



Dear Labby,

The faculty member who directs our postdoc association gave a talk about the importance of joining the appropriate professional society at this stage of our careers. In my case that would be ASCB. I talked to some members, and they stressed how great the Annual Meeting is. But I am saturated with information and last summer attended a Gordon Conference in which almost every talk was right up my alley (structural biology of a protein kinase involved in the metaphase checkpoint). The ASCB meeting looks like a composite of symposia and minisymposia all over the landscape. My lab head says I can only go to one meeting per year (and this only because she got both her R01s renewed and there is some travel money for me). I know you are likely biased, but what would I get out of the ASCB Annual Meeting relative to one focused on my research interest within cell biology?

—Meeting Strategist

Dear Meeting Strategist,

An excellent question and, yes, Labby is biased. But it may surprise you that this bias arises from a belief that being a member of ASCB, at *any* career stage, is not just about the scientific content of the ASCB Annual Meeting, superb as it is. When ASCB polled members about reasons for joining the Society, presenting at the meeting was selected by 70% of U.S. respondents and 74% of the international respondents. However, of equal or greater importance was “to be part of the international cell biology community”—selected by 70% of U.S., and 75% of international, respondents. Intriguingly, when asked about the primary reasons for *remaining* an ASCB member, presenting at the meeting was cited by only 51% of U.S. members and 57% of international members, while the percentage of those citing the importance of being part of the international cell biology community via ASCB membership rose to 79% for U.S. and a whopping 85% of international members. Also, when ASCB canvassed attendees at a past Annual Meeting, two of the most cited replies were ASCB’s proven efforts in educating Congress on the importance of federal funding for cell biology and serving as a voice for our foundational science’s role in biomedical progress. We were delighted by these responses, given that they acknowledge two of ASCB’s most successful and vitally important activities on behalf of its members.

Regarding the ASCB Annual Meeting, you are right that there are many formal sessions that will be outside your immediate research interests. Labby recognizes that postdocs may not always have the luxury to be generalists while intensively advancing their nascent careers. But the most catalytic events at the ASCB Annual Meeting are not in the formal talks. Rather they are woven into the extensive fabric of dynamic interactions with others. In fact, those interactions are with the very people who were, as a group, cited most frequently as a reason for joining, and staying a member of, the ASCB; that is, the cell biology community, the very community in attendance. And as ASCB past president Bruce Alberts has noted, “Innovation in science depends on a continual exposure to new approaches and ideas. This requires more than the usual reading of textbooks and journal articles. Random collisions are important, not only with the latest science inside and outside your immediate research area, but also with both senior and junior scientists who have complementary interests...attending this meeting each year has become an important part of a cell biologist’s life in the community of scientists.”

Networking is the heart and soul of the ASCB Annual Meeting. While the exciting breadth and depth of the science are incomparable, it is the conversations at poster sessions and over coffee, at Minisymposia, Celldance and CellSlam, after Symposia and Keynotes, that usher you into a special “corridor of connectivity.” You’ll meet heroes, new colleagues, potential collaborators, and new friends. Many have commented on how often a research collaboration or new direction was sparked by a casual conversation at an ASCB meeting. One never knows where the connection will be made. In its dynamic, open, and highly interactive format, the ASCB Annual Meeting, along with ASCB’s year-round activity of watching out for your interests and your career, makes membership a great investment. To paraphrase Yogi Berra: Your past could be your future, depending on what you do in the present.

There are also many not-to-be-missed workshops and sessions on career development that add further luster to the ASCB Annual Meeting’s crown. In 2009, these included “Getting Out of the Box: Transitioning to a Career Outside of Academic Research,” and “You Don’t Have to Work in a Lab to Be a Scientist.” There are also opportunities to avail oneself of ASCB’s two legendary and much imitated hallmark programs, those conducted by the Women in Cell Biology (WICB) and the

# DEAR Labby

Minorities Affairs Committees. These included recently “Negotiation Strategies for Work and Life” and “Welcome to the Land of Muckity Muckdom, or What You Don’t Know Will Hurt You!”

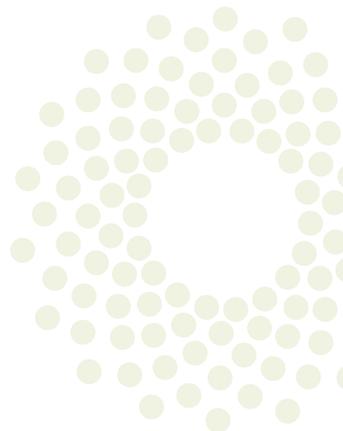
Educators benefit as well, with a variety of programs focused on K–12 and undergraduate science education. Education is a science too, and assessment-based programs are in the spotlight at the ASCB Annual Meeting. So is the advancement of international cell biology through teaching techniques formulated for use in ASCB’s workshops in Africa and elsewhere where resources are limited.

These all are dynamic features of the ASCB Annual Meeting. There are ideas, engaging people, and an array of activities flying around like chemical bond resonance energy, providing the same catalytic spark that drives the formal scientific sessions. And, importantly, ASCB education- and career-focused programs aren’t limited to the Annual Meeting. Members also enjoy regular columns rich with tested career and educational advice, such as the WICB and Dear Labby columns in this *Newsletter*, books such as *Career Advice for Life Scientists*, and free access to ASCB’s two journals, *Molecular Biology of the Cell* and *CBE—Life Sciences Education*. Members can also avail themselves of discounted subscriptions to other journals and discounted products and registration fees. With access to other ASCB members through the *Directory of Members*, and to ASCB staff, you can enjoy opportunities for engagement year-round. ASCB leaders and staff are keen to hear from members and to discuss their ideas. And by involving yourself in ASCB activities, you can develop your leadership skills, expand your influence, and increase your networking. So when ASCB seeks volunteers, you shouldn’t be shy about signing up.

The opportunities to encounter the proven programs for advancement at the ASCB Annual Meeting and year-round are a huge reason for becoming a member, beyond the state-of-the-art science and latest equipment on display. Since you are not (yet) an ASCB member, Labby will send you a copy of the newsletter in which this appears. Meanwhile, thank you for this opportunity to add up the many reasons being an ASCB member is good strategy, indeed great strategy, including and beyond the meeting. ■

—Labby

Direct your questions to [labby@ascb.org](mailto:labby@ascb.org). Authors of questions chosen for publication may indicate whether or not they wish to be identified. Submissions may be edited for space and style.



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