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Thinking Globally, Working Globally

Let's begin with five facts: Science is international. So is the American Society for Cell Biology. Nearly 28% of meeting attendees—and more than 26% of members—come from overseas. International collaboration is the coin of our “realm.”

Now the hard questions: Are barriers to international collaboration increasing? Which policies facilitate scientific collaboration? Which policies hinder it? As an international community of cell biologists, we care deeply about the answers. Our commitment to reducing barriers and enhancing scientific exchange and capacity is strong. Whether issues relate to visas, global competitiveness, protecting the integrity of science, enhancing scientific literacy, or furthering the public good, it's likely we're on the same side. How do we translate our concerns into action?



Brigid Hogan

Thinking Globally

Under past president Zena Werb's leadership, the ASCB resurrected its International Affairs Committee (IAC). Serving as the fulcrum for Society international activities, the IAC has benefited from strong leadership and active membership. As co-chairs, past presidents Mary Beckerle and Bruce Alberts set a full agenda for the fledgling committee, and active members and staff continue to develop the breadth and depth of its programs. The ASCB Council and the Carnegie Foundation of New York have remained stalwart supporters.

ASCB's international efforts have expanded from joint meetings overseas—the first in France in 2007 with the European Cytoskeleton Forum—to enhancing scientific capacity. Related projects in Africa include textbook donations and workshops; the latter are well supported with travel awards, grant writing assistance, journal clubs, and iBioSeminars presentations. Carnegie has been the key supporter of the African workshops, led by Dick McIntosh. Chris Watters has been the mover and shaker behind the African book donations, seeking assistance from ASCB member textbook authors and their generous publishers.

Promoting science literacy and knowledge in this way is important since, as Mohamed H.A.

Hassan, executive director of the The Academy of Sciences for the Developing World, wrote in *Science* last fall, “...a world in which humanity is dedicated to solving common global problems together... can only be realized when all countries have attained scientific proficiency.”¹

The ASCB iBioSeminars library is successfully growing to meet this same vision, thanks to Ron Vale and Howard Hughes Medical Institute support. We have also had two International

Roundtables to bring together international and U.S. graduate students to discuss common training issues and career concerns. (There's even a Facebook group for further discussion and collaboration. Visit www.ascb.org to join.) And there is no question that we showcase cell biology globally at the ASCB Annual Meeting and in *Molecular Biology of the Cell*.

Working Globally

These efforts help to break down barriers and enhance scientific exchange and capacity. How else do we further collaboration? Collaborations occur in our labs, on committees, and through ASCB's meetings. One example is the upcoming joint meeting planned by the ASCB with the Japanese Society for Cell Biology and RIKEN Center for Developmental Biology. Clearly, we all share a commitment to identifying and furthering the latest exciting research.

Achieving these goals is harder to do when the sustainability of science funding is imperiled worldwide. Most countries are now experiencing economic turmoil, and independent and government funding is often at risk. For example, major Canadian funding has recently been allocated to science infrastructure, “but where's the money to support the graduate students, the postdocs and all the other undertakings of research...?” asked a climatologist quoted recently in *Nature*.² The Austrian science fund (FWF) cancelled its first two board meetings in 2009. According to a letter by Michael Freissmuth to *Nature*³ last month, the FWF froze all decisions on already

reviewed grant applications until May. Other funders have had to “close shop,” and academic institutions worldwide are feeling the pinch.

New stimulus funding in the U.S. offers an abundance of new grant opportunities that will, we hope, enable some postponed hires to go forward and top scored proposals to proceed—providing financial support for postdocs, research assistants, and PIs. But as U.S. Representative Jesse Jackson, Jr. (D-IL), noted at a March 26th hearing of the House subcommittee that funds the National Institutes of Health, “The Recovery Act funding is a double-edged sword. The prosperity is short-lived.”

Moreover, Jackson noted, “...the committee will be watching carefully to be sure that the NIH spends it in a way that both stimulates the science [and creates] high paying jobs across the country.” “Under the [Recovery] Act, each grant recipient is required to report to the government quarterly on the number of jobs created and the number retained as a result of the stimulus funding,” *Nature*⁴ reported.

Advancing Career Development

Questions about how to develop careers, whether securing a first postdoctoral fellowship or position, plague us across borders. We encounter the same difficulties whether seeking a junior faculty position in the U.S. or the European Union or entry into publishing, law, consulting, biotech, pharmaceutical companies, nonprofits, or government agencies.

