



## The Essential ASCB: A Community for Cell Biologists

Twenty years ago I attended my first ASCB meeting as a newly minted assistant professor. I had been invited to chair a Minisymposium on endocytosis, and I was being given the Women in Cell Biology (WICB) Junior Career Award. The former was my first opportunity to be seen as a leader in my chosen field. The latter offered a challenge: The award was inscribed "In recognition of her significant *potential* for scientific achievement." In one meeting the ASCB had both acknowledged my efforts to that point and created the expectation for me to do more. History has repeated itself. I am grateful that by electing me as President you, the members of ASCB, have recognized my leadership in cell biology. But I also accept your challenge for more.



Sandra Schmid

For 50 years the ASCB has been fulfilling its original mission of "promoting the field of cell biology." At the 50th Anniversary Keynote Symposium I had the honor of meeting many of the distinguished past presidents whose efforts over the past five decades, together with those of legions of volunteer committee members and our dedicated professional staff, have made the ASCB the influential and vibrant organization it is today. In keeping with the theme of this essay, while acknowledging all that the ASCB has accomplished to this point, I also bring high expectations for increased value.

### Valuable ASCB Activities

Last year, as President-Elect, I initiated a long-term strategic planning effort that started with assessing who we are and what we do.<sup>1</sup> Through numerous discussions with Council members and committee chairs, analysis of membership surveys, and knowledgeable input from ASCB staff, I have been made even more aware of the incredible diversity and value of the ASCB's activities. For example:

■ Did you know that as a founding member of the Coalition for the Life Sciences the ASCB was instrumental in securing the doubling of

the National Institutes of Health budget that occurred in the late '90s? The Public Policy Committee of the ASCB has also taken the lead in standing up against anti-evolutionists and for stem cell research. These issues go to the heart of our greater society's support for the scientific/research enterprise.

- Did you know that the discoveries highlighted in the Public Information Committee (PIC) press book are picked up and disseminated in newspapers, journals, and magazines throughout the country? The PIC works tirelessly to inform the public of the value and excitement of our research.
- Did you know that our journal *CBE—Life Sciences Education (CBE-LSE)* has

become the leading journal in its field? The Education Committee, through other activities, along with *CBE-LSE*, points K–12 and undergraduate educators to research-tested, inquiry-based approaches. These efforts not only ensure a steady stream of future cell biologists, they also raise overall public awareness of the scientific method and its value.

- Did you know that the ASCB has a very active International Affairs Committee (IAC), something that many societies lack? Our IAC reaches out to colleagues across the globe and supports training and research in the developing world, including India and Africa, as well as international collaboration.
- Did you know that no other single scientific society can match the efforts of our Minorities Affairs Committee (MAC) to increase and maintain diversity within the research community? Over the years, generously supported by a Minority Access to Research Careers grant from the National Institute of General Medical Sciences, MAC has provided opportunities for training, networking, scientific exchange, research, recognition, and mentorship to countless underrepresented minority scientists at all stages of their careers.

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- Did you know that many other societies look to our WICB Committee as a model for promoting and supporting women in science through advocacy, career development guidance, networking opportunities, recognition, a speakers bureau, and more?
- Finally, did you know that the ASCB Annual Meeting is the largest gathering of cell biologists in the world? Our Annual Meeting provides a unique opportunity to experience both the breadth and depth of cell biology. It is a venue not only for our most distinguished scientists, but also for undergrads, graduate students, postdocs, and junior faculty to present their work. And it's an unprecedented opportunity for networking across all career levels.

### Creating Opportunities through Communication

In a sense, the many activities of the ASCB constitute the essential infrastructure

needed to support and enrich both our chosen profession and our individual careers. Sadly, like the heat and lights in our laboratories and the journals in our libraries (or on our intranets), we tend to take these activities for granted. We forget how critical the right environment can be for boosting our careers and productivity. The ASCB functions to create such an environment, but we can be even more effective. This year my efforts will be focused on putting in place mechanisms for more effective, multidirectional communication within the organization, both between the ASCB and its members and among its members.

