

Zachary M. Byko
(570) 801-3801
zmbyko@gmail.com
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WAS*IS
Boulder, CO

Dear Ms. Demuth,

I am extremely interested in and excited by the possibility of participating in the 2009 Summer WAS*IS workshop. My interest in integrating social science with meteorology practice was sparked soon after starting my career as an applied meteorologist at Mars Snackfood U.S. during summer 2007. A part of my job includes monitoring and forecasting the weather in locations which grow much of the world's agricultural food crops. My first day on the job, I had a rather myopic view of weather and climate, seeing the ultimate goal of a meteorologist as being someone who can predict the weather better than anyone else. Soon thereafter, I came to realize that much more is at stake than just an accurate weather forecast. In the months that followed, drought nearly halved the size of Australia's wheat crop, a killing freeze damaged wheat in Argentina, and market speculators feared La Niña would bring dry weather to the wheat areas in the U.S. Plains. Wheat storage bins began running dry and prices climbed to record high levels. Suddenly, one of the world's most affordable food staples became unaffordable to many who need nourishment the most. As wheat and other commodity prices soared during the first half of 2008, I recognized that weather is much more than a determinant of what kind of clothes to wear, but rather plays a major role in determining the price and availability of food. Weather and climate impact the quality of life on earth, which is at the core of my interest in the interplay between weather and social science. Broad-minded and well-trained meteorologists can play a role in mitigating and improving weather's impact on society.

One of my core objectives by participating in WAS*IS is to learn more about the tools and fundamentals to effectively be a practitioner of applied meteorology. My formal education as an undergraduate and graduate student is in classical atmospheric science, with my only exposure to social science being introductory economics. Though on-the-job experiences have expanded my tool chest via interactions with skilled colleagues, WAS*IS will provide the opportunity to further expand my skill set by learning from experts in a world-class integrated workshop. Fluency in the language of the social scientist will also improve my ability to communicate weather and climate impacts, thereby making me a more effective meteorologist.

Additionally, WAS*IS will allow me to interact with a diverse group of graduate students and professionals from a variety of careers. I am interested in learning their interests and hope the thoughts and experiences I share can be applied to improve their research, work, or graduate studies. Similarly, their sharing will also allow me to develop as a professional. Of all the reasons why I am applying to this workshop, the potential to develop new relationships based on a common interest in integrating weather and society is at the top of my list. As an early-career practitioner, my hope is that these relationships grow as we all share from a mutually beneficial network of supporters and collaborators. The network I hope to become part of during WAS*IS will help me move closer to being the broad-minded, transformational, applied meteorologist that I strive to be.

Sincerely,

Zachary Byko