



Programs for Young Scientists

The IIASA 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 Southern African YSSP (SA-YSSP), which was held annually for three years in the southern summer in South Africa. IIASA also runs a thriving postdoctorate program and many capacity-building events and workshops for scientists and policymakers worldwide.

The YSSP has taken place annually since 1977. Overall, almost 2,000 young scientists from 86 countries have benefitted from the program. 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. The IIASA postdoctorate program follows the same principles, and the SA-YSSP added 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—IIASA research on global environmental, economic, and social change. Successful applicants are funded through IIASA 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.

Impacts

- Programs for young scientists often provide a valuable opportunity to live and work in a foreign country and meet experienced researchers from different cultural backgrounds. Knowledge and personal horizons develop in tandem and many former participants speak of the YSSP as being a defining moment in their lives.
- The common language of systems analysis, learned by early-career scientists through the YSSP and by scholars working at IIASA, has helped many scientific fields to develop.
- During the YSSP many young scientists get their first chance to think 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 world wide, 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.
- Following the success of the SA-YSSP, the South African government committed nine years of funding to establish the Southern African Systems Analysis Centre, which trains the next generation of systems thinkers across southern Africa through collaboration and joint-supervision of scholars by IIASA researchers.



Further information:

www.iiasa.ac.at/impacts/capacitybuilding