

A Matter of Opinion

The Experimental Biology Meeting: It's Our Meeting

This article outlines a set of initiatives that are part of the American Physiological Society's contribution to the continuing development of the Experimental Biology meeting. These initiatives do not set a new structure for the meeting, rather they represent the beginning of a process, a process that I believe will ultimately change the face of the EB meetings.

The goals motivating the following proposals were to ensure that we present quality science at the Experimental Biology meeting and, in addition, to sustain EB as a meeting distinguished by a catholic approach spanning many disciplines and encompassing the full range of biological integration. A niche for such a meeting exists, and there is no reason why EB should not fill that niche, except if we fail to make it sufficiently rewarding and exciting. In my view, if the meeting were simply dissolved, another meeting with similar emphasis would have to be created, and since the structure already exists we should use it.

The problems with Experimental Biology, as currently constituted, are two. First, a sense of ennui all too often pervades the air. I was told on more than one occasion during the past year that only the science that investigators deemed not fit to present at a Gordon Conference or other "hot topic" event was presented at EB. Obviously, such a feeling will color the atmosphere and give all of us the sense that we are simply going through the motions.

Second, EB was created in a time of turmoil as the Federation was reorganized, and the formation of EB took place in an environment of great uncertainty. Operationally, the change was made from the "Federation meeting" to the "Experimental Biology meeting"; FASEB takes off its shirt and "bam" it becomes EB! That metamorphosis is incomplete, however, as EB remains "sort of" the old Federation meeting and "sort of" something else. I imagine that the complete transformation of Experimental Biology will involve a realignment of scientists from many societies, some currently participating societies in EB, some not, but all taking place within the context of a different Experimental Biology meeting, one which, because of its association with established societies (with resources at their command), will be able to adapt to the rapidly changing needs of science.

Three actions have been taken by APS as initial steps in the process of transformation. First, at a joint retreat of Council, the Program Committee, the Program Advisory Committee, and the Section Advisory Committee, a plan was developed that will allow a group of participants in future APS spring meetings (concurrent with the EB meetings) to explore one topic in depth over a period of two days of scientific presentations. The **Physiology InFocus Program**, described on the next page, will be guided by the President-Elect and organized by an investigator chosen by the President-Elect in

consultation with the Executive Committee and the Program Committee. Once an individual is selected to run the Physiology InFocus Program, he or she will have enormous flexibility in topic, in program modality, and in the societal origins of the individuals who will present. More importantly, the total elapsed time, from concept to presentation of what we anticipate will be an exciting new program, will be one year, and we expect that the result will be an intense exploration of a topic of immediate importance to modern biology.

A second initiative taken by those who attended the retreat, although at the moment modest in scope, has the potential for enormous impact on the immediacy of APS programming. As many as three symposia will be held open for submission and approval as late as November preceding a meeting in April. Such symposia can be built around fast-breaking scientific discoveries and programmed and presented while momentum and excitement are high.

A third initiative, taken as part of a long-term, coordinated plan, could potentially yield a new operating structure for Experimental Biology. The basic concept is that the theme structure of Experimental Biology will be more intensely focused on the directions in which scientific research is progressing. We have begun discussions with the Experimental Biology Board, and with a number of Federation societies, aimed at determining how such themes could be identified and nurtured. In contrast to the current situation, themes would have no "life of their own." They would exist only in the context of rapid advances in science and would evolve and disappear as science changed.

An exciting aspect of the proposal is that modern data processing and communication methods make it possible to advertise both the themes of the Experimental Biology meeting and the meetings of participating societies, such as the American Physiological Society, as separate and simultaneous events. In other words, themes could be advertised as independent scientific expositions existing within the framework of Experimental Biology. With such a structure, investigators who are members of the participating societies would be able to submit abstracts and symposia either through their normal societal program structure or through a program structure built around highly focused, scientifically sound and exciting themes.

Why build such a complicated structure? Simply because it responds to the needs of our members and the needs of many of the members of the principal programming societies of EB. Such a structure can simultaneously provide for the meetings of the constituent societies and respond to the stimuli of scientific discovery. Both are accomplished within the context of a large meeting, which parenthetically it should be noted has a strong element of support running through all of