United States

http://www.arabidopsis.org/portals/masc/countries/United_States.jsp
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North American Arabidopsis Steering Committee (NAASC)

The eight member NAASC (www.arabidopsis.org/portals/masc/countries/NAASC_Info.jsp) is composed primarily of U.S. researchers and represents Arabidopsis researchers in the United States, Canada and Mexico. Annual elections by North American researchers registered at TAIR provide new members to replace two that rotate off the committee each year. Xinnian Dong (Duke University) and Blake Meyers (Deleware Biotechnology Institute) were recently elected to serve a four year term starting this July. Xuemei Chen and Joe Kieber conclude their term at the 2009 International Conference on Arabidopsis Research (ICAR). Additional continuing committee members include Julian Schroeder, Caren Chang, George Haughn, Scott Poethig, Mark Estelle, and Jane Glazebrook. NAASC provides North American representation to the MASC and serves as the main organizing and fundraising body for the ICAR when it is held in North America and raises funds to support young North American scientists to participate in foreign ICARs. For the 2008 ICAR, Caren Chang and Julian Schroeder spearheaded the fund-raising effort while Scott Poethig submitted funding proposals for the 2009 ICAR.

The International Conference on Arabidopsis Research

NAASC organizes the ICAR when it is held in North America and supports young North American scientists to participate in foreign ICARs. Since 1995 the meeting had been in the U.S. 2 of every 3 years. In 2005 the NAASC changed the format of North American meetings to alternate sites with the usual location in Madison, Wisconsin. During the annual MASC meeting at the 2007 ICAR, a 3 year conference site rotation was adopted: North America, Europe, and Asia/Pacific Rim.

The 19th ICAR, held July 2009 in Montreal, marked the first time the meeting took place in Canada and over 800 attendees participated. The conference organizing committee was chaired by NAASC members Joe Kieber and Xuemei Chen, and included Tamara Western and Hugo Zheng from local McGill University. NAASC developed a meeting survey to gauge the opinions of attendees about the ICAR to help in planning future meetings. A subset of the results from the 322 responses received are presented in the accompanying Table. Joanna Friesner, U.S.-based MASC Coordinator, provided overall organization of the three conferences held from 2006-2008. The ICAR plans to return to the U.S. in 2011 following the 2010 meeting in Japan, with current plans to return to Madison, Wisconsin.

Post-ICAR 2008 Survey

Of 322 respondents	31% Graduate Student	29% Postdoctoral Scholar	29% Faculty	5% Industry	5% Industry
First Arabidopsis Conference?	55% No	45% Yes			
Home Country	39% U.S.	28% Europe	15% Canada	15% Asia/Pacific Rim	5% Other
Opinion on length of meeting (5 days)	84% Just Right	9% Too Long	3% Too Short	4% No Opinion	
Preference on speaker type	79% Mix of Plenary/ Abstract	18% Plenary Only	3% No Opinion		
Preference on speaker mix	50% Equal Mix	32% More Invited	10% More Abstract	6% Invited Only	2% No Opinion
Were 3 poster sessions enough?	68% Yes	32% No			
Quality of talks	50% Good	35% Excellent	14% Average	0.6% Poor	0.4% No Opinion
Liked community workshops?	72% Yes	4% No	24% No Opinion		
Liked 'free afternoon'?	92% Yes	8% No			

Follow-up to the 2020 Vision for Biology workshop: The role of plants in addressing grand challenges

The NSF's 2010 Project, designed to elucidate gene function in Arabidopsis, will have its last competition for proposals in 2010. Researchers in the US began discussions in 2007 to develop a new vision to propel forward the next decade of Arabidopsis research in the US. In January, 2008, an NSF-sponsored workshop was held which included participants invited from different areas within the Arabidopsis research community as well as from other plant and animal model system communities. The goal of the workshop was to be forward-looking about the direction of biology research in the next decade and to discuss where plant biology, Arabidopsis, and model organisms fit into this larger vision.

