

# Society for Molecular Biology and Evolution (SMBE) Council and Business Meetings, 2006, Tempe, Arizona

## Council Meeting

1. *Call to order.*—President Montserrat Aguadé called the meeting to order at 8:30 AM on 24 May 2006. In attendance were President Montserrat Aguadé, President-Elect Deborah Charlesworth, Past-President Jeffrey R. Powell, Editor William Martin, Secretary Sudhir Kumar, and Councilors Michael Lynch, Laura A. Katz, and Charles Aquadro. Treasurer Marta L. Wayne was absent on maternity leave. The meeting began with Introductions. Midway through, Council was joined by Marcy K. Uyenoyama, Elizabeth Raffaele, and the representatives from Oxford University Press (Cathy Kennedy and Caitlyn Haase).
2. *Approval of minutes.*—Council unanimously approved the minutes of the 2005 Council and Business meetings, published in the March 2006 issue of the journal *Molecular Biology and Evolution* (MBE).
3. *Editor's report.*—The Editor gave a report on the health of the journal, including the geographical distribution of the submitting authors, acceptance rates, and other associated statistics (see detailed Editor's report).
4. *Treasurer's report.*—William Martin presented the treasurer's report on behalf of Marta L. Wayne, summarizing the financial state of the Society. Records indicate that the Society is in excellent financial health. The report was audited by Manolo Gouy and Brandon Gaut and was unanimously approved by the Council (see detailed Treasurer's report).
5. *Secretary's report.*—Secretary Sudhir Kumar reviewed Council actions over the preceding year. These notes, along with the meeting minutes, are summarized here:

Society Elections: The nominations committee was appointed by Past-President Jeffrey Powell and consisted of Michael Lynch (chair), Kenneth Wolf, Kateryna Makova, and Sudhir Kumar (ex officio). The committee strived to nominate candidates for 3 SMBE offices (President-Elect, Secretary, and Councilor) from diverse geographical locations, gender, and age. Drs. Paul Sharp (Nottingham) and Shozo Yokoyama (Emory) contested elections for President-Elect, Drs. George Zhang (Michigan) and Robin Bush (California, Irvine) contested elections for Secretary, and Drs. Laura Landweber (Princeton) and Christian Schlötterer (Vienna) contested elections to fill the Councilor position. The deadline for voting for the 2006 Society election was scheduled for the end of the second day of the Annual meetings (26 May 2006 at 10 PM) in order to involve as many members as possible. The elections were conducted online for the second time at the OUP member-subscription site, where short biographies of each candidate were made available. In the final tally, Drs. Paul Sharp, George Zhang, and Laura Landweber were elected to hold the offices of President-Elect (2007), Secretary (2007–2009), and Councilor (2007–2009). Council also engaged in a discussion of creating an overlap period for the

offices of Secretary and Treasurer to ensure stability within the council.

Society Web site: The importance of the Society's Web presence prompted Council members to appoint an official webmaster for SMBE. A motion to this effect was unanimously passed. The webmaster, a nonvoting officer of SMBE and a scientist, will be responsible for the coordination of all aspects of SMBE Web site development and maintenance, including the archiving of electronic information. The webmaster will direct a specialist web technology expert to update the content, structure, and technological features of the Web site. The webmaster will also work closely with the Secretary in developing and updating a procedures' manual for various Society functions. In the first year, the Council has allocated up to \$5,000 toward these activities, as a pilot project. In addition, the Council approved travel support for the webmaster to attend SMBE annual meetings to provide a report on the Web site and decided to include the webmaster's name in the MBE journal along with other officers. Sudhir Kumar, who led the design and implementation of the current SMBE website, was appointed webmaster over the next 3 years (2007–2009), with a possibility of extension for 2 additional years.

The council indicated the need for providing the current members with facilities to check their SMBE membership status online through the Web site. This facility will be implemented in conjunction with the Oxford University Press (Cathy Kennedy as the primary liaison). Furthermore, the webmaster will serve as one of the contacts to future organizing committees of SMBE annual meetings. Also, the development of a central web resource for disseminating information about the SMBE meetings to be used by the future hosts was considered important in order to ensure greater uniformity of the annual conference Web site from year to year for the benefit of the potential attendees. Following this discussion, designation of a permanent office to coordinate SMBE annual meetings was discussed, but no decisions were made.

Report on 2006 SMBE Annual Meeting: This meeting was hosted by the Center for Evolutionary Functional Genomics in Biodesign Institute at the Arizona State University, Tempe, Arizona. The conference during the meeting was held on campus from 24 to 28 May 2006 and was entitled "Genomes, Evolution, and Bioinformatics." It was one of the largest gatherings of scientific minds in the history of SMBE with over 675 attendees from 33 countries, representing more than 100 international institutions. Of these, about 40% of the attendees were students and 20% were postdoctoral graduates. Over 120 student and postdoctoral SMBE members applied for 28 travel awards to the SMBE meeting (see SMBE Web site for a list of awardees).

