



## A Vision for Cell Biology

This column was written by ASCB President-Elect Sandra Schmid at the request of Tim Mitchison.

The ASCB was founded in 1960 with the stated purpose of “promoting the field of cell biology.” Our Society did this in two primary ways: by hosting an annual meeting and sponsoring a major scientific journal. Fifty years ago, these basic needs of cell biologists—to communicate broadly and discuss advances in the field—were not being met by other societies or other journals. Moreover, cell biology was a small and recently emerging field. After one year, the ASCB membership numbered 427. A total of 844 people attended the first meeting.



Sandra Schmid

### Growth in Knowledge, Numbers, and Mission

Today, with the vast expansion of our knowledge base, cell biologists have become specialists in subareas and even in sub-subareas, such as nuclear structure (nuclear particles or nuclear pores), the cytoskeleton (actin, microtubules, or intermediate filaments), membrane trafficking (exocytosis vs. endocytosis), the extracellular matrix (integrins or collagen), signal transduction, etc., just to name a few. They work on different organisms (yeast, *Dictyostelium*, *Drosophila*, mammalian), using different techniques (microscopy, genetics, biochemistry, biophysics, computational biology). All cell biologists, however, share a common appreciation for, and goal of, unraveling the mechanistic complexities of the cell: the fundamental unit of life.

Our challenge is to understand how these complex and disparate cellular processes are integrated. Then cell biologists can begin to define the molecular bases for human diseases and the opportunities for therapeutic intervention. Hence, despite the plethora of smaller, more specialized meetings, the need for a comprehensive meeting in cell biology has never been greater.

Along with our knowledge and challenges, our numbers have grown as well. We now have

approximately 10,000 members, including students, postdoctoral fellows, early- and late-career academics from research institutes and small teaching colleges, and scientists from biotech and pharma. About 26% of our members are from outside the U.S. With this growth in numbers has come an expansion of our mission.

For many years the ASCB has been a leading advocacy group, encouraging the public and our politicians to support science. We are also active in education, through our journal (*CBE—Life Sciences Education* at [www.lifescied.org](http://www.lifescied.org)), sessions at our Annual Meeting, outreach programs like Celldance (our

image and video contest), and iBioSeminars ([www.ibioseminars.org](http://www.ibioseminars.org)). Our nascent The Cell: An Image Library is focused initially on serving the research community. However, a long-term goal is to grow the resources in our BioEDUCATE website to provide more tools for educators.

We seek to mentor and support young scientists through career and advice columns in this *Newsletter*, our books (*Career Advice for Life Scientists*, available at <http://tinyurl.com/y87hd32>), workshops at our Annual Meeting and available online (visit [www.ascb.org/iweb/membership/multimediacontent.aspx](http://www.ascb.org/iweb/membership/multimediacontent.aspx)), and other ASCB workshops. And we seek to increase diversity in our scientific community by supporting the careers of women and minorities. These efforts are planned by the ASCB Women in Cell Biology and Minorities Affairs Committees and the Subcommittee on Postdoctoral Training, and implemented by members and five staff members (who also work in other areas), supported by our Executive Director.

### A Time for Introspection

ASCB is a nonprofit organization. Nonetheless, to fulfill and sustain our mission we need to be revenue-generating. Our revenues derive primarily from grants, the Annual Meeting, our journal (*Molecular Biology of the Cell*, only after a significant long-term investment by

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the ASCB), and our membership dues. ASCB strives to keep member meeting registration fees, page charges, and dues as low as possible. All revenues help to support the Society's programs and service to our membership.

While celebrating our past accomplishments, this milestone year—our 50th anniversary—also provides an excellent opportunity for introspection. It's a good time to ask, how are we doing? What are we doing well? What can we do better? What are we doing too much of, too little of? What should we stop doing, or start doing? Who do we serve? Who should we be serving . . . or serving better? The answers to these questions can help us plan for the future and to position ASCB as the need-to-join organization not only for cell biologists, but for life scientists in general also.

With this in mind, we have embarked on a long-term strategic planning effort. It will involve the elected ASCB Council, our Committee Chairs and members, our staff, and all of our members. The process, which will be completed this year, began last month with the posing of the following three questions to Council members:

1. What is cell biology and what areas should be covered at our meeting and in our journal that aren't . . . in particular, what are areas that are

not yet considered to have found a "home," yet represent the cutting edge or the future?

2. Who should we represent and how should we reach out to this constituency?
3. What does ASCB mean to you?/What do you think the ASCB "brand" is or should be?

Within the framework of these questions and the discussion that emerges from them, we are assessing where we have consensus, and what questions need further discussion. The all-member survey—sent to members last month—adds valuable data for discussion.

Continued discussion will ensure that we agree on our current strengths and weaknesses. More importantly we'll review what opportunities we might capitalize on and review how our resources are aligned with our goals and priorities. We'll continue to discuss the danger signs that we need to pay attention to, and prepare for, with course corrections.

We'll ask our committees to revisit their missions and to assess their strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. In this way, we can align goals and enhance synergies among committees.

A Council Retreat has been planned for May 27, during which time specific goals will be prioritized, activities reviewed, and new efforts considered in relation to our resources and priorities. We'll reach out again to our membership for additional feedback and ideas.

Just as our founders did 50 years ago, our goal is to (1) articulate a vision of where cell biology needs to be in 10 years, and (2) ensure that ASCB is on course for the next decade to continue its service to, and ensure its leadership in, the cell biology and biomedical research community. Our efforts are thus a continuation of a proud history we'll be celebrating in Philadelphia in December at our 50th Anniversary ASCB Annual Meeting.

You can follow our progress and make your own suggestions/comments by joining the conversation on Facebook. To do so, become a fan of the ASCB on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/AmerSocCellBio](http://www.facebook.com/AmerSocCellBio). You can comment on ASCB posts or start your own discussion to share your thoughts. Or follow us on Twitter at [www.twitter.com/AmerSocCellBio](http://www.twitter.com/AmerSocCellBio). ■

—Sandra Schmid

*Comments are welcome and should be sent to [president@ascb.org](mailto:president@ascb.org).*

## 50th ASCB Annual Meeting Information, Registration Now Available



Don't miss the exciting program we have planned for the 50th Anniversary ASCB Annual Meeting, December 11–15, in Philadelphia, PA. Meeting registration, abstract submission, hotel reservations, and attendee and exhibitor information are now available at [www.ascb.org/meetings](http://www.ascb.org/meetings). Register early and save. ■