



Eight Reasons to Attend the ASCB Annual Meeting

This column was co-written by 2011 ASCB Program Committee Chair Jan Ellenberg.

December may seem like a long time away, but it's not too early to start planning. Why attend the ASCB Annual Meeting in Denver, Colorado, from December 3–7, 2011? With apologies to poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning, let us count the ways you'll love this meeting.

1. Size Matters

The ASCB Annual Meeting is the largest gathering of cell biologists in the world. There are no better opportunities to experience the excitement of being part of this vibrant international community. While smaller meetings focus on specialized areas of research and common approaches, this meeting is unique in exposing you to the breadth of research questions and new technologies in cell biology. Here's where you'll get new ideas and alternate ways to tackle your own research. Graduate students and postdocs will find no better meeting to help decide career directions. The ASCB Annual Meeting is the place to meet potential mentors, whether you're presenting a poster or Minisymposium talk, or questioning speakers or poster presenters. If you teach undergraduates, it's one-stop shopping for getting up-to-date on the latest developments across the entire field—including educational approaches.

2. A Meeting with a Vision

The 2011 meeting program is structured around a vision of the future of cell biology. This vision embraces and incorporates the dramatic changes that cell biology has undergone in the last five years and will need to undergo in the future to realize its full potential.

Cells are the smallest autonomous units of life. It is at the cellular level that we will first understand the basic processes of life in a

physiological context. The cell is the natural coordinate system in space and time onto which we have to map and integrate genomic, transcriptomic, proteomic, structural, and dynamic functional information about the molecules that make up living systems. As the de facto hub of much of modern biomedical research, cell biology is facing unprecedented opportunities.



Sandra Schmid

Realizing these tremendous opportunities represents a formidable challenge and requires new concepts and approaches. Individual cellular processes, such as motility, membrane trafficking, cytoskeletal dynamics, nuclear structure, etc., can no longer be studied in isolation; they need to be considered as integrated events. The molecular machinery that performs these functions is complex and combinatorial at the single protein, protein complex, and pathway level. Understanding this complexity requires new ways of thinking about cellular functions, including network biology and quantitative theoretical methods to generate mechanistic and predictive models.

With this vision in mind, the meeting offers seven Symposia featuring distinguished speakers, all leaders in their fields. Each morning in sequence they will present a continuum of complexity in cell biology from molecules to multicomponent machines, through self-organizing structures, signaling networks, and information processing up to multicellular organization. The Symposia will lead finally to the underlying design principles of cells and tissues. These Symposia seek to integrate traditionally separate disciplines and to showcase new approaches to solve complex cell biological problems.

Embodying the meeting's vision will be this year's Keynote Speaker Marc Kirschner, chair of Harvard University's Department of Systems Biology. Marc's distinguished career in cell biology spans reductionist

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approaches of reconstituting mitotic events and cytoskeletal dynamics to large-scale ‘omics’ and mathematical modeling to embryonic development. More recently, Marc’s theories on the origins and mechanisms of evolutionary variation have continued to fascinate. His is a talk that no one should miss!

3. Many Small Meetings in One

Starting with Member-Organized Special Interest Subgroups on Saturday and continuing with daily Minisymposia and thousands of posters that serve as focal points for lively discussions, smaller meetings embracing each subdiscipline of cell biology are ongoing. Recurrent Minisymposia topics are the backbone of the ASCB meeting, building communities in the core disciplines of cell biology. These include actin, microtubule, and intermediate filament cytoskeletal networks, membrane trafficking, organelle biogenesis and dynamics, extracellular matrix and cell adhesion, cell motility, signal transduction, nuclear structure and function, chromatin organization, cell cycle, and cytokinesis. Researchers find a home to which they can return every year to hear the latest findings and connect with others in their field.

New Minisymposia fulfill the meeting’s vision of reaching out to other disciplines (e.g., chemical biology, bioengineering, and synthetic biology) and new communities (e.g., modeling and simulation and cell biology of microorganisms). Working Groups highlight major questions in interactive “town hall” type sessions. Workshops focus on new tools for cell biology, such as mining of large data sets, learning from heterogeneity, and cross-scale imaging approaches. Such tools are vital for cell biology’s future.

Minisymposia chairs have been selected to showcase excellent junior investigators, rather than established senior ones. These sessions also provide an outstanding opportunity for other early-career scientists to present their work to a large audience, so make sure you check the box requesting that your abstract be considered for a Minisymposium talk—and submit by **July 28** for consideration.

