

## President-elect

(to serve as president 2022–2023)



### Gustavo MacIntosh

For the vast majority of my career, I have been a member of ASPB and working in the US, but the story of how I became a plant scientist began in Argentina. At Universidad Nacional de Mar del Plata, I obtained my *Licenciatura* in Biology (equivalent to a BS/MS degree) while researching the regulation of a human parasitic protozoan. My research shifted permanently to plants during my PhD in Chemical Biology at the Universidad

de Buenos Aires, where I investigated protein phosphorylation in potato tuberization and published my first first-author paper in *Plant Physiology*. In 1997, right after my PhD defense—with my wife, our newborn daughter, and two pieces of luggage—we moved to East Lansing, MI for my postdoc training at the DOE-Plant Research Laboratory at Michigan State University. There, immersed in molecular biology of *Arabidopsis* and yeast, I started working on ribonucleases, which remain my main research interest. Later, I helped the lab move from MSU to Delaware, where I became an Associate Scientist at the Delaware Biotechnology Institute, expanding my work to functional characterization of *Arabidopsis* noncoding RNAs. In 2003, I obtained an Assistant Professor position at Iowa State University, where I have built a laboratory investigating the functional characterization of plant RNases and the mechanisms and regulation of RNA salvage and cellular homeostasis, funded primarily by the National Science Foundation and the Roy J. Carver Charitable Trust. A few years after moving to Iowa, I expanded the laboratory's focus to include defense mechanisms that protect soybean plants against the soybean aphid—and the counter-strategies employed by aphids. This project, funded primarily by the Iowa Soybean Association and the USDA, was recognized for its value to Iowa through the 2017 Distinguished Scientist Award from the Iowa Academy of Science.

In ASPB, I have served in all elected positions for the Midwest section and in many committees (EDIC, Science Policy, Membership, Council). I am currently an elected member of the Board of Directors for a few more months, and now seek to serve the Society as President.

Professional societies are having an identity crisis, and ASPB is no exception. The old model, centered around annual meetings and specialty journals, provided value but placed a limit on ASPB's growth. To keep ASPB relevant, we must acknowledge and adapt to

the changing realities of our profession. These realities include society's increasing expectations of equity, diversity, and inclusion; the need for flexible and accessible ways to communicate and network; and the fact that many recent graduates are building careers outside the traditional academic path. As President, I would aim to facilitate ASPB's evolution and continued growth in alignment with these changing realities.

Successful growth means building on solid foundations while dismantling and rebuilding structures when necessary. This is a worthwhile process the Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Committee (formerly the Minority Affairs Committee) has already begun. As a Committee member from 2012 to 2020 and Chair the last three years, and with help from many people in and outside the committee, we were able to reinvigorate the Society with EDI values. While we are still far from achieving true representation and inclusiveness, the foundation has been laid, and now is our opportunity to harness the momentum we have gathered to fuel further growth.

How might we increase the diversity of our members—and consequently, our leadership structure? We must renew what we offer to members. In other words, if we want marginalized groups to join us, we need to make sure we have something of value to offer. One way I propose we add value to our Society is involving and integrating industry partners. Looking at the current realities of plant biology, the most common career target for students is the private sector; our Society will only become stronger by inviting more industry plant biologists into the conversation.

At the same time, we need to conserve and build on what's already working. For example, the Early Career Plant Scientist section has already strengthened the society through the inclusion of early career (EC) representatives on committees. EC members have contributed novel ideas, different perspectives, and enthusiasm as ASPB participants. Continuing to provide EC members a community and mode for input ensures robust and productive membership for years to come. Our expanded virtual presence, necessitated by the pandemic, has also fortified membership by increasing participation and extending the Society's international reach—both positive outcomes I propose we capitalize on by continuing to develop and refine more flexible, accessible modes of communication.

Here, I've laid out my proposed focus on evolving and expanding EDI efforts, communications, and membership. I recognize that one person cannot achieve all these goals alone, and would welcome the opportunity to work with the Society's leadership team and all its members. As President, I would aim to function as a catalyst for member-driven, growth-oriented changes; as a steward for what's already working; and as a plant sciences advocate to policy makers and the public at large.