many scientific fields to develop and proliferate.

- The young scientists programs are frequently reported as being life- and career-changing. During YSSP many young scientists get their first chance to think through and beyond science to its applications in solving some of the biggest global problems of our time.

- Though the learning curve at IIASA can be steep, working alongside senior scientists and experts in their field is not only enriching but builds young people’s confidence.

- The contacts forged during young scientist programs, both YSSP and postdoctoral programs, are invaluable. They provide the chance to engage in joint research projects and publications now and in the future. The programs establish young scientists firmly within IIASA’s worldwide network of academic and institutional contacts, together with the benefits this can bring, including employment. With many current IIASA researchers having been YSSPers themselves, the YSSP undoubtedly makes a real difference to job prospects, helping many young scientists to find permanent positions in their home countries.

- Many SA-YSSP research topics are Africa- or developing-country-specific, and participants benefit from team mentorship from local experts and IIASA scientists. The generation of knowledge and insights is thus two-way. IIASA researchers benefit from the new infusion of the best young scientific minds. YSSP is also strengthening both the African and European research environment.

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