Many of us are also consumed by grant writing and teaching responsibilities, administrative roles, and committee service. When scientific policy helps us in our work, it is like air: taken for granted. When policy impedes us, it's more like air pollution or global warming: We talk about it... and, in concert with organizations like ASCB, try to change it.

As an international scientific community, we have focused on enhancing capacity and providing career-development resources through activities such as our Women in Cell Biology career-focused table discussions, advice columns, and books; Minorities Affairs Committee Mentorship Symposia and Junior Faculty Workshops; and Subcommittee on Postdoctoral Training sessions at the Annual Meeting. Our

ASCB Job Board (<http://ascb.org/jobboard>)—and Annual Meeting Career Center—spotlight international opportunities, with free listings available for member job seekers and those advertising positions/fellowships.

Our commitment to reducing barriers and enhancing scientific exchange and capacity is strong.

Crossing Borders

But how can the Society assist with visa concerns? What can we offer two Iranian physicians, working with foreign researchers, who were sentenced to prison this winter for “communications with an enemy government?” Their crime seems to be attending international conferences and

meeting with nongovernmental HIV/AIDS organizations. If this were a crime, then we would all be guilty.

Traveling across borders to advance science is what we all do, whether the borders are institutional, field-specific, or geographic. Sharing appropriate information across borders benefits all sides. In fact, a recent National Academies report, *Beyond Fortress America*,⁵ noted that restrictions on visas, exports, and data-sharing hinder scientific progress. Whether U.S. federal agencies responsible for issuing guidelines will listen remains to be seen.

Visa delays for international scientists and students wanting to come to the U.S. skyrocketed after September 11, 2001. New U.S. guidelines requiring the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, CIA, FBI, and other agencies to approve most scientists coming to the U.S. led to long delays. By 2003, a variety of scientific societies and corporations were sounding the alarm about the impact.

By 2007, the average seven-week lag time between visa application and receipt had shrunk to three weeks. A year later it has crept back up to eight weeks. *Science*, which reported the above information, noted that seemingly “arbitrary rejections” occur, and U.S. Embassies can only intervene in “high-profile” cases.⁶ *The New York Times*⁷ reported that the problem has intensified since the fall, “particularly for students in science, engineering and other technical fields.”

Renewing a visa is problematic as well, especially when foreign students, postdocs, or established researchers leave the U.S. for visits or meetings abroad. While requirements for visa renewals, and the time required, vary

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from country to country, *The New York Times* reported that problems “seemed most acute for people from China, India, the Middle East and Russia.”⁷

With tales of students and postdocs stranded abroad and lab experiments and animals languishing in the meantime all too common, the problem is crying for a solution. The ASCB has signed on to letters of concern, and the ASCB staff respond to requests for assistance by sending letters of invitation to all registered Annual Meeting attendees. The ASCB also advises all visa applicants to apply as early as possible.

A January 2009 meeting convened by the American Association for the Advancement of Science, with the National Academy of Sciences and a variety of groups, discussed concerns and actions. For scientists wanting to work in the U.S., obtaining an H-1B visa is time-consuming and frustrating.

Now there is concern that this frustration is limiting H-1B visa applications. On April 1st, the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services began accepting H-1B visa applications for FY2010. There are only 65,000 available each year, *CQ Today Online News*⁸ reports, and 20,000 are reserved for applicants with a master’s degree or higher from a U.S. college or university. Unlike in past years, instead of a “deluge” of applications, the level of applications was approximately half of the regular H-1B visas available for FY2010; the number also fell short of the 20,000 cap for those with advanced degrees.

*The Washington Post*⁹ quoted Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Visa Services David Donahue on the delays; he cited an approximately three-month delay as average. “We have now hired additional staff, and wait times are starting to fall,” Donahue said. “We hope to have wait times for cases requiring processing down to about four to six weeks by the end of summer.”

