CLOSURE OR A NEW BEGINNING?

A Message from the Past President

Dear Colleagues:

The calendar year and another Fall semester were rapidly drawing to a close when I began considering my message as past president of ACUBE. In recent weeks I have given considerable effort to firming up some of my thoughts and putting them in the form of a letter to the members. Although I could consider many aspects of ACUBE, I will restrict my comments to three areas: membership, the 1999 meeting, and communications with members, other organizations and the general public.

Attendance at the 43rd Annual Meeting of ACUBE held at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls was similar to what it has been at other meetings in the past; however, our present membership has grown to nearly 500. As of February 1, 2000, ACUBE has members in 44 states and two foreign countries. We receive manuscripts from individuals in many of the states and from several foreign countries. Not only are we increasing in members but also our journal is more widely recognized. Karen Klycek, as Past President, asked all of us to consider some questions relating to our growth: How big do we want to get? Can we become so large that we lose some of the important aspects of our organization? I agree with Karen that these questions are worthy of consideration but, as she has stated, are not pressing problems. Our vigorous expansion is a continuing reminder of the importance and relevance of our organization to those who emphasize undergraduate biology education.

Last year’s meeting “Integrating Process and Content: Flexibility for the Future” is still fresh in my mind. I was impressed with the quality of the presentations and workshops, as well as the manner in which they fit the theme. It gave me confidence that the concern I have for balancing process and content is very much a shared issue in biological education. Both biology and science in general are rather paradoxical in that what at the time may seem complete and well understood can, with further information, become quite incomplete. For example, the study of genetics was quite “complete” prior to 1950; it was based upon the Mendelian model. With the isolation and identification of DNA, that understanding of genetics became very incomplete. This dynamic aspect of biology requires continual vigilance and up-grading on the part of the biology teacher. This was excitingly obvious in the participants at the River Falls meeting! While there is a sense of closure with the completion of another annual meeting, I also have a sense of a beginning as memories of the meeting influence my thoughts about the interrelationship of process and content in my biology classes.

As Karen Klycek and others have noted, ACUBE has been working closely with CELS and AIBS. These organizations include members who are interested in biological education and advances in the discipline. I attended a President’s Summit sponsored by AIBS; my travel was supported by ACUBE. There were about 70 presidents of AIBS affiliated organizations in attendance. The participants considered, in a workshop format, three key topics: 1) integration of good science into wise public policy, 2) examination of opportunities for enhanced public and private support for research in biology, and 3) identification of areas of common concern or interest in education and careers in biology. It was the last workshop, in particular, that I believe can provide an avenue for ACUBE to affect change by emphasizing the process of science in the undergraduate biology classroom in educational institutes of all sizes.

There was some discussion of the development of curricular guidelines akin to those developed by most states for elementary and secondary science education. The matter of who develops these guidelines is of concern to many educators. Please read Buzz Hoagland’s “Great Expectations for the New Millennium” in this issue for further insight into the matter.

I think it is important that we maintain the communication and sense of connectedness among members that has characterized ACUBE throughout its history. In addition, we must strive to extend these aspects to the membership of other organizations and to the general public. Please contact me, or our current President Buzz Hoagland, or any member of the Steering Committee, if you have suggestions and/or ideas about the direction and involvement of ACUBE is relation to issues in biological education. Remember, the elected officers of ACUBE want to represent you.

I look forward to seeing you at the 44th Annual Meeting at Indiana State University next October.

Best Wishes,

Charlie Bicak, Past President

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