

Matthew Schmolesky

2004-2006 AAAS Fellow at the U.S. Department of State
Office of International Religious Freedom
Office of the Science and Technology Adviser to the Secretary

Currently an assistant professor of neuroscience in the Department of Psychology at Weber State University in Ogden, UT

Inspired by treks through Europe and Asia, Matt Schmolesky once considered a career in the U.S. Foreign Service. After receiving a PhD in neuroscience from the University of Utah and completing a postdoctoral fellowship in The Netherlands, he was looking for opportunities to apply his knowledge to the world outside of the lab. “I wanted to devote my time to world affairs, beyond just reading the Sunday paper,” he recalls.

His wife, Joanna Prasher, a 2004-05 AAAS Nuclear Threat Initiative (NTI) Fellow at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, first learned about the AAAS Science & Technology Policy Fellowships. They then attended the 2003 AAAS Annual Meeting and spoke with Fellows who inspired them to apply.

Matt later found the “perfect fit” with the U.S. Department of State’s Office of International Religious Freedom. He was assigned a portfolio focusing on East Asia and the Pacific and worked closely with John Hanford, ambassador-at-large for International Religious Freedom.

Matt joined Ambassador Hanford in Hanoi, where they successfully negotiated a landmark religious freedom agreement with Vietnam. His role included advising on policy; drafting the press release and portions of the agreement; staffing the negotiations; and coordinating with nongovernmental organizations, the U.S. Committee for International Religious Freedom, and other stakeholders.



Matt decided to move to the Office of the Science and Technology Adviser to the Secretary of State for his second fellowship year. “I was interested in experiencing another bureau within State and another portfolio of issues, especially science policy issues.”

There, Matt worked on two main initiatives: The Global Dialogue on Emerging Science and Technology, and the Perspectives on the Future of Science and Technology—venues to gather scientists in emerging fields, collect information, and report back to senior State Department leadership. He coordinated with scientists from around the world and planned a series of meetings in Germany, China, Italy, and Brazil.

Today, Matt and Joanna reside in Ogden, UT, where Matt works as an assistant professor of neuroscience at Weber State University. Joanna continues her work on emergency preparedness with HHS’s Office of Public Health Emergency Medical Countermeasures.