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An Experimental Year

This is my final column in this series, and it will be brief. My main goal in the past year has been to encourage the ASCB to continue its wonderful tradition of innovating by taking risks, even though this necessarily means accepting the occasional failures. As scientists, we all recognize that it is largely through such experiments that the world advances. Thus, as ASCB President, I have tried to make it possible for talented and energetic members to start new ventures that they believe in, and to take risks on behalf of the Society. This involves encouraging our members to suggest new ideas, using the ASCB Council to select the best ones, and then empowering these members as leaders with the resources and the freedom that they need to be effective.



Bruce Alberts

New Sessions, New Ideas

By the time you receive this newsletter, some of these experiments will have been tried at the Annual Meeting. For example, there were workshops designed to develop new ideas and opportunities in two very challenging areas of cell biological research: one on the nature of the cytoplasm, and the other on Alzheimer's disease. In each case, program chair Dyche Mullins recruited a small group of scientists with a broad range of expertise to review what we think we currently know, present some of the ongoing approaches to advancing our knowledge, and then lead a wide-ranging discussion of what completely new approaches might be tried. We hope in this way to ignite sparks among the participants that will cause some to undertake new research paths. A similar format could be used to explore a wide variety of topics at future meetings.

Several highly successful, albeit longer, workshops of this type have been held at the National Academies—one on schizophrenia and another on anti-virals against smallpox.^{1,2} In the future, the ASCB could consider organizing similar one-and-a-half day workshops before or just after the Annual Meeting. Also relevant

to this forward-looking approach is this year's Annual Meeting Symposium entitled "Cell Biology in Ten Years."

Another experiment that may prove to be of permanent future value is a new major session on how to use genomic databases. Many feel that those who develop these increasingly valuable research resources need to do more to make them accessible to first-time users. In principle, our Annual Meeting can help our members use major databases effectively, while also providing feedback to help designers make their websites easier to use.

New Programs

As announced in previous newsletters, we are presently looking for a postdoctoral fellow to work in the ASCB office in Bethesda for a year. This new position was created by Council to add more cell biological expertise to our staff, while helping to develop a network of ASCB Council Affiliates—a new experiment designed to create an especially active interface with members at selected locations.

At a retreat last May, the Council decided to reposition the Image and Video Library, making it a central part of a larger web-based effort to bring valuable biology education resources to scientists, students, and the public. This summer ASCB Council member Kerry Bloom agreed to head this effort. Kerry has a very ambitious and exciting vision for this new program, namely to create a "web-based repository of images, movies, protocols, lectures, image processing tools, animation software, and other materials that will serve our Society, educators, and students in their research and teaching endeavors."

The first steps in enacting his vision, which also involves our Education Committee chaired by Tim Stearns, can be seen on the ASCB website at <http://cellbase.ascb.org>. The ASCB website also features the wonderful set of 20 specially prepared "iBioSeminars." These cutting-edge scientific talks from leading scientists are available free online to the global

scientific community; they reflect the vision and hard work of ASCB International Affairs Committee (IAC) member Ron Vale. With his continued leadership and HHMI support, 20 more lectures will be posted in the next year.

With ASCB Past President Mary Beckerle's leadership as Chair, and member Dick McIntosh heading the effort, our very active IAC has been focusing recently on designing and raising support for a series of workshops in Africa that build local capacities in cell biological research and education. As planned, this would become a long-term project, involving two workshops a year, in which the best students in previous years are selected as teaching assistants for subsequent courses. The goal is not only to catalyze research on priority issues for Africa, but also to help develop new research collaborations and the next generation of African faculty members.

As I have emphasized in my earlier articles in this series, there is so much more to do if we

are to fully exploit our potential! The ASCB welcomes your ideas for how we can further make use of our organization to advance the many opportunities for science to improve the world.

It has been a great privilege for me to serve as your president for the past year, and I thank everyone who has contributed to make it so worthwhile—staff, Councilors, and committee members. It is with pleasure that I now pass the baton to Bob Goldman.

With my best wishes to all,

Bruce Alberts ■

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

References

¹Barondes SH, et al. (1997). Workshop on Schizophrenia. *Proc Natl Acad Sci USA* 94; 1612–1614.

²Harrison SC. (2004). Discovery of Antivirals against Smallpox. *Proc Natl Acad Sci USA* 101; 11178–11192.

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