

Alumni Profiles

(Editor's Note: Class Notes are available only in the printed version of the HMC Bulletin.)

The Pace is Set

by Steven K. Wagner



As a young boy growing up in Los Angeles, Scott Pace '80, spent considerable time launching homemade rockets at Lucerne Dry Lake near Barstow. It paid off.

Today, Pace, once the deputy chief of staff for NASA administrator Sean O'Keefe and a former director for space and aeronautics in the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy, heads NASA's newly created Office of Program Analysis and Evaluation (PA&E). Among the office's primary challenges is how to replace the space shuttle with a new launch vehicle—a far cry from his Lucerne Dry Lake days.

"We did every possible variant," he said of those carefree early launches. "Single-stage rockets, multi-stage rockets, clusters. We launched eggs, cameras—you name it."

At about that time, Caltech offered a Saturday program in math and science for high school students, and Pace eagerly participated. He also became involved with an Explorer Scout post at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory devoted to space-related topics. "All these things helped set my direction," he said.

Despite his weekend involvement with Caltech, Pace eventually enrolled at Harvey Mudd College, where he graduated with a degree in physics. He then received master's degrees in aeronautics and astronautics as well as technology and policy from MIT, and a doctorate degree in policy analysis from the RAND Graduate School.

"The Harvey Mudd College experience was actually very important, because it gave me the ability to speak different languages," he said. "You had to be able to speak a technical language—to have an engineering-like problem-solving mentality. But, in order to speak lawyer, or economist or politics, you needed to have a background in humanities."

Through the years, Pace has held numerous space-related positions, most recently serving as chief technologist for space communications in NASA's Office of Space Operations. In that position, which followed his White House appointment, he was responsible for advising senior NASA management on issues related to space-based information systems.

Prior to joining the White House team, he worked for the RAND Corporation's Science and Technology Policy Institute. He also was a key member of a successful international effort to preserve the radio navigation satellite spectrum, which occurred during the 1997 World Radiocommunication Conference.

In June, NASA announced the establishment of the PA&E, which reports directly to the administrator. The office is charged with independently assessing the performance of all NASA programs, making programmatic and institutional recommendations, performing cost analyses, and conducting strategic planning activities. In short, it provides independent analyses of all aspects of NASA programs.

"There are many competing demands on the NASA budget," Pace said. "Given a general strategy of exploration and scientific research, how do you balance those demands? There has to be some way of doing integrated analysis. That's a function that I believe we've needed at NASA for some time, and that's what we'll be doing."


To that end Pace offered a hint of things to come. “We need a way to return to the moon, to continue human access to space,” he said. “But, we need to move beyond the space shuttle. The shuttle needs to retire no later than 2010 by presidential direction, and the big challenge is, ‘Now what? How do we accomplish it?’”

Pace should know the answer to that. After all, his doctorate dissertation was titled, “U.S. Access to Space: Launch Vehicle Choices for 1990–2010.”

Despite the enormity of the challenges that Pace and his office face, he stops short of calling his new position a “dream job.”

“It is a large stage and a larger challenge than the things I’ve done before. It’s also a very natural continuation of the kinds of analytical interests I’ve had for a long time.

“In my mind, the most interesting problems in the space business are the ones at the intersection of the public and private sector. They’re like two continental plates colliding. The use of analysis to make integrated decisions at NASA is a continuation of what I had been doing—but I don’t think of it as a dream come true.”

Indeed, Pace keeps busy. On top of his work demands, he maintains a residence in Alexandria, Va., with his wife, Dana, and their daughter, Carolyn, 14. When asked what he does in his spare time, he laughed. “Spare time? What’s that?” 

Steven K. Wagner is a Claremont, Calif., freelance writer.

Food for Thought and Action

by Stephanie L. Graham




A pink triple-decker peppermint angel food ice cream cake is an annual birthday treat for mathematics alumna Anne Short '02. In her Thomas J. Watson personal statement, she described this and other food traditions as being important events in her life. Yet, she wrote, she was troubled by the disconnect she felt from the production of the food.

Such a dilemma appealed to the Watson Foundation administrators and they awarded her a fellowship in 2002 to conduct a year-long study on “Food Attitudes in Subsistence Communities,” which took her to the Republic of Kiribati, Nepal, Mali, Thailand and South

Africa. The foundation hopes that fellows will use their time abroad as a break from formal education and as an opportunity to explore their interests, test their aspirations and abilities, and view their lives and the United States from a new perspective.

Short spent her year living with locals, eating interesting food—millet with camel milk, crickets, cicadas, yak, and, her personal favorite, red ant eggs—and talking with people about food, their culture, and the changes they saw in local food production and consumption. Even though most of her prior plans fell through once she arrived at her destinations, she found living arrangements through tourist guide contacts, the Peace Corps and “chance, luck and learning whom to trust.” She presented herself as someone wanting to simply experience the culture, rather than as a tourist or researcher, and found that because of this, she was very well received. “The reaction I got was really amazing. So many people opened up their homes and lives to me,” she said. “What really stuck with me was the incredible power of family throughout the world, including people’s willingness to adopt me into their families completely, 100 percent treating me as if I was one of the family.”

She said this was particularly true in Kiribati, where she lived for three months. The family there now considers her one of them, and she still keeps in touch. She also lived with a nomad family in the Sahara desert and with another in Timbuktu, whose patriarch lamented the effect of television on his newly urbanized family. He told Short how his family now watched what was happening in the rest of the world instead of talking with each other about daily life.

She saw this as a good metaphor for the way she had been studying and it convinced her that instead of working abroad, she should work domestically, at least for the time being. She returned to the United States with a renewed commitment to studying food issues and agriculture systems, doing her master's at UC Berkeley on urban food access, with a focus on an Oakland, Calif., neighborhood. Currently working on her Ph.D., Short's work has taken on a science and technical aspect that she thinks her master's work lacked. A part of the Energy and Resources Group at Berkeley, she will study land use change in California's Central Valley, including the conversion of agricultural land to urban development and how this affects water quality and policy. She says she's still in the very early stages of project formation but is looking for a project that will be meaningful to her and others. The perspective she gained from her Watson travels, she believes, will help her to do that. 

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