

Committee Reports

- Membership Diversity Committee
-

Membership Diversity Committee

Robert E. Espinoza, Chair

SICB's Membership Diversity Committee, which seeks to increase the ethnic composition, representation, and participation of the *SICB* membership, seeks mentors for our mentoring program for the San Diego meeting. In 2004, we conducted a society-funded pilot program at the New Orleans meeting. This program brought African-American faculty and undergraduates from Xavier University of Louisiana to the meeting. Xavier is the oldest historically black Catholic college in the United States, and currently has the best record in the US for placing African-American students into medical schools. Thus, Xavier students are well prepared for careers in the sciences, yet largely unexposed to research. During three targeted social events, the invited student and faculty participants interacted with *SICB* faculty and students, which included Fred Stollnitz, who oversees the Undergraduate Mentoring in Environmental Biology (UMEB) Program at NSF, several NSF-UMEB PIs, and *SICB* President John Wingfield and President-elect Sally Woodin. On the basis of feedback from the participating faculty and students, and our own observations, the effort was a resounding success. Students reported (1) before the meeting, they were unaware of possibility and breadth of careers in research; (2) a profound sense of reinforcement for their interest in science and personal support; and (3) interactions with faculty at the meeting have already led to opportunities to participate in research.

Based on the success of the pilot program, we have a plan for future efforts to sustain this positive momentum. We will implement an expanded mentoring program for underrepresented student members at the San Diego meeting. Here's where you come in. If you are willing to serve as a mentor, please contact me and share with me your interests. Your responsibility will be to help the student navigate the often-overwhelming program our society offers its members. This might include helping the student choose among concurrent presentations and social events and introducing them to investigators (faculty and students) that share their interests. You will not be expected to spend every minute with the student. We will do our best to match students and mentors with mutual research interests. Postdocs and seasoned graduate students are encouraged to participate and you need not be a underrepresented minority yourself to be a mentor.