

# Sustaining Women in Science: Lessons from the American Society for Cell Biology

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# Why Women's Groups, Programs Needed at Scientific Societies?

- Remember the early 1970s?
  - Most positions weren't advertised.
  - Female role models were few and far between.
  - Sexist comments were common.
- Before the ASCB Annual Meeting in 1971
  - A small group of cell biology students, postdocs, and faculty met.
  - They discussed:
    - Paucity of women speakers at cell biology meetings
    - Low number of tenured women among cell biology faculty
    - Their interest in meeting for support, networking, collaboration, and discussion, at the ASCB Annual Meeting

# Title IX Creates Receptive Environment

- In 1972, U.S. Congress passed Title IX of the Education Amendment Act.
- It banned sexual discrimination in education programs receiving federal funding...not just sports!
- At that time:
  - 1 in 5 faculty members were female.
  - 1% of those in master's programs in science/engineering were female.
  - 40% of undergrads were female.

# From Small Acorns...

- The Women in Cell Biology (WICB) began as a grassroots organization.
- A founding WICB member served on the ASCB Council 1972-4.
- Nevertheless, WICB was not initially supported by the ASCB.
- WICB started its own publication, which:
  - Advertised jobs
  - Publicized studies, court cases related to women's issues
  - Provided news about women in powerful positions
  - Called attention to sexist comments by speakers and in the biological literature
- Participants at ASCB Annual Meeting WICB meetings grew from 30 in 1971 to nearly 200 in 1973 and 900 in 1991...men included.
- WICB created publications including *How to Get a Postdoc*, *How to Get a Job*, and *How to Keep a Job*.
- *WICB Newsletter* editor served as informal WICB leader.

# WICB Becomes Mainstream: How?

1. Get Funding: WICB published and sold books to raise funds for meetings in the 1970s.
2. Get Angry: The 1980 ASCB Annual Meeting featured no scheduled women speakers; guidelines adopted thereafter required gender balance and program review by WICB.
3. Get Speakers: WICB organized dinners where women scientists presented scientific talks.
4. Get Support: New leaders revived WICB in the early 1980s with support from ASCB's then Executive Director.

# WICB Becomes Mainstream: How?

## (Cont.)

5. Get Formal: WICB elected chairs and vice chairs to ensure continuity as a grassroots effort.
6. Get Consistent: ASCB Annual Meetings have featured WICB functions every year since 1983.
7. Get Recognition: WICB created own awards to recognize women scientists at junior and senior levels; encouraged nominations of women for other awards.
8. Get Mainstream... Without Losing Edge: In 1991, WICB became ASCB committee; chairs approved by Council.
9. Get Goals: Make them manageable and attainable.

# WICB Goals

1. Promote careers of women (and men) in cell biology
2. Nurture the “human side” of being a cell biologist
3. Offer career advice & assistance
4. Identify, nominate, & recognize outstanding female cell biology speakers, awardees (and men who promote women’s careers)
5. Diversify programs
6. Consider & respond to public policy relating to women in science

# WICB Programs: Get Focus, Get Results

- A 1994 ASCB survey identified mentoring as top WICB priority.
- The WICB Career Discussion Lunch was born in 1995; it remains one of ASCB's most popular events for women and men.
- WICB and ASCB members have increasingly become ASCB presidents, other officers, Councilors, symposium speakers, minisymposium chairs, presenters, awardees.
- WICB Speaker Referral Service contacts meeting organizers to decry the absence of women speakers AND suggest speakers; programs diversify.



# WICB Programs Offer Career Advice, Support, and Networking

Other WICB Programs include:

- WICB Workshop\* at the ASCB Annual Meeting
- Evening Program at the ASCB Annual Meeting
- Monthly career advice columns in the *ASCB Newsletter*
- Compilation and publication of columns, free dissemination
- Nominations of outstanding female cell biology award candidates
- Selection & presentation of WICB Junior and Senior Awardees
- WICB Blog
- WICB Network
- Childcare Travel Awards\*\*

