Great Expectations for the New Millennium

Message From Our President

The new millennium has apparently arrived with little fanfare. I recognize that some purists will argue that Dionysius Exiguus, a sixth century monk, started the first millennium in year one instead of year zero, so that the actual millennium begins on 1 January 2001. For a thoroughly entertaining review of this subject, I recommend Stephen Jay Gould's 1997 Questioning The Millennium: A Rationalist's Guide To A Precisely Arbitrary Countdown, Harmony Books, New York. However, the surface does not always reflect the soul. Some recent events indicate that change, be it good or not so good, is on the way.

Past President Charlie Bicak speaks of a move to develop national curriculum frameworks for undergraduate biology education (parallel in scope to those for undergraduate Mathematics and Chemistry). Many of us will likely agree that some guidelines would be helpful, providing that educators are the primary framers and that businesspeople do not have veto power. American education has always been influenced by the corporate world; however, we may be on the verge of a hostile takeover (for further insight please read the recent message forwarded to the ACUBE Listserve entitled Teaching The Three 'M's In The New Millennium: (Multi-tasking, Materialistics, and Mind Management) by Edward Miller, former editor of the Harvard Education Letter). The fall 1999 issue of Thought & Action: The NEA Higher Education Journal also reveals some disturbing corporate influences in higher education. It is worth mentioning that the University of Phoenix, the leader in distance education, is now the nation's largest private, for-profit institution of higher education and compensates faculty at a rate of $750 to $1000 per course. We will discuss some of these issues at an Educator's Issues Forum during the 44th Annual Meeting at Indiana State University in Terre Haute, Indiana (see this issue for a brief summary of those issues).

For the good of biology education, for the good of the Academy, and for the good of educators, we must get involved with this movement to establish national curricula, national standards, and, likely national testing programs. Most states have implemented curriculum reform at the K-12 level during the last decade of the millennium, and many have instituted high-stakes standardized tests required for graduation. Many educators have endorsed the changes in the curriculum, but the vote on standardized tests as the major criterion for graduation is still out. We, the members of ACUBE, have the opportunity to work with the various private and public agencies which will be responsible for these future changes.

Charlie Bicak also speaks of maintaining communication and connectedness which have been a hallmark of ACUBE throughout our history. At the dawn of the new millennium, communication is queen (king for those older? younger?). We face daily issues in our courses, in our departments, and in our institutions, but we seem only to communicate four times each year via Bioscene and once each year at our annual meetings. We have a listserve to which we can all belong (contact Tim Mulkey to sign up) for more frequent communication. If you are not a member of the listserve, I encourage you to become a member and use it.

Our major vehicle of communication, Bioscene, is getting better all the time (I’ve heard that phrase somewhere before). We have more articles per issue, more issues per year, and now we have color graphics on the covers. Concomitantly, our costs are increasing. Therefore, we will be asking the membership to vote "yes" on a proposal to increase ACUBE annual dues to $30 at the 2000 meeting in Terre Haute.

I look forward to more regular communication via the listserve and to our next meeting at Indiana State.

Sincerely,

Buzz Hoagland, President
e-mail bhoagland@wsc.mass.edu