

How to Get the Most out of the ASCB Annual Meeting

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The ASCB Annual Meeting is a monster of an event that can easily overwhelm those who have not developed personal strategies for “doing” the meeting. There are many approaches that work, and the key is to find what works for you. I’ll offer a few strategies to help you develop a personal plan so that you can avoid going home feeling frustrated and unfulfilled because you “missed the good stuff” or didn’t make hoped-for connections.

Plan Ahead—But Be Flexible

First and foremost, plan ahead. Look at the schedule and get a sense of the layout of the meeting. Notice the afternoon Symposia. These will likely be out of your area but are general talks given by some of the best in the field. You will want to attend most of these. They are the fun and easy way to keep up-to-date on some of the big developments in cell biology.

As you plan for the meeting, take time to look at the abstracts. Do some keyword searches and make a list of posters and Minisymposium talks that you do not want to miss. Don’t let this list get too long. Keep it focused on your highest priorities. Make yourself a schedule that allows you to see and hear the presentations that are most important to you. Remember: You cannot do it all. Set some clear priorities, but do not fill all of your time. Leave room to be flexible.

When putting together your personal schedule for the meeting, take a close look at the special offerings. The ASCB offers workshops and special talks sponsored by the Education, Minorities Affairs, and Women in Cell Biology (WICB) committees. (Some of these events require preregistration.) What are your career goals? Are any of these events of special value to you? Of particular note is the WICB-sponsored Career Discussion and Mentoring Roundtables, which offer

an opportunity for informal discussion of topics of interest while providing an excellent opportunity for networking.

Nota Bene

Take copious notes. The volume of information that you will encounter in the few days of this meeting is phenomenal. Plan to share what you’ve learned with the folks back home. Carry a notebook with you at all times. Jot down names and snippets of conversations as well as notes from talks and posters. Keep an action list of things that you want to follow up on after the meeting: papers to look up, people to write to, and experiments to do.

Connect

Ours is a social enterprise. The connections you make are very important, and the ASCB Annual Meeting is a great place to make these connections. Especially valuable are the connections that you make with

your peers. Hang out at the poster sessions. Talk to people about their work. Be flexible: That Minisymposium talk that you were planning to attend would be good, but so is the conversation you are having with a new contact. Maybe you can set up a time to meet the person again later? Or maybe this is a rare opportunity and you can find a way to learn later what you missed in the talk.

Be brave, try not to worry about rejection, and don’t wait for introductions. When I was a relatively new graduate student attending a meeting on my own, the only familiar faces I saw were among a group of senior investigators who were sitting at a table; two of them had given seminars at my home institution. I asked if I might join them and was told no. Ouch! If you put yourself out there, rejection will happen, but so will some wonderful connections. Even if your overture is declined, say “thank you,” and consider that they might have been discussing confidential information.



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See the Latest Gizmos and Gadgets

Make time to visit the exhibits, where you can see the latest gizmos and gadgets. You will find valuable technical information, brochures and books, and free samples. If you've been having technical difficulties with equipment or reagents, enjoy the luxury of talking face-to-face with a technical representative. And the Exhibitor Showcases and Tutorials scheduled at various times during the meeting provide in-depth technical information.

Enjoy

Finally, and truly the most important bit of advice that I can offer: Relax and enjoy yourself. After all, you are at this meeting because you know how fascinating cell biology can be. Here you are with this stunning opportunity to learn about some of the most exciting stuff happening in one of the coolest of all human endeavors. Don't cheat yourself of the opportunity to enjoy it thoroughly. ■

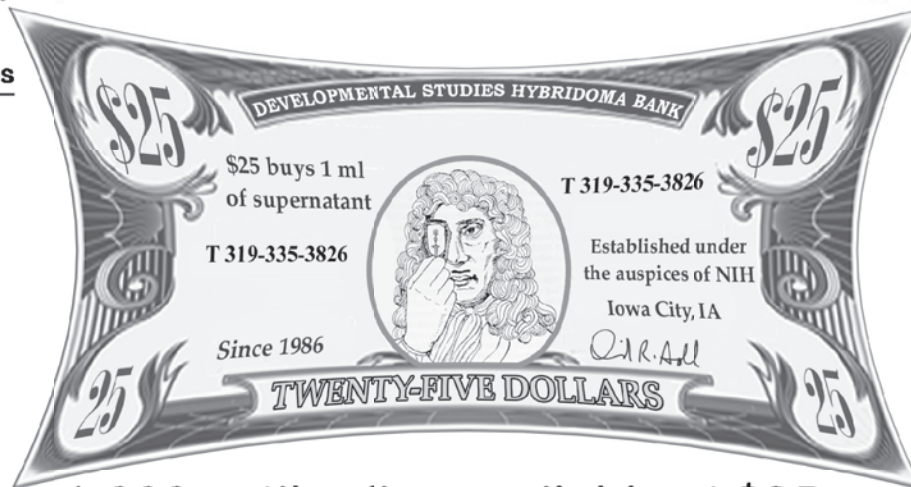
—Lynne Quarmby,
Women in Cell Biology
Committee

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NCI-Cancer Antigens
Neural Development
Cell Signaling
Cell lineages/Stem cells
Extracellular Matrix
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Transcription Factors
Anti-Human Antibodies
Epitope Tags
Dictyostelium Antigens



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Myosin MF-20
Nestin RAT-401
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BrdU G3G4
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p53 7A4
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