*\*Funded by the Office of Women's Health Research, NIH*

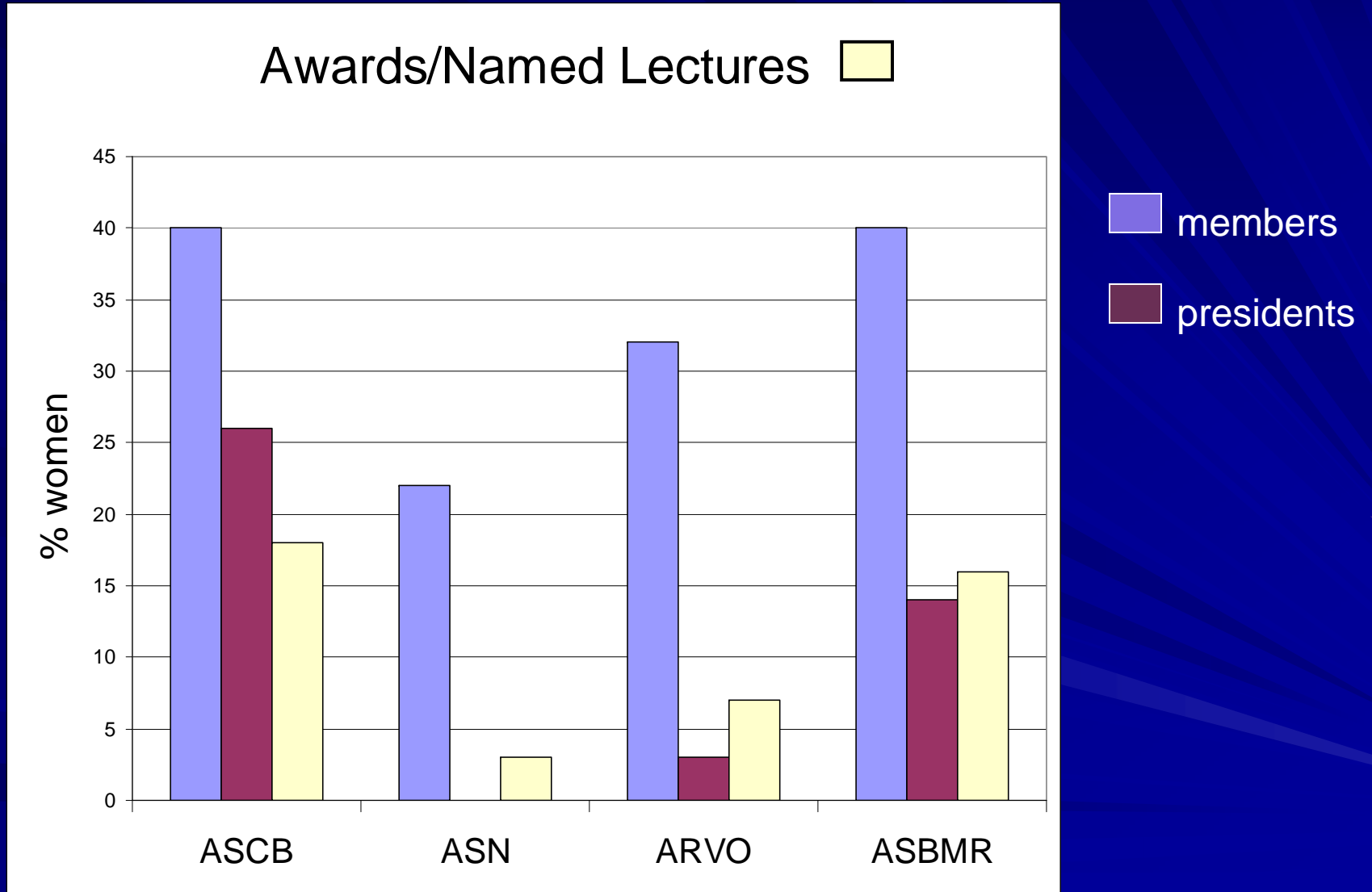
*\*\*Initially funded by the Elsevier Foundation*

# Get Results: Paying Attention to the Numbers

- Percentage of ASCB members: approximately 40%
- Percentage of ASCB Annual Meeting speakers goal: approximately 40%; in 2009 draft program: 43%
- ASCB's current female leadership: President, Secretary; nearly 60% of Council
- Attendance at WICB functions: excellent
- Evaluation of WICB columns & events: excellent