At this 14th annual SMBE meeting, there were 20 symposia, 4 keynotes, 375 platform presentations, and 200 posters. The conference honored the legacy of 2 founders of SMBE (Walter M. Fitch and Masatoshi Nei) and the

lifetime achievement of another Scientist (Tomoko Ohta) by organizing symposia in their honor. A number of educational and research organizations sponsored symposia as well. Donation from the Biodesign Institute provided travel, registration, and accommodation support for 75% of the invited speakers. National Aeronautics and Space Administration Astrobiology Institute provided support for 15 speakers in a day-long symposium on Discovering the Time Tree of Life. Other sponsoring organizations included Apple Computers, Royal Society, Blackwell Scientific, and Oxford University Press.

The SMBE Awards Banquet was held on the evening of the penultimate day of the meeting (27 May 2006). Over 425 attendees applauded the winners of the following awards. Dr. Tomoko Ohta of the National Institute of Genetics (Japan) received the SMBE Award for Lifetime Work for her contributions to Evolutionary Genetics. Dr. Brian Golding of the McMaster University (Canada) received the SMBE Council Service Award for distinguished contributions toward fostering Molecular Evolutionary Biology. Joanna Kelley of the University of Washington and Jennifer Cork of the North Carolina State University shared the SMBE Walter M. Fitch Prize. Prize winners were presented with a certificate, a US\$500 check, and a travel award of up to \$1000 to cover registration, accommodation, and travel expenses. D. Allan Drummond of the California Institute of Technology received the SMBE Best Graduate Student Poster Award and Dr. Heather Norton of the University of Arizona received the SMBE Best Postdoctoral Poster Award. Six other contestants (graduate and postdoctoral students) for the Fitch Prize and 10 other graduate students were selected for travel awards of up to US\$1000 (domestic) or US\$1500 (international) to cover registration, accommodation, and travel expenses. All awardees also received an online student MBE subscription for the year 2007.

Financially, the conference organizers report a total expenditure of US\$200,000. This cost does not include gratis use of facilities by Arizona State University or donations made in the form of time devoted by scientific and technical personnel in the Center for Evolutionary Functional Genomics at Arizona State University.

**Future Annual Meetings:** The presentation of the proposal for SMBE 2007 (24–28 June 2007) at Dalhousie University in Halifax (Nova Scotia, Canada) was given by John Archibald. Facilities as well as organizational plans were presented, along with maps of the site, general information about the locale, and the organizers' ideas for generating sponsorships for invited symposia presentations. President Montserrat Aguadé informed the council, on behalf of the 2008 SMBE meeting organizers, of the proposed dates for the meeting to be held in Barcelona, Spain (5–8 June 2008). Potential sites of the 2009 SMBE meetings—to be held in North America following the SMBE tradition—were discussed, and the President-Elect (Deborah Charlesworth), responsible for leading the effort to select the venue, is in talks with representatives of several potential locations.

The size and the overall expense of the recent annual SMBE meetings (see 2006 meeting report above) has expanded in the recent years. However, the direct contribution of the Society toward the annual meetings has remained the

same (US\$15,000). Given that the society is in good financial health, the council unanimously passed the motion that starting with the 2007 SMBE meeting, the seed donation for conference planning and for inviting outstanding speakers will increase to US\$25,000. It was also mentioned that this decision will be implemented retroactively for year 2006, if a request is made by the hosts of 2006 meetings at Arizona State University. The chair of the host committee (Sudhir Kumar) thanked the council and indicated that the conference budget is in good shape and that he does not foresee any such need.

The overall financial contribution of the SMBE towards the annual meeting in 2006 was discussed, and it was noted the SMBE has provided 28 student travel grants (each up to US\$1000 for domestic awardee and US\$1500 for international awardee) and support for the travel of 2 faculty awardees, in addition to the \$15,000 given to the conference committee. Therefore, the SMBE council has contributed extensively toward making the conference more diverse and bringing excellence to the event. The SMBE Council was greatly encouraged by the fact that over 120 students and postdocs applied for 28 student/postdoc travel awards to the 2006 Meetings. Given the excellent financial health of the society, the Council was highly enthusiastic about the continuation of travel support intended for 10 graduate students and 8 Walter Fitch prize contestants. However, the difficulty in finding 10 undergraduates from underrepresented backgrounds for SMBE 2006 meetings led the Council to discuss about the future of those awards. No formal motions were made to continue all of these student travel awards for the future SMBE meetings.

