

AIBS news

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AIBS *news*

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AIBS Expands Collaborations in Public Understanding of Science Projects

AIBS began work last year with other organizations—primarily the Arizona Geological Survey, the American Institute of Physics, the Geological Society of America, the National Science Teachers Association, and the University of California Museum of Paleontology—to launch the Coalition on the Public Understanding of Science (COPUS) and Year of Science 2009. The projects continue to develop quickly and were discussed with the AIBS Council last May. Both are dedicated—COPUS as an ongoing network and Year of Science 2009 as a 12-month-long set of activities—to the proposition that a general public with an understanding and appreciation of the nature of science is a prerequisite for a skilled workforce able to compete in a knowledge-based global economy, to make informed decisions about relative risks such as medical treatments and other quality-of-life factors, and to engage in public policy discussions involving science and technology. An insufficient understanding of science leads to exclusion from much of the discourse of modern society, an inability to distinguish science from nonscience, and a vulnerability to special interests attempting to influence public perceptions of science in their favor.

Sixty organizations have signed up so far for COPUS and Year of Science 2009. In addition to a number of AIBS member societies, as well as those of the Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology, the participating organizations include the National Academy of Sciences, the Environmental Protection Agency, the National Institutes of Health, the American Sociological Association, the American Geological Institute, the American Association of Physics Teachers, and the

Association for Astronomy Education—plus numerous museums, university departments, science centers, Café Scientifique chapters, and cultural organizations such as the Student Pugwash association and the Liz Lerman Dance Exchange.

AIBS Immediate Past-President Kent Holsinger (University of Connecticut) reports, “UConn’s provost just asked me to serve as the university-level coordinator for Year of Science 2009 activities, which will involve the main campus [Storrs], the regional campuses [Avery Point, Hartford, Stamford, Torrington, and Waterbury], the medical school, and (possibly) the law school. He’s directed our vice provost for research and graduate education [Greg Anderson] to provide additional funds to support interdisciplinary colloquia and other programs and to provide some staff support to help with coordination of UConn’s activities.”

At these early stages, many of the project activities are driven by the COPUS Web site, www.copusproject.org, and its subsection www.yearofscience2009.org. All interested organizations are invited to apply to join. The Web site features include a searchable database of participating organizations’ events and programs for promoting the public understanding of science, as well as online collaboration tools (for posting messages, sharing ideas and experiences, group chats, uploading documents, etc.).

For further information, contact Sheri Potter by e-mail: spotter@aibs.org.

Free Online Lectures from 2007 AIBS Annual Meeting

The AIBS Media Library at www.aibs.org/media-library contains videos, audio recordings, slides, and transcripts of plenary lectures recorded at AIBS annual meetings from 2000 onward. The eight lectures from the 2007 AIBS annual

meeting (“Evolutionary Biology and Human Health”) are now online:

Keynote speaker

- Eric Green (National Institutes of Health)
“Comparative Genome Sequencing: Using Evolution to Decode the Human Genome”

Infectious Diseases

- Edward Holmes (Pennsylvania State University)
“The Evolution of Emerging Viruses”
- Rustom Antia (Emory University)
“Modeling the Emergence of Infectious Diseases”

Genes and Genomics

- Carlos Bustamante (Cornell University)
“Computational Methods for Enabling Gene Mapping in Natural Populations and Domesticated Species”
- Douglas C. Wallace (University of California, Irvine)
“A Mitochondrial Paradigm of Metabolic and Degenerative Diseases, Cancer, and Aging: A Dawn for Evolutionary Medicine” (sponsored by the Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology)

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Recent AIBS Public Policy Reports Online at www.aibs.org

Human Adaptation and Malfunction

- Sarah Tishkoff (University of Maryland)
“Genetic Variation and Adaptation in Africa: Implications for Human Evolution and Disease”
- Martin Nowak (Harvard University)
“Evolutionary Dynamics of Cancer”

Endnote speaker

- Randolph Nesse
(University of Michigan)
“Evolutionary Medicine Is Flowering: How Can We Help It Set Seed?”

AIBS and COPUS Sponsor Science Communications Workshop with ESA

AIBS and the Coalition on the Public Understanding of Science are cosponsoring a student-run workshop, “Communicating Science to the Public: The Where, Why, and How of Engaging Non-scientists,” at the Ecological Society of America annual meeting in San Jose, California, on 5 August. The workshop is intended to motivate young ecologists to communicate their research outside the usual scientific outlets, and to introduce them to a variety of traditional outlets (e.g., newspapers, magazines, books, school groups) and novel avenues (e.g., Web sites, blogs, podcasts, music) for doing so. The workshop will also focus on the techniques of effective communication. Additional information about the workshop can be found at http://rydberg.biology.colostate.edu/communicating_science/.

AIBS Education Director at EnvironMentors Fair

Samantha Katz, AIBS director of education and outreach, was a judge at the 15th annual EnvironMentors Fair, held in Washington, DC, on 23 May.

EnvironMentors is an environment-based mentoring program aimed at preparing high school students for college programs and careers in science and environmental professions. The program is a collaborative effort of volunteer science and environmental professionals, aspiring high school students, science teachers, school administrators, government

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agencies, community organizations, foundations, and businesses.

Students and mentors work together over the academic year on research projects on environmental topics; the projects are then presented at the yearly fairs. Two \$10,000 scholarships are awarded each year to students in the EnvironMentors program.

In addition to serving as judge at the fair, Katz distributed AIBS tote bags and informational materials to all student competitors.

For more information, visit <http://ncseonline.org/EnvironMentors>.

