

ASCB Minorities Affairs Committee Goals: “Strengthening the Chain of Success”

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The Minorities Affairs Committee of the American Society for Cell Biology (ASCB-MAC) is an active standing committee of the Society with an aggressive agenda and a goal of inclusion. Our mission is fourfold:

1. To increase diversity among the ASCB members
2. To bring issues related to minorities in science to the attention of ASCB members
3. To assist in the professional development of minority scientists and in the education of minority science students
4. To provide opportunities for faculty members at minority-serving institutions (MSIs) not only to advance their research and teaching effectiveness, but also to establish long-term professional relationships with ASCB members

The Minorities Affairs Committee (MAC) began at the ASCB in 1980 as an ad hoc committee called the Minority Affairs Committee. It was the brainchild of Winston Anderson who, at a breakfast meeting (during the annual meeting) with the Society president, Bill Brinkley, and others, including Peter Satir, discussed the role and presence of minorities in the Society. Anderson and Satir subsequently requested a small pilot investment from the ASCB Council to fund travel by minority students who were interested in presenting their research at the annual meeting. The Council agreed to this request, and Satir served as the first committee chair. In 1985, Anderson received a National Institutes of Health Minority Access to Research Careers (NIH-MARC) grant, which, along with continuing support by the ASCB Council, provided support for many more minority students. Except for 1 yr, this grant has provided support for the MAC to the present time. Winston Anderson followed Peter Satir as chair, and in 1985, the ad hoc committee became a standing committee of the Society, with George Langford serving as chair. Langford was followed by James Wyche, and in 1994, Wyche by J.K. Haynes and Donella Wilson, the latter of whom currently chairs the committee.

The MAC has now begun to examine more carefully trends in the number of minority students at various points in the pipeline leading to scientific careers, and it serves as a resource regarding these issues. Committee members report on minority participation in the sciences recorded in publications such as *Science and Engineering Doctorate Awards 1999*

(National Science Foundation) and *Science and Engineering Indicators 2002* (National Academy of Sciences), which are available on the National Academies Press web site. Such reports are pertinent to the MAC's mission because information on the trends and progress of minority scientists throughout the country facilitates the MAC's strategic planning and program evaluation. For example, from 1990 to 1999, completion of degrees in science and engineering by underrepresented groups increased significantly. In 1993, as opposed to previous years, more Black women than men received PhDs; a similar crossover occurred for Hispanics in 1999. Statistics indicating increases in the number of PhDs awarded to American Indians and Alaska natives are likewise available. These results suggest that programs supporting minority scientists are having an impact and suggest potential target areas in the pipeline where intervention would be most productive.

Among the MAC's recent accomplishments are the following:

- Catalyzed the efforts of the ASCB to develop its Statement of Objectives, which includes “to promote and develop the careers of historically under-represented constituencies in biomedical research, including minorities and women”
- Renewed a 12 yr competitive grant from the MARC program (National Institute of General Medical Sciences) for nearly \$1 million in support of MAC activities
- Established the SuperMAC, a committee of chairs and vice-chairs of minorities affairs committees of the major professional scientific societies, which has held two meetings and several conference calls during the last few years to develop an Action Plan to address the underrepresentation of minorities in science
- In accord with the SuperMAC Action Plan, initiated and assisted in the development of a successful proposal to the NIH to establish a database of minority scientists and students (www.JustGarciaHill.org)
- Developed an ASCB home page web site (www.ascb.org/committees/mac/minorities.html), which includes a current list of MAC programs, along with application forms, a directory of summer research programs for undergraduate minority students, and pertinent information links

MAC programs are diverse, but all are designed to enhance the successful careers of minority scientists and minority science students in the cell biology field. The MAC sponsors

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more than 15 programs and events. Among these are the following:

- Travel Awards for underrepresented minority scientists and students who submit poster abstracts to the ASCB annual meeting
- A poster session for MAC Travel Award recipients, attended by, among others, ASCB Council members
- The E.E. Just Lectureship and Award, which goes to a prominent underrepresented minority scientist who serves as an annual meeting plenary session speaker
- Summer Visiting Professorship Awards for faculty at MSIs to conduct research in ASCB members' laboratories
- Financial awards to minority participants accepted into courses at the Marine Biological Laboratory at Woods Hole, Massachusetts, and Friday Harbor Laboratories, Washington
- Liaison contacts with nearly 50 MSIs

All these programs are valuable to the MAC in achieving our long-range goal of contributing to the nation's effort to increase the number of underrepresented minority scientists.

