

JOSEPH J. HELBLE

2004–05 AAAS Roger Revelle Fellow in Global Stewardship

Joe Helble had an unusual fellowship experience – he completed two AAAS Fellowships, but with a 10-year gap in between. Joe was a AAAS Fellow with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) during the summer of 1993. He had completed his PhD in chemical engineering and was working in private industry when his employer granted him a leave of absence. His research in air pollution and the environment always had a strong public policy connection, and he wanted to pursue a AAAS Fellowship after learning about the program in graduate school.

Soon after the end of his fellowship, Joe joined the engineering faculty at the University of Connecticut. “The [fellowship] experience gave me a taste of public policy, and an academic position offered me the flexibility to explore this aspect of my research in more detail,” he says. He intended to return to Washington, DC; however, family commitments and administrative duties as head of UConn’s Chemical Engineering Department kept him rooted in New England. When the time was right both personally and professionally, he applied to the AAAS Roger Revelle Fellowship in Global Stewardship as a sabbatical opportunity. “I had been looking forward to it for a long time,” he admits.

The Revelle Fellowship places Fellows in the executive branch or Congress, or at DC-area environmental organizations. Joe chose Senator Joe Lieberman’s (D-CT) office. There, he worked as a science policy advisor on a broad range of issues including mercury regulations and the implications of nanotechnology on the environment. The highlight of Joe’s experience “on the Hill” was writing and introducing a bill calling for a tsunami warning system in Southeast Asia following the aftermath of the December 2004 tragedy. Although the bill did not advance, it served as a platform for subsequent discussions on tsunami warning systems. Following the close of his second fellowship, Joe became dean and professor of Engineering at the Thayer School of Engineering at Dartmouth College. “Working on Capitol Hill, I learned how important it is for the science community to work together to secure funding for the sciences,” says Joe. “And the knowledge I gained about the policy process definitely has helped me in my current position.”

