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Why the ASCB Annual Meeting Is Not to Be Missed

One of the things that I love most about my life is the opportunity to meet people from different countries and backgrounds driven by a shared passion for science and biology. In fact, I can think of few other jobs that come with the same freedoms of thought, creativity, and expression as those available to scientists. Add to that the pleasures of interacting with often highly unconventional and imaginative colleagues. So while the challenges of our work sometimes seem insurmountable, the many pleasures make the stresses and pressures worthwhile.



Brigid Hogan

Annual Meeting Offers Stimulation, Inspiration

Where can you interact with colleagues and be sure to find stimulation and inspiration? At the 49th ASCB Annual Meeting in San Diego this December. In fact, the meeting may well count among the highlights of your year. Anahi Molla Herman, a 2008 ASCB Travel Awardee, says that attending the ASCB meeting was “the best experience I ever had during my Ph.D. studies.” Herman is a Ph.D. candidate, Department of Infectious Diseases, Institut Cochin, in Paris.

Attending from across the world, Minh Le, Ph.D. candidate, Department of Computation and Systems Biology, Singapore-MIT Alliance, found similar stimulation. The 2008 ASCB Travel Awardee adds: “This is the best conference I have been to. I found many interesting topics to learn, well-organized and stimulating discussion during the talks, and a lot of useful information for career development.”

The ASCB Annual Meeting is a rich source of ideas, peer support, postdoctoral opportunities, possible collaborators, mentorship, and career development tools. In fact, I’m convinced that its breadth, depth, educational value, and opportunities for networking are incomparable.

Jing Jin, another 2008 ASCB Travel Awardee, agrees: “I enjoyed the diversity of research fields

covered at the 2008 ASCB Annual Meeting, and the opportunity to learn various new techniques at workshops. Attending the meeting not only broadened my perspectives, but also brought me a lot of ideas for my current project and future career development.” Jin is a postdoctoral fellow, Section of Microbial Pathogenesis, Yale University School of Medicine, If you come with the right attitude and energy, then you are in for a mind-altering experience. The key is to be both well prepared and flexible. Create a plan that includes

talks and workshops in your area of research, but also leaves time for sessions that cover new ground and will expand your repertoire of techniques. That’s what Yuting Sun did. The 2008 Travel Awardee naturally enjoyed the scientific interactions in the session she spoke in. “Furthermore, I was... thrilled by the diversity of the topics offered, and enjoyed many sessions that were not in my field at all, such as information technology for cell biology,” she continued. “Attending the ASCB meeting expanded my horizons. I think attending such a meeting at the late stage of my graduate training has definitely helped a lot in determining my career plans.” Sun is a postdoctoral fellow, Department of Molecular Biology, Genentech.

Of course, you don’t have to be a graduate student or postdoc to be inspired by the ASCB Annual Meeting. More seasoned folk are in for a treat too. This year selections by Program Committee Chair Vann Bennett and his committee guarantee a rich and varied experience for all. Bennett is an unconventional and highly creative scientist. He has greatly stimulated my own way of thinking. Now, he and his committee will do the same for you in a superb array of Symposia, Minisymposia, Working Groups, and Workshops. Together, these events will offer a wide range of cutting-edge results and new ideas that will, we hope, blow your mind! I *know* that your thinking will change.

That’s what Kristopher Lee Schmidt, Ph.D. candidate, Department of Biology

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—Yuting Sun

and Biochemistry, Simon Fraser University, and Department of Biology, Trinity Western University, found last year: “While the ASCB meeting had a fair deal of *C. elegans* representation, it also provided a broad view of the current important topics and themes in cell biology, getting me to think outside the ‘model system’ box. The ASCB meeting also had a strong focus on translational research, clearly showing how, given a little creativity and cooperation, the day-to-day grind of the scientific pursuit can really pay off.” Schmidt was also a 2008 ASCB Travel Awardee.

Annual Meeting Furthers Collaboration, New Thinking

The biggest “secret” to a great experience is to come with an open mind. Be prepared to join in the discussions, go out of your way to meet other participants, and you may strike up collaborations that will last a lifetime. It didn’t take Anahi Molla Herman long to find a collaborator:

“I had extremely interesting discussions... which let me construct a professional network that has allowed me to develop new collaborations,” she recalls. “Indeed, I am currently finishing my Ph.D., working on a paper in collaboration with an Irish group I met at the ASCB.”

Networking and getting valuable feedback on your work from leaders in the field are everyday experiences at the ASCB Annual Meeting. Herman notes that she met all the people she admired in her field, along with fellow students from around the world. 2008 Travel Awardee Charles Peter Xavier reports that the Annual Meeting “was a great experience to learn about a lot of new, exciting research by a huge number of researchers throughout the world. It was also a good platform to share and initiate new collaborative work.”

Annual Meeting Furthers Career Development

The first meeting events are devoted to special interest workshops and mentoring sessions

(see Saturday sessions on page 17). 2008 Minorities Affairs Committee (MAC) Travel Awardee Marc J. Carmichael explains the value of these opening career-focused sessions: “The MAC sessions, poster presentations, and meeting activities all offered opportunities

to network. As a Ph.D. candidate about to defend my dissertation ...it was extremely valuable for me to have so many opportunities to connect with individuals who shared their insights on the potential path forward after I earn my Ph.D.” Carmichael is a Ph.D. candidate, Biomedical Engineering, Joint Graduate Program of Rutgers University and University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey.