The ASCB-MAC also sponsors a satellite Mentoring Session, held on the Saturday prior to the ASCB annual meeting each year. This 4-h workshop is designed to engage and encourage junior minority scientists and to increase their awareness of the do's and don't's for achieving successful careers. The Mentoring Sessions and topics are organized by students and postdocs who serve on the MAC for 2 yr. Some of the workshop topics presented in previous years were "Mentoring—Say It, Write It, Fund It and Live It"; "Career Opportunities in Cell Biology"; "Finding a Career Path"; "The Excitement of Research"; "Overcoming Obstacles"; "Log-on for Success"; and "Climbing the Career Ladder in 2002." The information disseminated at these workshops typically guides the discussions throughout the remainder of each annual meeting. This event leads into the Minority Poster Session and Reception, where poster presentations are judged for outstanding scientific effort. The posters judged most meritorious are later announced at the MAC Awards Luncheon, where these poster presenters are given monetary awards. This activity also encompasses a 30-min Career Table discussion led by 15 designated Table Leaders, which provides yet another opportunity for networking and information sharing among colleagues.

A major success during the ASCB annual meeting has been a booth shared with the ASCB Education Committee. This MAC/ED booth, with computer access and tables and chairs, serves as a networking information station for all scientists, but especially for underrepresented minorities. It serves not only as a meeting place to discuss or brainstorm future collaborative research projects, grants, and programs, but also as a place to provide computer demonstrations, miniseminars, and consultant appointments. The booth is staffed at all times by a MAC or an Education Committee member and one MAC annual meeting Travel Awardee. Such staffing alone fosters networking and mentorship. All awardees are instructed to become familiar with the materials and programs offered by both committees so that they can answer any questions asked.

Each is also requested to encourage visitors to register at the JustGarciaHill web site as well as on an ASCB-MAC roster for future contact purposes.

The ASCB-MAC's newest program involves a linkage relationship between the ASCB-MAC and seven selected MSIs with the goal of increasing the participation of underrepresented minority scientists and students from MSIs in activities supported by the ASCB. One faculty member each from California State University at Northridge, City College of New York, Spelman College, Florida A&M University, New Mexico State University, University of North Carolina at Pembroke, and University of Puerto Rico, Mayaguez, receives 15% release time and salary compensation to carry out ASCB-MAC program initiatives, including participation in and recruitment for the Minority Scientists web site. These Linkage Fellows are submitting promising annual reports indicating the potential success of this program.

Outreach to other organizations that may provide additional resources has allowed the MAC to reach an increasing number of minority scientists and students. For example, the National Institute of Aging is providing additional support for MAC Travel Awards, and we are cooperating with the National Human Genome Research Institute to promote involvement of minority scientists and students in the Human Genome Program. For several years, we have also sponsored a Cell Biology Symposium at the annual meeting of the Society for Advancement of Chicanos and Native Americans in Science (SACNAS), and we have had a booth at the Annual Biomedical Research Conference for Minority Students (ABRCMS). Communication with other well-established minority organizations, such as the American Indian Science and Engineering Society (AISES), and additional MSIs where a majority of underrepresented minority student and faculty scientists are being trained will become a part of our MARC grant renewal planned in the near future. As part of our career enhancement program, the MAC has funded more than 40 minority scientists to attend the Histochemical Society's Workshop, including 13 this past year at the University of Washington, Seattle. Our intent is to personally develop and maintain even more national contacts to inform others of MAC opportunities.

The theme of MAC activity for the next few years is "Strengthening the Chain of Success—by Strengthening Each Link." New directions for the MAC include expanding the number of national laboratories with which the Committee is affiliated and expanding the Linkage Fellows Program to include more MSIs. In addition, we plan to revitalize the SuperMAC, provide travel support for undergraduate faculty and their students who do not submit abstracts so that they can also attend the ASCB annual meeting, and continue to augment the ASCB-MAC web site. The MAC hopes to continue to increase minority representation on all ASCB committees to fully integrate minorities into all Society programs and governance. Persons interested in information on how to become involved in MAC activities should contact the MAC Chairperson, Donella Wilson, at mac@ascb.org, or any member listed at the ASCB-MAC web site given previously.