



We Are All About the Science!

This President's Column was written by Sandra Schmid (President-Elect) and Tim Mitchison (President).

On May 27, the ASCB Council held a one-day strategic planning retreat. As the Society rounds 50 years and looks to the future, ASCB Councilors met with key staff to consider such questions as: What is cell biology, who does the ASCB represent, and how can we best serve these constituencies? The retreat was part two of the strategic planning process one of us (Sandra Schmid) outlined in her guest President's Column in the May *ASCB Newsletter*.



Tim Mitchison

Part one was collecting opinions from the membership through the recent survey on the importance of different ASCB activities. We would like to thank the many members who took the time to fill out the survey; your opinions provided essential input into our discussion.

The main goal of the retreat was to reassess the mission of the ASCB, and to articulate a clear and succinct mission statement that encapsulates our purpose and core values. Defining our mission will help us—and future ASCB Councils—decide what activities to support, and how to prioritize our resources among our many ongoing activities. This is especially important in the current climate of financial constraint and as we look to the future.

What Is Cell Biology?

The ASCB Council and ASCB members see cell biology as a highly complex and integrated field aimed at understanding the cell as a system of dynamic, interacting parts. The cell is the fundamental unit of life, and cell biologists also seek to understand how cellular processes lead to the formation of distinct living organisms through differentiation, development, and tissue morphogenesis. We also study the processes that regulate organismal homeostasis under normal physiological and pathological conditions. While acknowledging the importance of traditional core areas of cell biological research—including the cytoskeleton,

intracellular trafficking, nuclear structure and function, signal transduction, cell–cell and cell–extracellular matrix interactions, and cell division—the ASCB Council also discussed the

need to integrate these areas to understand fully the cell as a complex living system. Council and ASCB members alike also recognized the importance of new approaches and the need for input from biophysicists, physicists, chemists, engineers, mathematicians, and computational biologists to augment the efforts of traditional cell biologists in dealing with increasing complexity.

Who Are We?

The ASCB Council and members also considered the Society's identity and constituency. ASCB members are at many different career stages, and hold positions at many different institutions. However, our reasons for being part of the Society are surprisingly coherent. The number one cited reason (expressed by 74% of our survey respondents) for remaining members of the ASCB was “to be part of the international cell biology community.” The Council reaffirmed its belief that the ASCB should be an inclusive and diverse community open to anyone interested in cell biology (i.e., undergraduates, graduate students, postdocs, teachers, academic and applied researchers).

Members recently approved a bylaws change to discontinue the membership requirement of sponsorship by a current member. We will miss this tradition, but shedding it is an important step toward greater inclusivity. In addition, our low membership fees for students and postdoctoral fellows reflect this value. However, Council also agreed that our resources and programs should primarily be focused on supporting graduate students, postdocs, and researchers actively engaged in cell biology.

What Is Our Mission?

The most important discussion at the retreat concerned defining our mission and developing

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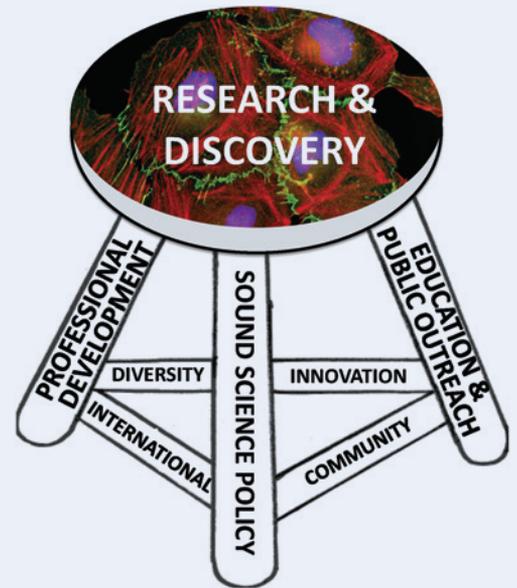
a concise mission statement that articulates a clear vision of our purpose and objectives. This will serve as a promise to our members, and as a guide to current and future Councilors, committee members, and ASCB staffers in the development and execution of programs in support of our objectives. From these discussions emerged the following mission statement:

ASCB is an inclusive, international community of biologists studying the cell, the fundamental unit of life. We are dedicated to advancing scientific discovery, advocating sound research policies, improving education, promoting professional development, and increasing diversity in the scientific workforce.

