

Kristen Averyt, PhD serves as the eighth President of the Desert Research Institute – a recognized world leader in investigating the effects of natural and human-induced environmental change and advancing technologies aimed at assessing a changing planet.

An active member of the international science community and an accomplished environmental scientist, Dr. Averyt comes to DRI from the University of Colorado, Boulder where she served as the Associate Director for Science for the Cooperative Institute for Research in Environmental Sciences (CIRES), which is a joint institute between NOAA and the university.

Dr. Averyt completed her undergraduate degrees in marine science and chemistry at the University of Miami. She was awarded a Fulbright Fellowship for study in New Zealand, so subsequent to graduation, she moved to the University of Otago. There, she studied the inorganic chemistry of New Zealand freshwater lakes, earning a Master of Science (with distinction) in chemistry in 1999.

Upon returning to the U.S. in 2000, Dr. Averyt began graduate school in the Geological and Environmental Sciences Department at Stanford University. Inspired by her experience in New Zealand, she focused her research on understanding the interplay between climate and ocean chemistry. She developed a novel geochemical proxy and used it to reconstruct ocean chemistry during significant climatic events over the last 120 million years.

In 2003, Dr. Averyt was awarded a Christine Mirzayan Science and Technology Policy Fellowship at the National Academies. It was during this time, while embedded within the Polar Research Board in Washington D.C., that she realized her desire to help connect science with society. Thus, after successfully defending her Ph.D. in late 2004, Dr. Averyt applied for and was awarded the prestigious NOAA Knauss Sea Grant Fellowship, which brought her back to Washington to work in the U.S. Senate.

In late 2005, Dr. Averyt took on a new, international science leadership role, moving to Boulder, Colorado to begin working as part of a small team supporting Working Group I of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). As a member of this team, she was one of many scientists who shared in the 2007 Nobel Peace Prize awarded to the IPCC.

After completion of the IPCC Fourth Assessment Report process, she shifted her focus toward connecting science with society at the regional scale. In 2008, she was hired as a research scientist with the Western Water Assessment (WWA), a program within CIRES. Soon after beginning her term, Dr. Averyt became the Deputy Director of the program. It was during her time with WWA that she began to develop her energy-water nexus research portfolio.

In March 2012, Dr. Averyt was asked to step in as the Acting Associate Director for Science of CIRES. She accepted the position permanently several months later and served in that role in the CIRES Senior Administration until July 2017. Dr. Averyt also served as the Director of WWA from early 2013 until October 2014.

Throughout her career, Dr. Averyt has received several awards and honors and she is very active in the science community on numerous boards and committees. She was a lead author on the Third U.S. National Climate Assessment, and was recently named a lead author for the coming Fourth Assessment. She is a non-resident Senior Policy Fellow of the American Meteorological Society, and engages regularly with stakeholders interested in bringing science to bear on societal issues from the local to national to international scales.