**SMBE Journal and Membership:** The council deliberated on the price increases for institution and individual subscribers. Some members were concerned about a significant increase in the institutional subscription price, noting that the change in the OUP strategic pricing, that would make the online and the print journals the same cost, would end up increasing some institutions' cost by up to 10%. There were also discussions about need for a higher US dollar increase in subscription rates as compared with Euro and Sterling. Finally, a motion proposing a 5%, 4%, and 4% increases (dollar, sterling, and euro, respectively) were approved by a majority vote. The motion proposing that the online-only journal will cost the same as the print journal passed by majority vote. Council also discussed the subject of open access, the suggestion of starting a journal blog (rejected), and typesetting costs that are high due to the inclusion of copyediting. Because the authors can now make their papers open access in MBE, the Council unanimously passed the motion to remove a previous requirement of requesting waivers to post the accepted manuscript at Web sites other than MBE. This will automatically enable authors to comply with the funding agency requirements.

Discussions were also held about starting a second journal by the Society given that only a small fraction (~30%) of the papers submitted to MBE are being accepted. Because the lack of space leads to the rejection of many potentially desirable manuscripts, a committee was appointed to investigate the potential need and specifications of a journal that the Society could launch to better serve its members. Bill Martin will chair that committee

consisting of Deborah Charlesworth, Michael Lynch, Laura Katz, Cathy Kennedy, and the newly appointed Editor (see below).

Council stressed the importance of expanding senior membership within the Society. Council discussed methods of increasing general membership and concluded that the society Web site was an integral resource. The focus was on linking subscriptions, meeting registrations, and the Society Web site. Many different models were discussed, but no formal motions were made on how to effectively connect membership, meeting registration, and publishing.

Appointment of Editor for MBE: The motion to offer Dr. Marcy K. Uyenoyama of Duke University the Editorship of MBE (effective 1 January 2008, with a transition year in 2007) was unanimously passed. Dr. Uyenoyama accepted the offer and indicated her plans to continue with the current editorial board. The current editor's tenure will overlap with the new Editor's tenure in the first year (2007–2008). Because this is a new role for the outgoing Editor, the Council plans to come up with a title for the current editor to hold during the transition period. Following general concern about the need for liability insurance for MBE Editor, the Council indicated that if the new editor is not insured through her home institution, then SMBE will provide monies to insure the Editor's office. Furthermore, the Council indicated support for equipment and operation expenses in order to enable the new Editor to efficiently access manuscript-processing infrastructure remotely, a need brought on by MBE's quest to process manuscripts without delay. Making these costs proportional to the rising submissions was considered. Council then unanimously approved a base budget of US\$35,000 per year for 5 years for the local office of the new Editor. In addition, the Council approved an additional \$5000 for the new Editor for starting-up her office (e.g., equipment) and for additional expenses (e.g., internet connectivity). Council indicated that it will discuss changes to these allocations based on special requests from the Editor. Council also increased the office budget for the current editor from US\$25,000 to US\$35,000 because the manuscript submissions have gone up by ~50% (from 630 in 2003 to 900 expected this year). This was also the reason for the allocation of higher per-year operating budget for the new Editor.

Other Business: A CPA hire was approved, and it was noted that the chosen firm is one that specializes in handling

the finances of nonprofit institutions (expected to cost US\$1,000–\$2,000). This is in addition to the 2 internal auditors, who examine the Treasurer's report every year. Also, it was noted that there will be a need to get extension on filing taxes. A committee was also formed by the President to modernize SMBE bylaws, including Masatoshi Nei, Jeff Powell, and George Zhang. They later accepted the task to revise SMBE bylaws. Council also requested that current officers support the new Secretary's task of assembling a Procedures' Manual by providing information on the responsibilities of their office. Dr. Michael Lynch chaired the committee for selecting best postdoc and student posters.

### Business Meeting

1. *Call to order.*—President Montserrat Aguadé called to order the annual SMBE Business meeting at 6:30 PM on 25 May 2006. About 20 SMBE members were in attendance. The President summarized the discussion at the Council meeting and attempts to enhance SMBE membership (there are currently 500–550 SMBE members).

2. *New business.*—The state of the Society and of the MBE Journal was addressed in the discussion. Both are in excellent condition. The primary topic of new business was a strong emphasis on the SMBE bylaws needing to be reviewed and revised. A committee, chaired by Masatoshi Nei, is already putting together the proposed revised bylaws.

Addendum: The Council thanks the following for their devoting time toward various society functions and needs: Kenneth Wolf and Kateryna Makova (nominating committee); Diethard Tautz (Fitch Prize selection committee); Manolo Gouy and Brandon Gaut (treasurer's report auditors); Masatoshi Nei and George Zhang (bylaws committee); and Marcy Uyenoyama and Cathy Kennedy (SMBE journals committee). Council also thanks the following for judging postdoctoral and student posters during the 2006 SMBE meeting: Jeffrey Touchman and Brian Verrelli (co-chairs with Michael Lynch); Doris Bachtrog, Michael A. Thomas, George H. Perry, Michael Kohn, Philip Awadalla, Marcy Uyenoyama, Lucia Vazquez, Susan Masta, Sudhindra Gadagkar, Michael Jensen-Seaman, Liliana Florea, Vicki Friesen, Jan Mrazek, Esther Betran, Hideki Innan, Jason Wilder, and Chelsea D. Specht.