My goal is to work with Council and the ASCB staff to strengthen the ASCB as a community by increasing opportunities for networking, collaboration, career development and promotion, education, and scientific exchange—all essential components for successful careers. If we seize the opportunity to communicate more effectively, then we can

demonstrate to ourselves and others exactly how essential this organization is. Here are some specific goals:

- To improve communication, Council has pledged to hold more frequent conference calls. The Executive Committee will more frequently invite individual committee chairs to discuss their committee's activities. Such conversations often lead to new ideas and reveal opportunities for synergy and integration across our many programs. For example, the idea for the highly successful Science Discussion (networking) Tables during the poster sessions at the 2010 Annual Meeting arose during one such Council phone call.
- To improve communication with and among our members, we will begin to expand our *Member Directory* and create a dynamic and searchable database linking members by research interests and expertise, primary

methodologies, teaching obligations, available positions, etc. With your help and input, this expanded *Member Directory* will enable potential postdoctoral fellows and/or collaborators to identify regionally specific opportunities for collaboration, positions, and networking more readily. Importantly, the database will also enable the ASCB to communicate with its members and serve their needs more effectively. And future Program Committees and other ASCB members who organize meetings will be able to draw on information in the database to identify speakers. These efforts will supplement and extend those of WICB's Speakers Bureau; WICB offers a service for all meeting organizers that showcases female scientists by specialty. (For more information, write [wicb@ascb.org](mailto:wicb@ascb.org).)

- To continue to use this President's Column as a vehicle to discuss matters of concern to our community of cell biologists. I plan

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to be provocative and, by doing so, hope to start some conversations that can continue in our labs and departments, in the *Newsletter*, and at our meetings.

- To overhaul and update the ASCB website so as to make it your essential bookmark for research highlights and opportunities, career advice, networking, educational and training tools, shared protocols, job postings, etc. We'll add to the tons of information already available, and better organize it to make it more readily searchable and accessible according to your interests. We'll create a more dynamic and interactive site to let you know better what we're doing and how we can help each other.

- To increase the *unique* value of the ASCB Annual Meeting by showcasing the breadth

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and the depth of cell biology, promoting and leading discussions on future trends and challenges in cell biology, and by providing increased opportunities for scientific exchange, networking, and career development.

I love a challenge, but I'll need your help to accomplish these goals. Be part of the community and add to the conversation. Let *me* know *your* ideas about how the ASCB is or can be essential for cell biologists at all stages of their careers. I'm looking forward to a great and productive year! ■

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

## Reference

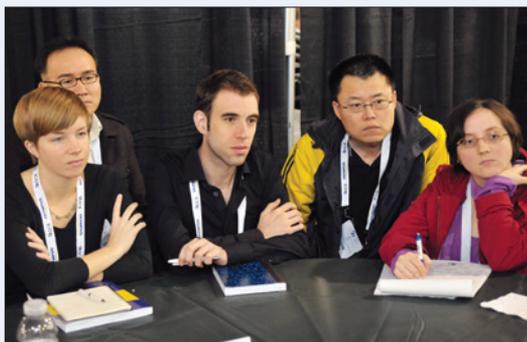
<sup>1</sup>Schmid S (2010). A vision for cell biology. *ASCB Newsletter* 33(4), 3–4.

*Annual Meeting 2010, continued from page 1*

and postdocs eager to discuss science and seek advice from their fields' leaders.... I wish that there had been these tables when I was a young scientist...." Table leaders reported similar satisfaction with ASCB's latest innovative offering. ASCB's first Graduate School Fair was also enjoyed by participants and presenters alike.

For more information about 2010 Annual Meeting sessions, including some available on videotape to ASCB members (see list on p. 33), visit [www.ascb.org](http://www.ascb.org) and click "Members Only," then "Multimedia Content (Video/PPT slides)." To view the press book, go to [www.ascb.org/pressbook/2010/embargo/pressbook.html](http://www.ascb.org/pressbook/2010/embargo/pressbook.html). Or enjoy essays from 2010 ASCB award recipients and from leading scientists about the future of cell biology in *Molecular Biology of the Cell (MBoC)* at [www.molbiolcell.org/content/vol21/issue22](http://www.molbiolcell.org/content/vol21/issue22). (Coverage of Minisymposia will appear in the March 15, 2011, issue of *MBoC*.)

For visual highlights, don't miss the winning Celldance videos and images, presented in Philadelphia at what the *New Scientist* called "Biology's answer to the Oscars" ([http://ascb.ascb.org/meetings/celldance\\_winners.cfm](http://ascb.ascb.org/meetings/celldance_winners.cfm)).



*Rapt participants at a Science Discussion Table*

Celebrate the ASCB's 50th anniversary by visiting [www.ascb.org/50thanniversary.html](http://www.ascb.org/50thanniversary.html). And look to the future as predicted by Annual Meeting participants on p. 9, cited by Faculty of 1000 as a display of comparable interest to our featured talks and displays.

Partial to the science? Ginhart noted, "I saw a number of outstanding talks and posters at the meeting, and to say that there is not enough room here to mention them all is an understatement." Like Ginhart, we're "already looking forward to the 2011 meeting in Denver." ■

—Joan R. Goldberg