

Curators of the world unite: the International Society of Biocuration

We often take the wealth of biological data that is available for granted. As computational biologists, we can often search the Internet and find a dataset that will fulfill our needs. These are usually made available through one of the hundreds of biological databases that have been created over the last 20 years. The people who marshal this information and put it into the formats that allow us to easily work with it are the unsung heroes of molecular biology. The recently formed International Society of Biocuration (ISB) gives these people a voice.

Biocuration can be summed up as the transformation of biological data into an organized form. It is only achieved through the combined efforts of the experimental community who generate the data, the biocurators who organize the data and the software and database developers who make the data available for all to use.

The ISB grew out of the International Biocuration Conferences, which provided a forum for biocurators to discuss the scientific obstacles as well as new developments in the field. The next meeting is the Fourth International Biocurator Meeting that will be held in Chiba, Japan, in October 2010. Further details can be found on the ISB's web site at <http://www.biocurator.org/>. I would like to encourage all biocurators and developers with an interest in curation to register as a member of the ISB and play a part in the growth of this exciting new body.

The Society was founded in early 2009. The first election of the executive board was held in September 2009, which is now composed of Pascale Gaudet (President), Lorna Richardson (Secretary), Lydie Bougueleret (Treasurer), Terri Attwood, Tanya Berardini, Tadashi Imanishi, Owen White, Ioannis Xenarios and myself. The mission of the ISB is to define the work of biocurators; propose discussion and job forums; organize conferences and workshops; build relationships with journals and publishers to improve links between journals and databases; provide documentation and gold standards; and foster connections with user communities to ensure that databases meet their needs. A further important purpose is working to raise awareness of biocuration and biological databases with funding agencies to help secure long-term funding for biocuration. Despite the billions spent each year on generating biological data, there is still a reluctance to invest in the relatively small fraction of funding needed to maximize the use of this data through curation.

Next time you download a dataset for your work, spare a thought for the hardworking biocurator that has made your life so much easier. If you are a biocurator or database developer, then please join the ISB to support their important work. I would like to wish the International Society of Biocuration a warm welcome and every future success.

Conflict of Interest: A.B. is a member of the Executive Board of the ISB.

Alex Bateman
Wellcome Trust Sanger Institute, Cambridge CB10 1SA, UK
agb@sanger.ac.uk