# Comparing Four Scientific Societies

2005 Data from Sandra Masur



# Expanding Efforts with Minorities Affairs Committee

- Minorities Affairs Committee Activities
  - ABRCMS\*, SACNAS\* & ASCB Exhibit Booths
  - Travel awards to the ASCB Annual Meeting\*
  - Travel awards to Marine Biological Laboratory\*, Friday Harbor Laboratories\*, Cold Spring Harbor for summer courses\*
  - Visiting Professorships: collaborative research experiences for junior faculty\*
  - Junior Faculty & Postdoc Career Training Workshops\*

*\*funded by NIH MARC grant*

# Promoting Diversity, Providing Career Development Assistance

## ■ Minorities Affairs Committee (MAC) Activities (cont.)

- Linkage Fellows\*: resources & mentorship at minority-serving institutions
- Assistance diversifying ASCB Annual Meeting scientific program, including MAC Poster Session & Reception\*\*
- Mentorship Symposium at the ASCB Annual Meeting\*\*
- Interventions Conference
- Recognizing and promoting minority scientists' visibility
  - E.E. Just Lecturer at the ASCB Annual Meeting

*\*funded by NIH MARC grant*

*\*\*funded by Burroughs Wellcome Fund*

# Minorities Affairs Committee

- Anthony DePass, Chair
- Lydia Villa-Komaroff, Vice Chair
  - Renato Aguilera
  - Sean Decatur
  - Deborah Harmon Hines
  - Sandra A. Murray
- Staff Liaison
  - Deborah McCall, Minorities Affairs Senior Manager
  - Laura Robles
  - Peter Satir
  - MariaElena Zavala

# Women in Cell Biology Committee

## ■ Ursula W. Goodenough, Chair

- Alexandra Ainsztein
- Elizabeth H. Blackburn
- Jennifer Canfield
- Susan L. Forsburg
- Caroline M. Kane
- Laurie E. Littlepage
- Harvey F. Lodish
- Elizabeth Marincola
- Sandra K. Masur
- Inke Nathke
- Suzanne R. Pfeffer
- Lynne M. Quarmby
- Sandra L. Schmid
- Jean E. Schwarzbauer
- Vivian Siegel
- Anne Spang
- Philip D. Stahl
- JoAnn Trejo
- Lydia Villa-Komaroff, MAC Liaison
- Junying Yuan

## ■ Staff Liaison

- Cheryl Lehr, Executive Assistant/Office Manager

# Conclusions

- Grassroots and formal Society action are both effective.
- Survey members: Find out what they want.
- Ask about:
  - Mentorship
  - Acknowledgment
  - Career knowledge (e.g., promotion path, importance of publications, grants, negotiation skills, etc.)
  - Work-life balance issues, flexible institutional policies
  - Recognition: ABRF leadership, award, and speaker gender breakdown
- Set goals.
- Develop manageable programs and timelines.
- Pay attention to the numbers/assess results.
- Yes, we can!



# Resources

- American Society for Cell Biology Women in Cell Biology
  - Career Advice for the Life Scientist (CALS) I & II; forthcoming: vol. 3
  - Monthly columns in the *ASCB Newsletter*
  - Sessions at ASCB Annual Meetings (Dec. 5-9, 2009, San Diego)
  - [www.ascb.org](http://www.ascb.org), click on merchandise for CALS (free) or Annual Meeting
- Association for Women in Science (AWIS)
  - Chapter meetings, coaching services
  - [www.awis.org/about/chapters.html](http://www.awis.org/about/chapters.html)

# Resources (cont.)

## ■ MentorNet

- E-mentoring, coaching, case studies, training
- [www.mentornet.net](http://www.mentornet.net)

## ■ RAISE Project

- Compilation of awards for women in science
- <http://www.raiseproject.org/>

## ■ National Science Foundation Advance Programs

- Portal to individual websites with institutional survey instruments, evaluations
- [www.nsf.gov/crssprogm/advance/itwebsites.jsp](http://www.nsf.gov/crssprogm/advance/itwebsites.jsp)

# Resources (cont.)

- *National Leadership Workshop on Mentoring Women in Biomedical Careers: Meeting Proceedings* (Office of Research on Women's Health, NIH, November 27-28, 2007)
- *Women in Biomedical Research: Best Practices for Sustaining Career Success* (Office of Research on Women's Health, NIH, forthcoming)
- *Beyond Bias and Barriers, Fulfilling the Potential of Women in Academic Science and Engineering* (National Academy Press, 2006)
- *Report of the Committee on Gender Differences in Careers of Science, Engineering and Mathematics Faculty, National Research Council* (National Academy Press, forthcoming)