The U.S. isn’t alone in making work difficult for nonnative scientists. In 2007 the European Commission told European Union nations that they needed to move faster to make it easier for non-European scientists to work in European labs. Yet “Britain is reviewing its immigration policies to determine whether there should be more restrictions on the types of workers who can obtain visas,” *The Washington Post*¹⁰ reported in April. Persian Gulf countries have reduced work

visas recently. Given the economic situation, this is likely to worsen worldwide. Meanwhile, Canada eased work rules for foreign students, making eligible foreign graduates able to obtain a permit to work in Canada for up to three years after graduation... without a job offer.¹¹

While foreign student applications and enrollment in the U.S. remain high, the U.S. position as the most popular destination for international students is far from firm. The economic downturn’s impact remains to be seen. Changing U.S. policy on Cuba could open up scientific exchange and expand capacity as well, leading to increased benefits in terms of public health in particular.

Wherever you work, ASCB offers an international community, career assistance, and venues for networking and collaboration, for presenting your science and advancing the field. Thank you for working with the ASCB to promote scientific collaboration across borders. We welcome your advice about future activities. ■

—Brigid Hogan and Joan R. Goldberg

Comments are welcome and should be sent to president@ascb.org.

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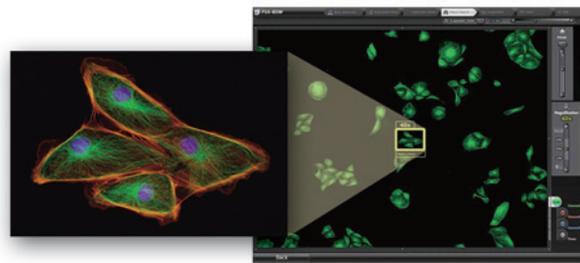
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Election, continued from page 1

An email with a link to the Society's electronic ballot and candidate biographies was sent to regular, postdoctoral, and emeritus members. Reminder emails will follow.

The election closes on June 26, 2009. Results will be announced in the July issue of the *ASCB Newsletter*.

2008 ASCB President Robert D. Goldman served as Nominating Committee Chair; also serving on the Committee were Gary G. Borisy, Lawrence S. B. Goldstein, Caroline M. Kane, Sandra Ann Murray, Thoru Pederson, and Anne J. Ridley.

The ASCB thanks the Nominating Committee for its service and the nominees for their willingness to serve the Society. All eligible ASCB members are encouraged to exercise their right to vote. ■

Annual Salary Survey

The Scientist magazine, in cooperation with several major professional societies, is conducting a survey of compensation in the life sciences. The survey is open to all life scientists employed in the U.S.

The survey can be found at www.scisurveys.com. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and will take approximately four minutes. To ensure accurate and representative results please answer all questions carefully and completely. All responses are confidential, anonymous, and coded. Data from this research will be reported only in the aggregate.

The survey is being conducted and analyzed by AMG Science Publishing, an independent consulting firm. Articles describing the results of the survey will be published in *The Scientist* September 2009 issue and on The-Scientist.com website. ASCB will post links to the survey results when they become available.

Respondents who fill out the survey by Friday, May 22, 2009, may enter a drawing for one of three Amazon.com gift certificates worth \$100. ■

MEMBER Gifts

The ASCB is grateful to the following members and applicants who have recently given a gift to support Society activities:

Julia H. Carter

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The ASCB 2009 Call for Nominations

Norton B. Gilula Memorial Award

Who is Eligible: An outstanding graduate or undergraduate student who has excelled in research

How to Apply: The student or advisor should submit a one-page research statement, a list of publications, if any, the abstract submitted to the current year's Annual Meeting, and the advisor's letter of recommendation. Duplicate applications from graduate students may be submitted for the Gilula and Bernfield Memorial Awards.

Awards: The winner is presented a plaque and a ribbon at the poster board. Expenses to attend the Annual Meeting are paid.

Deadline: August 1

Merton Bernfield Memorial Award

Who is Eligible: An outstanding graduate student or postdoctoral fellow who has excelled in research

How to Apply: The student or postdoc or his or her advisor should submit a one-page research statement, a list of publications, a copy of the abstract submitted to the current year's Annual Meeting, and the advisor's letter of recommendation. Postdocs may also submit the recommendation of their graduate student advisor. Duplicate applications from graduate students may be submitted for the Gilula and Bernfield Memorial Awards.

Awards: The winner is presented a plaque and \$1,000 honorarium and will speak at a Minisymposium at the Annual Meeting. Expenses to attend the Annual Meeting are paid.

Deadline: August 1

All applications and nominations should be submitted to:

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For names of prior awardees or more information, visit www.ascb.org, or contact the ASCB at (301) 347-9300 or ascbinfo@ascb.org.