We also sought to prioritize these objectives in light of results from the membership survey. A strong consensus emerged that the ASCB’s primary purpose is to advance scientific discovery. We are all about the science! We accomplish this goal directly through Symposia, Minisymposia, award presentations, and poster sessions at our Annual Meeting; the only annual international meeting encompassing the entire breadth and depth of cell biology. We also advance scientific discovery through our journal, *Molecular Biology of the Cell (MBoC)*. *MBoC* is open access after two months, peer-reviewed, and a scientist-run journal; it publishes high-quality findings from research in all aspects of cell biology. In addition, as our newly launched and developing collection of images, videos, and animations—The Cell: An Image Library—grows, it will serve as an important research tool.

The other activities in the mission statement can be viewed as supporting our primary purpose of advancing discovery. We support members’ research programs by advocating for science, and for science funding, through activities of our own Public Policy Committee and our active membership in the Coalition for the Life Sciences. These groups continuously educate Congress on the importance of our scientific research, and advise the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and National Science Foundation on matters of peer review and funding policies.

We support professional development of our members at all career stages, but particularly younger scientists. We do this through career development programs and workshops sponsored by the Women in Cell Biology (WICB) and Minorities Affairs Committees



Numerous activities help support the ASCB mission of advancing scientific discovery.

(MAC). The Subcommittee on Postdoctoral Training also assists young scientists with career choices. And the Dear Labby column in this *Newsletter*, along with the *Career Advice for Life Scientists* books compiled from WICB columns, offer wisdom in highly readable formats.

Education is also important, to keep the career pipeline filled with excited young cell biologists, and to help the public understand what we do and why. We support education through such activities as our open-access, online journal *CBE—Life Sciences Education*, which is partially funded by the Howard Hughes Medical Institute. Annual Meeting education workshops and sessions—including special programs for high school teachers and students and for professors and undergraduate students—expand our educational portfolio. CellSlam, Celldance, and the ASCB press book (all Public Information Committee efforts) expand our educational outreach online, as do iBioSeminars.

Promoting increased diversity in the cell biology workforce was reaffirmed as an important ASCB core value at the retreat. This is supported by pioneering efforts of the MAC and its programs funded by an NIH Minority Access to Research Careers (MARC) grant to reach out to minority students, postdocs, and faculty. WICB publications and programs support women scientists and others, while International Affairs Committee programs build capacity and expand engagement in the international community. The Carnegie

Foundation of New York funds the ASCB's African workshops.

The ASCB's mission is captured, metaphorically, by the image of a three-legged stool (*see previous page*). Our objectives of sound science policy, improved science education, and professional development are all in support of our members, who are actively engaged in cell biological research. As a diverse, international community of cell biologists, we can ensure the vitality of our research and of our profession together.

Now, if someone asks you, "why should

I join the ASCB?" you can tell him or her how our membership contributes to the future strength of our chosen field. Or you can tell them about the platform embodied by the three-legged stool and invite them to share a seat and join our community. Why not become an ASCB Ambassador (see www.ascb.org/ambtoolkit for more information) and spread the word? ■

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

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The ASCB 2010 Call for Nominations

Norton B. Gilula Memorial Award

Who is Eligible: An outstanding graduate or undergraduate student (at the time of nomination) who has excelled in research or a first-year postdoc whose work was performed while a PhD or MD/PhD student

How to Apply: The student or advisor should submit a one-page research statement, a CV, 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 for his/her poster board. Expenses to attend the Annual Meeting are paid. Funded by an annual grant from Rockefeller University Press.

Deadline: July 15

Merton Bernfield Memorial Award

Who is Eligible: An outstanding graduate student or postdoctoral fellow (at the time of nomination) 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 CV, 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 an honorarium and will speak at a Minisymposium at the Annual Meeting. Expenses to attend the Annual Meeting are paid.

Deadline: July 15

All applications and nominations should be submitted to:

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