AIBS Member Society Announces Grant

On 20 June, the St. Louis-based Botanical Society of America, an AIBS member organization, announced that the Monsanto Fund has awarded the PlantingScience educational outreach program a two-year, \$81,730 development grant.

PlantingScience provides high school students who are carrying out self-designed scientific research projects with online mentoring and support from plant scientists. The program is coordinated through a partnership between the American Society of Plant Biologists and the Botanical Society of America, both of which are AIBS member organizations.

The Monsanto Fund grant will be used to expand the PlantingScience list of inquiry-based topics available for use in the classroom. New units that will be available in the fall of 2008 include genetics, ecology, and economic botany. For more information, please visit www.PlantingScience.org.

NEON Partners with the Science and Engineering Alliance

The Science and Engineering Alliance (SEA), a coalition of minority-serving institutions founded in 1990, has been funded by the National Science Foundation (NSF) to engage underrepresented faculty and students in the research initiatives of the National Ecological Observatory Network (NEON).

An initial NSF grant in September 2006 enabled SEA to host educational workshops about the scope and poten-

tial of NEON science for the minority community, and to identify faculty from the biological sciences interested in participating in observatory research. SEA is a nonprofit consortium that serves four state-supported, historically black colleges and universities: Alabama A&M University, Jackson State University, Southern University and A&M College, and Prairie View A&M University. SEA also counts two national laboratories among its members: Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory and the National Institute of Standards and Technology.

“NEON is a long-term federal R&D initiative with enormous potential for involving minority-serving institutions,” said Robert Shepard, SEA executive director. “It’s a good fit with SEA’s mission: to ensure production of globally competitive American scientists and engineers that are prepared for the workforce.”

With the NEON–SEA partnership in place, a recent NSF supplement to the original SEA award will help new university faculty members and graduate researchers not familiar with NSF to assess solicitations and prepare competitive proposals. A one-and-a-half-day workshop that addresses funding opportunities within the NSF Directorate for Biological Sciences and strategies for submitting responses will be held in Atlanta, Georgia, in January 2008.

Another supplemental grant will fund (a) a research opportunity award, (b) research experiences for teachers and undergraduates, and (c) research assistantships for high school students.

The research opportunity award will expand the NEON research experience of Zhu Ning, a professor in urban forestry at Southern University and A&M College in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. In the summer of 2007, Ning will work in the laboratory of Alan Covich, director of the Institute of Ecology at the University of Georgia in Athens, on a NEON-relevant research project looking at how coastal riparian forests respond to pulsed disturbances and increased spread of invasive riparian trees.

The research experience award will enable a teacher, an undergraduate stu-

dent, and a high school student to research a topic under the direction of Teferi Tsegaye, of the Department of Plant and Soil Science at Alabama A&M University in Huntsville. The studies will focus on “bioassessment of benthic macroinvertebrates as in-stream water quality indicators.” A second similar group will engage in NEON-related research at Florida A&M University in Tallahassee, under the direction of Larry Robertson and Elijah Johnson, professors in the Environmental Sciences Institute. The focus will be on “using computer programs to obtain the flow of phosphorus and other nutrients in a watershed.”

“The justification for this supplement is twofold,” said Shepard. “First, it will enable teachers and students from underserved areas with limited access to participate in NSF-supported research. Second, it will broaden the participation and discussion of NEON itself.”

The First Wave of NEON Founding Members

The Science and Engineering Alliance has been approved by the NEON, Inc., Board of Directors as a founding member of the National Ecological Observatory Network. It joins an initial group of founding institutions that includes the following: University of Arizona, University of California–Los Angeles, University of Colorado–Boulder, Harvard University, University of Kansas, Kansas State University, University of New Hampshire, University of Notre Dame, University of South Carolina, Utah State University, University of Washington, and Williams College. NEON Project Office staff are currently processing additional founding member applications and forwarding them to the NEON, Inc., board for consideration.

NEON invites qualified institutions to apply for founding membership or institutional membership in NEON, Inc. Qualified institutions include colleges, universities, museums, scientific associations, and ecological or environmental nonprofit institutions interested in promoting the purposes and activities of NEON. Founding membership appli-

cations are due by 1 November 2007. For membership details and an application form, visit <http://neoninc.org/neon-membership/join-neon.html>.

Recent Articles Online at www.actionbioscience.org

Original interviews in English

- “Scientific Literacy in the Classroom,” with Carol A. Brewer, professor of biological sciences, University of Montana, and 2007 AIBS Education Award recipient
- “Slowing the Aging Process,” with Douglas C. Wallace, Center for Molecular and Mitochondrial Medicine and Genetics, University of California, Irvine
- “The Evolution of Emerging Viruses,” with Edward Holmes, Center for Infectious Disease Dynamics, Pennsylvania State University

Recent AIBS Public Policy Reports Online at www.aibs.org

Public Policy Report for 11 June 2007

- FY 08 science funding update
- It is summertime: Meet with your member of Congress
- Bush goes global: Plenty of talk, any action?
- Is there still room for science at NASA?
- More problems for NASA
- Employment opportunity: AIBS Public Affairs Representative
- New director for NSF’s Division of Environmental Biology
- Education issues *Condition of Education* 2007 report
- A museum for creationists
- From the *Federal Register*

Public Policy Report for 29 May 2007

- House interior appropriations subcommittee proposes increased funding for science and environment agencies
- Congress abuzz about pollinators
- House goes omnibus on innovation bills
- Massachusetts joins states advancing bio research
- From the *Federal Register*

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