We’ve reorganized the poster topics so that you can more easily identify your community. As you renew your ASCB membership for 2012, we’ll be collecting this information about your specialty so that we can identify more chairs

for next year’s Minisymposia from within our membership ranks... and help build community year-round.

4. Meet the Pros, Play with Their Toys

Workshops, vendor exhibits, showcases, and tutorials are unique to large meetings—and many are unique to the ASCB Annual Meeting. At the meeting you’ll be able to see and, most importantly, test-drive all the latest technologies and instrumentation that make our work faster and more precise. Talk to the experts to help solve a problem, troubleshoot an experiment, or design a new approach. You can’t help but envision new ways of solving old problems as you walk through the Exhibit Hall and see the latest technologies that can augment your lab’s current inventory of techniques and inspire your next experiments. The exhibits are conveniently located near the posters.

5. Network, Network, Network

Virtually all leading cell biologists regularly attend the ASCB Annual Meeting. You’ll spot them at the posters, talking in small groups outside meeting halls, standing in line for coffee. Look at badges. Say hello. Invite them to your poster or alert them to your Minisymposium talk. Looking for postdoc opportunities, jobs, collaborations? This is the opportunity to find them. Expanding on last year’s success, Science Discussion Tables will offer more opportunities to sit down and discuss latest trends with leading scientists. Join the question and answer sessions after each Symposium and Minisymposium to ask your questions and impress the speakers with your knowledge. You’ll also meet friends and future colleagues at the ASCB Annual Meeting; we did... and do annually.

6. Advice for All Career Stages

If you’re a graduate student or postdoc seeking advice on the next stage of your career, the ASCB Annual Meeting offers an assortment of workshops, Women in Cell Biology (WICB) Career Discussion Roundtables and workshops, Minorities Affairs Committee (MAC) Mentoring Symposia, Subcommittee on Postdoctoral Training career sessions, and mentoring not available at any other venue. If you’re a young assistant professor teaching your first courses in cell biology or a veteran looking

for new ways to inspire and educate your students, programs offered by the Education Committee throughout the meeting can help. Writing a National Institutes of Health (NIH) or National Science Foundation (NSF) grant? You can meet your Program Officers and Study Section Administrators to get their advice. Editors from all leading journals attend the meeting to scout for new stories at the posters and Minisymposia. Even senior scientists need advice some time, so enjoy discussions with your peers over coffee, wine, or dinner.

7. It's Fun

Enjoy special cell biology-geek events like Celldance (where award-winning cell videos are recognized—they could be yours!) and the WICB Mentoring Theater. Get together with old friends, have a lab reunion. Collect cool pens, fridge magnets, discounts on products, and bath toys in the Exhibit Hall. And, if you're lucky, get

“ROCK'd”—Random Offers of Conference Kindness “goodie bags.” Be inspired by talks from ASCB award winners, too.

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8. A Spectacular Venue

High in the Rocky Mountains, Denver is a beautiful city. As a major hub, Denver's airport is a convenient single flight away from over 160 U.S. and international cities. The brand new convention center, located downtown, is a few blocks from a pedestrian mall and other streets teeming with restaurants for fun casual or fine formal dining. Snow-capped mountains rim the city and world-class ski resorts are nearby. Think about staying a few extra days or coming early

to take advantage of this unique location. And remember, Denver enjoys 300 days of sunshine a year. See you there! ■

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

What 2010 ASCB Annual Meeting Participants Enjoyed

“I love the sense of collegiality, the breadth of topics, and the chance to hear a LOT of science that may not be directly related to my own work.”

“I really enjoyed getting to talk one-on-one with researchers in my field. This happened informally outside of scheduled sessions, as well as at posters.”

“The networking opportunities were vast! I really enjoyed the career sessions. The panel discussion really helped push me in the right directions, as did the career roundtables.”

“The ASCB meetings are the most exciting annual meeting on the scientific landscape.”

“ASCB Annual Meetings always charge my batteries to full capacity and make me want to return to the bench as quickly as possible to test all the great new ideas I got by attending inspiring presentations and discussing with colleagues.”

“It's ‘one-stop shopping’ for the best in basic research, biomedical application, and pedagogy related to cell biology.”

“The excitement it brings to graduate students and postdocs.... Each year we come back with new ideas.”

“You could really see that poster presentations play an important role at the ASCB meeting. PIs and grad students come together to discuss research, which is one of the most essential features of a scientific meeting.” ■