

Vital Support for the Biological Sciences

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BioScience

American Institute of Biological Sciences

Vital Support for the Biological Sciences

The year 2005 has been a time of accomplishment and self-assessment for AIBS, including an examination of our responsibility for the promotion and effective communication of our science. Events in our nation and in the world have made us look deeply at our professional obligations to our disciplines and to society. Major misperceptions about science influence the public's—and often policymakers'—views about what should be taught in schools, what science should be supported with public funding, whether there is scientific grounding for commitments to international conventions, and many other dilemmas. Dichotomous thinking creates artificial oppositions, such as science versus ethics, science versus religion, and the like. These create misimpressions and limit discussion.

AIBS influences those areas of national debate in which it has expertise by offering both information and personnel. We are working with the National Association of Biology Teachers, the Biological Sciences Curriculum Study, and the National Evolutionary Synthesis Center to ensure that teachers have the knowledge and resources they need to teach science, particularly evolution, cogently and effectively, so that nonscientific approaches will not be considered parts of science. We are working in partnership with the Natural Science Collections Alliance to advance the public policy interests of the research and education communities that use natural science collections. And we are working with the research and education communities to plan the National Ecological Observatory Network.

We are concerned that some colleagues in the physical sciences seem persuaded that research in biology is well supported, when in fact only some parts of biology enjoy respectable levels of funding. AIBS must be a voice for organismal biology, in the broadest sense of the term, and show why it should be an equal partner with other sciences. We use our executive office in Washington, DC, to mobilize scientific expertise, as we have done with roundtable presentations in response to key policy issues, with statements regarding the teaching of "intelligent design," and with information on the science of climate change, the consequences of biodiversity modification, and other considerations relevant to the recent natural disasters in our country and elsewhere.

AIBS must be forward-thinking in order to advance the training and support of our constituency. For example, electronic communication has changed the way that scientists view the dissemination of information, including research publications. In light of this, what is the appropriate policy to adequately protect authors' intellectual property rights and scientific societies' revenue streams, while serving our colleagues well in the digital age? Another example arises mainly as a consequence of the limited funding available for the training—and the retention—of young biologists. AIBS must seek extramural funds for many of its activities, but is frequently asked to provide moral and financial support for excellent, relevant efforts mounted by other societies and by *ad hoc* groups. How should AIBS meet such requests while maintaining its laudable activities in education and diversity recruitment? We hope to find new ways and means.

As I said a year ago when I began my term as AIBS president, your suggestions are welcome. AIBS is *your* organization. We *are* responsive. It has been a privilege and an honor to serve AIBS, and I believe that its attitudes and its activism can accomplish much more—with your participation.

MARVALEE H. WAKE
President, AIBS