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# Change is Constant

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## Change Is Constant

Scientists love dynamic environments. After all, the goal of the scientific enterprise is to constantly improve how we understand and describe our world; we thrive on new insights, and most of us would be bored to tears were we denied the thrill of discovery and change.

Nonetheless, we often struggle to keep up with some changes, from the pace of discovery in fields other than our own to the ever-developing methods for teaching new generations of students. Some of the most striking changes we encounter occur in the institutions that have traditionally nurtured and supported science. Decreasing budgets and increasing expectations are driving rapid and far-reaching changes in universities, institutes, funding agencies, and publishers. The goals of the scientific enterprise aren't changing, but almost everything surrounding our pursuit of those goals is.

Scientific societies such as AIBS are also facing profound changes, and many are struggling to adapt to them. Once upon a time, scientific societies were the backbone of the enterprise (with apologies to all biologists who do not study vertebrates): They published the journals in which we reported new results and offered our reviews and syntheses; they hosted the meetings at which we exchanged our newest ideas and plans; and they gave us a voice in national discussions of science education, science policy, and research priorities. Today's picture is different; there is a wide variety of models for scientific publishing, the costs and constraints of travel have changed how we view the traditional scientific meeting, and the atomizing of the biological community by discipline has made it unclear whether any society can speak for biologists as a whole.

Scientific societies remain uniquely positioned, in principle, to play essential roles in advancing the causes of research, education, and enlightened policy. The challenge is how to fulfill those roles in societal and budgetary environments that are different from anything we have seen before. In my term as AIBS president, I have begun guiding AIBS toward defining how we can better serve the life science community, and how to develop the financial and structural means to sustain that activity. AIBS staff are in the midst of a strategic planning process to meet these challenges, and I lead the long-range planning committee that is overseeing the effort. After my presidential term ends I will continue to chair the long-range planning committee for two subsequent years.

Redefining a sense of identity for AIBS is a large endeavor, but it is necessary: Dynamic environments are exhilarating only if we keep up with them. There is an enormous pool of scientific and educational talent in the life science community, and we must find innovative ways to act together so that talent may shine and succeed in a rapidly changing world. AIBS can lead the kind of collective effort that is needed, and the goal of the strategic and long-range planning processes is to ensure that AIBS will always continue to do so.

JOSEPH TRAVIS
*AIBS 2010 President*

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