

Gina Eosco
Interest Statement

One of my life's hallmarks is a sincere interest in people—how they think, how they respond, and how life impacts them. At the University of Maryland, my original aim was to pursue a psychology degree, but a few semesters of chemistry and my natural curiosity about weather developed my desire to learn more about the physical and earth sciences. I was able to combine my interests by pursuing a degree in environmental science and policy—an interdisciplinary program combining the social sciences with the environmental sciences. My interests in weather and its social impacts solidified when an F3 tornado traveled directly through my college campus killing three people and affecting hundreds of students. My friends' campus apartments were rendered uninhabitable; their cars were thrown across parking lots. Their lives were forever going to be different.

My life was forever different as well. I felt impelled to learn more about weather and hazards. Could I have communicated with my friends to warn them about the tornado? Was there a campus policy that could be implemented to ensure student safety? This personal experience in combination with my passion for weather and people is why I want to participate in this workshop.

For the past two years, I have been working at the American Meteorological Society's (AMS) Policy Program, where I have had the opportunity to interact with many professionals in the fields of weather and climate, as well as members of federal agencies and Congress. I have also worked very closely with users in the road weather and public health community through our policy study series. Through these interactions, I have started asking questions and identifying gaps within the weather and user communities. Are the providers communicating effectively with users? Do users understand how to interpret weather and climate products? What are the sociological impacts of weather on communities and how do we prepare for those impacts when making forecasts? Are local, state or federal policies helping or hurting the communication process?

Hurricane Katrina is an example of the inconceivable social impacts on our society. Although the hurricane prediction was unprecedented, the social impact was undoubtedly underestimated. Lack of communication, less than adequate disaster preparations, and environmental restructuring of our natural resources has all led to a catastrophic event. Unfortunately, our society responds to hazards in a reactive way. Instead of researching the social impacts before a storm, we learn about it in real time. The United States will continue to see storms of powerful strength and alarming consequences, but with workshops like WAS*IS, we can take a closer look at social impacts and learn how to communicate and educate our users and the public.

I plan on studying many of these questions and issues in graduate school starting in fall 2006. I want to focus on communication barriers among scientists, users, decision makers and the public with a focus on environmental science—and weather in particular. I am extremely passionate about this discipline and hope to start my research by participating in the WAS*IS workshop. This workshop will allow me to start focusing on communication barriers, bridging the gap among communities, and implementing policies that will help us transition from current methods of implementing weather applications toward more effective techniques in the future.