The undergraduate poster session is a great opportunity for undergrads, as is the reception following. And on Saturday you’ll also find a special session—food and drink

provided—for first-time attendees. I’ll be there with Vann and other Society leaders. Experience the buzz!

Annual Meeting Spotlights Science

Six o’clock pm on Saturday, December 5th, brings the opening Keynote Symposium. This year the speaker is Rudolph Jaenisch. He’ll talk about “Stem Cells, Pluripotency, and Nuclear Reprogramming”—topics in which he has made pioneering contributions. This promises to be an exciting and stimulating start to the scientific program.

The following day marks an experiment in programming to showcase an even more diverse range of topics than previously. There are eight concurrent Minisymposia in the morning and two concurrent Symposia in the afternoon, Sunday through Tuesday. One Sunday Symposium covers the cell biology of human genetic disorders, with Christine Petit, Val Sheffield, and Chris Walsh—all world-class leaders and great speakers. Or learn about the dynamics of cell organelles from Jennifer Lippincott-Schwartz, Jodi Nunnari, and Jonathan Weissman—another wonderful lineup of speakers!

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After each Symposium students and postdocs can meet with speakers for a “Question and Answer” session. Meeting leaders “up close and personal” is one of the reasons the ASCB Annual Meeting is so memorable. If you are a student, please don’t be shy; attend and speak up. Most speakers are delighted by the opportunity to talk with students and attract a postdoc to their lab.

Poster sessions begin on Sunday. It’s worth putting considerable effort into designing and preparing your poster to showcase your research. For expert advice, see websites from Colin Purrington (www.swarthmore.edu/NatSci/cpurrin1/posteradvice.htm) and Kathryn Tosney (www.bio.miami.edu/ktosney/file/PosterHome.html). You can elicit constructive feedback about your work and sell your ideas at your poster. Sometimes animated discussions nucleate around a poster; you may meet potential collaborators there (and blow away the competition!).

2008 Travel Awardees Maria Apostolopoulou, Jacob Morville Schröder, Viviana Cremasco, and Katherine Moynihan speak highly of the value of poster participation *and* networking.

Apostolopoulou, a Ph.D. candidate, Department of Biology, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, notes she “had the chance to interact with a lot of leading scientists in the field and have them evaluate my research.” Schröder, a Ph.D. candidate, Department of Biology, University of Copenhagen, concurs: “To meet and present your work among fellow students and leading scientists can generate fruitful discussions that will help advance your project as well as your scientific network.”

Cremasco echoes the thought, noting the valuable insights into her research that she gained. Not surprisingly, “attending the meeting was certainly one of the most formative experiences during my scientific training,” she says. Cremasco is a graduate student, Department of Orthopedics, Washington University School of Medicine.

Moynihan notes that she not only enjoyed the interaction with investigators, she came away with new techniques, along with new ideas. Moynihan is a graduate student, Department of Cell and Developmental Biology, Vanderbilt University.

Annual Meeting Features Leaders and Fun

Symposia cover the topics of stem cells (Ruth Lehmann, Amy Wagers, and Marja Timmermans), mechanisms of cell division (Abby Dernburg, Jan Lowe, and Andrea Musacchio), morphogenesis (Suzanne Eaton, Mark Krasnow, and Olivier Pourquié), nuclear dynamics (Bob Goldman, Bas van Steensel, and Wim Vermeulen), and cutting-edge microscopy (Toshio Ando, Stefan Hell, and Xiaowei Zhuang). The speakers are not only outstanding leaders in their fields, they’re great presenters too.

Also not to be missed are Ron Vale, who will present the Keith Porter Lecture, and Peter Walter, who will receive the E.B. Wilson Medal. Interactive Working Groups will raise fundamental questions about the nature of life, the Golgi, and the cell biology of disease.

As Sushmita Pahari, graduate student, Department of Infection and Immunity, National Centre for Cell Science, India, recalls, our “remarkable” meeting features not only “many excellent talks by scientists in diverse areas,” but also “noteworthy vendor exhibitions [and] tutorials...” So do plan to drop by the Exhibit Hall and the tutorials.

In the end, however, the meeting is not just about the science. Networking is a critical activity for scientists, and socializing is a great way to build friendships and meet collaborators. If you’re a graduate student or postdoc, join the ASCB Facebook group created just for you. If you’re looking for a job, consider our LinkedIn group and visit our Career Center in San Diego. (*Note:* Our online Job Board is expanding soon.) Gay, lesbian, and transgender attendees and members are invited to join a special ASCB Facebook group too. (For these social media opportunities, visit the ASCB home page at www.ascb.org.)

Don’t forget: The ASCB Annual Meeting offers unique ways to have fun *and* enjoy science. Learn about Celldance and CellSlam (organized by ASCB staff and the Public Information Committee). Consider entering these extraordinary contests (see page 14). And come to San Diego to indulge your passion for science and your appetite for new ideas and experiences. See you there! ■

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

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