President Calls for Enhanced Diversity and Inclusion within American Society of Parasitologists

In a published address by Susan Perkins, immediate past president of ASP, Perkins brings attention to the issue of diversity within the society, highlighting steps the society has taken toward inclusion and suggested improvements for the future.

LAWRENCE, Kan. (PRWEB) December 27, 2018 -- Journal of Parasitology -- The lack of diversity within the scientific community is not a new problem. While there are many published studies showcasing the benefits of collaboration between a diverse set of individuals, there is still a substantial lack of diversity within some scientific societies. Susan Perkins, the immediate past president of the American Society of Parasitologists (ASP), saw both the benefits and need for diversity within the society.

In her 2018 presidential address, delivered at the Annual Meeting in Cancún México and published in the latest issue of the Journal of Parasitology, Perkins suggests that in a similar way that biodiversity is viewed as beneficial, a diverse group of individuals provides better ideas and faster results when faced with complex problems. Along with other cited research that support these claims, Perkins cites a study conducted by Freeman and Huang (2014) in which they found that ethnic diversity in a group of authors had the strongest correlation to higher citation rates over a 5-year period.

Reviewing leadership and award winners within the American Society of Parasitologists, Perkins found that there have been just 6 women elected to the position of president since ASP was founded in 1924 and that the gender balance in award winners is heavily skewed toward men. However, the data revealed that a more equal gender balance exists among the Society’s new investigator awards, which are awarded to junior members of the society.

Perkins’ address stressed the vital role a society plays in an individual’s early professional development. “Scientific societies play a really important role in the lives of scientists,” said Perkins. “The generational shift is slow but in a scientific society anyone can join and our leaders are rotated on a regular basis. This allows for more opportunities for people of different backgrounds and genders to join and advance within the society.”

In 2016, a society ad hoc committee, in which Perkins was chair, drafted a Conference Discrimination and Anti-Harassment Policy. The society has also worked to be more age-inclusive by instituting a policy where a student should be appointed to every committee, ensuring junior member voices are being represented.

“Two years ago we did our first post-meeting survey. In doing the survey, and being one of the people who looked at the responses, I saw that half of our meeting attendees are senior faculty and half were students. They have different goals and expectations with a different way of looking at things. It makes sense to have their voices heard on the committees as well,” said Perkins.

In an effort to be more inclusive, ASP has also held two recent annual meetings in Mexico, making travel easier for Latin American scientists and allowing for more interaction between Canadian, U.S. and Mexican members of ASP.

While steps have been made to further advance inclusion within the society, the presidential address outlines steps for future improvement. This includes publishing a diversity and inclusion statement on the website,
pushing for broader scope in the Society’s award nominations, collecting demographic data to test trends of diversity in ASP and setting up daycares and hosting special socials and workshops at annual meetings.

While the American Society for Parasitologists is by no means alone in its need for more diversity, conversations like this help to propel the society into a more inclusive future.


###

About the Journal of Parasitology

The Journal of Parasitology is the official journal of the American Society of Parasitologists (ASP). It is a medium for the publication of new original research, primarily on parasitic animals, and official business of the ASP. The journal is intended for all with interests in basic or applied aspects of general, veterinary, and medical parasitology and epidemiology. For more about the journal or the society, see http://www.journalofparasitology.org.
Contact Information
Dominique Scanlan
Allen Press
http://www.allenpress.com
+1 (785) 865-9226

Online Web 2.0 Version
You can read the online version of this press release here.