Born in Washington, D.C., long-time ASCB member and past-President Joseph Gall recalls that he always had an interest in biology. As a child, he collected insects, while his parents nurtured his curiosity with science and education. He attended Woodberry Forest Prep School; Gall remembers that his choice of colleges was essentially made for him. However, he never regretted attending Yale, where Gall tailored his early academic interest and hobby into a degree in Zoology.

Gall remembers one of the biggest impressions made upon him was the size of Yale's library. He was "nominally pre-med" but never realized that there was such a thing as a professional biologist that would allow him the opportunity to teach and conduct research. As an undergraduate, Gall came to know Donald Poulson, who was one of the pioneers in the study of Drosophila genetics. After completing his Ph.D in Zoology at Yale under Poulson's mentorship, Gall wanted to have his own lab, and, forgoing a postdoc at the age of 24, moved to the University of Minnesota to join its faculty.

Gall remained at Minnesota for 11 years, first as an Assistant and then Associate Professor of Biology. Gall says that at that time, most of the biology departments in universities emphasized teaching over research. He enjoyed the heavy teaching emphasis and taught courses on Cell Biology, Histology, and Comparative Anatomy.

Circumstance brought him back to Yale. A faculty member was taking a leave of absence and Gall was invited to teach at the University for the year. He had no intention of staying at Yale, but was attracted to the more research-oriented environment. He was to remain in New Haven for 20 years. His research there in electron microscopy turned to studies in molecular biology and cytogenetics.

Gall left Yale in 1983 and came to the embryology department of the Carnegie Institution of Washington in Baltimore where he remains today. The Carnegie offered Gall the opportunity to become completely involved in his research. He had never been in a total research institution, so he found Carnegie especially appealing. Gall strongly believes that people at universities have three responsibilities: research, teaching, and administration, and that to be effective, one must be committed to all three. After 31 years in a university environment, Gall tired of the administrative demands on his time.

Gall and his colleagues are currently studying the synthesis and processing of pre-messenger RNA in the giant nucleus of frog and salamander oocytes. Previous studies have shown that many RNA processing components are localized on the chromosomes at the sites of RNA synthesis, but that the same components also occur in thousands of granules separate from the chromosomes. Gall calls these granules "snurposomes" because they contain small nuclear ribonucleoproteins. He believes that it is probable that snurposomes are sites for assembly and storage of RNA processing components used in the oocyte and later in the embryo.
Gall has been a member of ASCB "as long as anyone" and was its president in 1967-1968, when membership numbered only 500. By his own account, he has only missed two or three Annual Meetings. Gall feels that ASCB has been the focus of his professional life outside the university. Gall is also past-Chairman of the Board of Scientific Counselors at the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development and was Associate Editor of the Journal of Cell Biology. As for recreational activities, Gall modestly describes his hobby as "not dangerous" — collecting books on the history of biology and microscopy. As the art and history editor for Molecular Biology of the Cell, Gall's collection provides the covers that appear on each monthly issue.

Gall is concerned that young people today are finding it increasingly difficult to get started in careers in science due to the extreme competition for faculty positions and difficulty in obtaining grants. He is troubled that the inflationary cost of conducting scientific research is strangling initiative. Gall admits that he does not have the solutions to these problems, but feels that pressure must be kept on Congress to recognize the value of basic research and the importance of the RO1 grant, which he feels is being neglected by "big ticket" science projects.

Gall has derived great personal and professional gratification from many of his students, such as ASCB past-President Mary Lou Pardue and incoming-President Sue Gerbi. Gall believes that education is a joint venture between students and their mentors. He is deservedly proud that he has always encouraged women in his lab and that the field of cell biology in particular has been very welcoming towards women.