



American Society of Plant Biologists

Cultivating a better future through plant biology research.

POSITION STATEMENT ON DIVERSITY

The study of plants is essential for a comprehensive understanding of biology. Many fundamental discoveries in molecular, cell, organismal, evolutionary, and ecological biology have been made using plants as model systems. Moreover, plant biologists will play vital roles in addressing many of the most pressing problems facing humanity. For example, “Unleashing a Decade of Innovation in Plant Science: A Vision for 2015-2025,” the report developed by representatives of the plant science community through a strategic visioning process, highlights the issues of climate change, food insecurity, and diminishing natural resources and describes how plant science can be brought to bear to help develop solutions (Plant Science Research Summit, 2013).

The American Society of Plant Biologists (ASPB) believes strongly that meeting the serious challenges faced by humanity will require groups of scientists that exhibit diversity in their age, race, gender expression and identity, nationality, ethnicity, religion, educational background, and physical and mental abilities. In other words, it is essential that plant biology, as well as science more broadly, draws upon the most comprehensive pool of intellectual talent society has to offer. Therefore, ASPB is committed to supporting and cultivating an inclusive scientific enterprise that maximally leverages the full societal spectrum of experiences and insights.

Several studies have documented that diversity in the workforce promotes innovation and achievement (Hong and Page, 2004; Denson and Chang, 2008; European Commission, 2003). Despite its obvious advantages, ASPB recognizes obstacles associated with building diversity into the workforce and membership. For example, studies have documented gender and racial biases in hiring practices and the awarding of grant funding (Bertrand and Mullainathan, 2004; Moss-Racusin et al., 2012; Ginther et al., 2011; Sheltzer and Smith, 2014). These inequities have been attributed to “implicit biases” that affect our actions and decisions in an unconscious manner based on our attitudes and stereotypes. Thus, immediate and sustained efforts are needed to increase the participation of diverse individuals, particularly from groups underrepresented in the sciences. ASPB considers the need to increase diversity among its membership to be an opportunity for investment. We believe that diversity enriches the intellectual, professional, and social experiences of the membership by providing individuals with different experiences, perspectives, and cultural backgrounds the opportunity to learn and work collaboratively to solve problems creatively and make informed decisions. We consider the underrepresentation of African Americans, Hispanic/Latino Americans, and Native Americans in ASPB and in science in general to be a problem that must be addressed.

ASPB believes that enhancing the climate of inclusiveness will help to increase the diversity of the membership. We recognize that each individual is unique and deserves respect and that everyone must be given equal opportunities and treated equally. The goal of enhancing inclusiveness must be to appreciate similarities between individuals from diverse groups but also to value, respect, support, and utilize the differences. By making inclusiveness paramount within the society, ASPB will create an environment that welcomes all individuals to actively participate in plant biology.

ASPB has made it a priority to increase diversity and establish a climate of inclusiveness, and many of its current activities reflect these commitments. First, ASPB has established societal committees, the Women in Plant Biology Committee (WIPB) and the Minority Affairs Committees (MAC) whose activities focus on the recruitment, retention and inclusiveness of women and underrepresented minorities in ASPB. Second, ASPB encourages and enables women and individuals from minority groups to attend its annual meeting through competitive travel grant programs. The WIPB provides travel awards to deserving female applicants, and the MAC offers Recognition Travel Awards to individuals from underrepresented groups and instructors at minority-serving institutions. Third, to enhance the inclusiveness at the annual meeting and in the Society, the WIPB and MAC both sponsored events with keynote speakers who address issues of diversity and inclusiveness. Fourth, ASPB sponsors the MAC Symposium at its annual meeting that highlights the scientific accomplishments of underrepresented minorities. Fifth, to enhance the pool of underrepresented minorities that are positioned to be recruited by ASPB, the MAC has obtained federal grant support to offer professional development workshops aimed primarily at undergraduate students at minority-serving institutions. The goal of these workshops has been to build the skills and knowledge base needed to apply to and succeed in graduate school.

ASPB has further committed to efforts to enhance inclusiveness and build diversity in order to attain and maintain a diverse community. Diversity will be strongly considered in making assignments to societal committees, encouraging individuals to run for leadership positions, nominating individuals for societal and external awards, selecting speakers for sessions at annual meetings, and hiring personnel.

Being inclusive will enhance ASPB's ability to create an atmosphere that fosters scientific creativity in plant biology as well as a broader societal understanding of science. ASPB will actively support diversity within its membership to help build generations of valued skilled professionals who are cognizant of how diversity can promote creativity.

References

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