The outcomes of the workshops were discussed during the 2008 MASC meeting and were made publicly available in reports posted at TAIR and described in the 2008 MASC annual report distributed to each attendee of the 2008 ICAR. A summary report can be found at: www.arabidopsis.org/portals/masc/masc_docs/masc_wk_rep.jsp. NAASC members also contributed to an editorial describing the workshop outcomes that was published in the journal Molecular Plant (ref: Molecular Plant 1 (4): 561-3, July 2008). During the 2008 ICAR, NAASC also facilitated a special seminar by Dr. Jim Collins (NSF) which included a presentation to discuss future NSF funding strategies and research interests followed by an interactive discussion session.

Arabidopsis Researchers Elected to the National Academy of Sciences

The National Academy of Sciences (NAS) was established in 1863. It is an honorific society of distinguished scholars engaged in scientific and engineering research, dedicated to the furtherance of science and technology and to their use for the general welfare. The Academy membership is composed of approximately 2,100 members and 380 foreign associates, of whom nearly 200 have won Nobel Prizes. Members and foreign associates of the Academy are elected in recognition of their distinguished and continuing achievements in original research; election to the Academy is considered one of the highest honors that can be accorded a scientist or engineer.

- Arabidopsis researchers elected April 28, 2008: James Carrington (Oregon State University, Corvallis), Steve Kay and Martin Yanofsky (University of California, San Diego), and Johanna Schmitt (Brown University).
- Arabidopsis researchers elected April 28, 2009: Robert Fischer (University of California, Berkeley), Sarah Hake (USDA Plant Gene Expression Center), and Detlef Weigel (now at the Max Planck Institute for Developmental Biology).

ABRC: Randy Scholl, Director, to retire

Management and supervisory roles at ABRC are under reorganization to accommodate the retirement of Randy Scholl in August, 2009. Dr. Erich Grotewold of OSU's Department of Plant Cellular and Molecular Biology will become the new Director. The ABRC has just made a new senior hire (Dr. Jelena Brkljacic), which together with the reorganization of the existing personnel, will ensure a swift transition.

The iPlant Collaborative- One year update

NSF funding for the iPlant Collaborative (iPC), at the level of 50 million USD for 5 years with the possibility of a second 5 year funding period, began February, 2008. The overarching goal is to develop a fluid, community-driven cyberinfrastructure collaborative for the plant sciences that would enable new conceptual advances through integrative, computational thinking. The iPC will bring together plant biologists, computer and information scientists and engineers, as well as other experts, to address 'Grand Challenges' in the plant sciences. Arabidopsis, with its advanced resources, datasets and extensive research community, is expected to play an integral part.

The first year goals were primarily to stimulate community participation in the project, bring together groups to propose Grand Challenges, and begin creating specific cyberinfrastructure components. In the second year, iPC will begin supporting cyberinfrastructure for selected projects. In 2008, 5 of 9 submitted Grand Challenge workshops were held which included over 300 participants from 12 countries. In January, 2009, iPC held a brainstorming workshop on what cyberinfrastructure is required for addressing challenges in plant sciences. In March, 2009, 6 Grand Challenge Collaboration requests to develop cyberinfrastructure were reviewed. The iPC will begin by supporting two efforts; the first, Plant Phylogenetics, will create cyberinfrastructure to identify and display evolutionary relationships between ½ million green plant species by creating phylogenetic trees which eventually will include linkages to species data, thereby serving as a foundation for broadly applicable specific trait and ecological information. The second Grand Challenge project, the Genotype-to-Phenotype group, will examine the Phenology of Flowering, and will focus on the needs to integrate large datasets as one of its primary objectives. The project outcomes are expected to be broadly applicable to a wide range of plant biologists. Also underway is the development of iPlant Action Teams (iPATs), two-person teams consisting of one computational and one plant biology faculty member to solve a mini-project in plant computational biology in order to develop models for successful collaborations. Other activities include the iPlant Summer Teacher Research Fellowship, now in its second year, and several workshops including 'Computational Biology for Biology Educators'. In summer and fall, 2009, iPC expects to consider additional Grand Challenge workshop proposals and collaborations.

US Young Researcher Exchange Program

In 2005 a program was established to allow graduate students and post-doctoral fellows from NSF-supported US labs to engage in short-term research visits to German labs. This NSF-funded program is a collaboration with the German Arabidopsis Functional Genomics program, AFGN, which similarly allows German students to work in US labs. Since its inception, the US program has funded research visits to Germany by 2 post-doctoral fellows and 11 PhD students. AFGN has supported 7 PhD students. Both programs end this year.