

## **SSB Interim Diversity Committee Report**

Interim Diversity Committee: Kelly Zamudio, Hervé Sauquet, Tracy Heath, Alexandra Hernandez

The SSB Interim Diversity Committee was tasked with enhancing diversity efforts in our society, devising a mission and set of values regarding diversity in SSB, interfacing with ASN and SSE diversity committees, and making recommendations for future equity, inclusion, and diversity (EID) efforts by the Society.

**We recommend the formation of a standing committee that focuses on incentivizing activities at all levels of the society (executive council, council, membership, meetings) that enhance the visibility, recruitment, retention, and mentorship of a diverse membership.** A proposal for the creation of this committee and its governance is submitted along with this report.

We outline here some of the activities that we have participated in over the last year as an Interim Committee, and ideas of how a permanent diversity committee could expand on these activities. We also include a list of suggested nominees, or other members who have expressed interest in participating if an SSB Diversity Committee is created.

### ***Inclusiveness:***

Including individuals on any axis of diversity requires an environment that is welcoming, and open to dialogue about the experiences, advantages, and barriers in our professional paths.

*Current Activities:* In an attempt to start this dialogue, representatives of the Interim Diversity Committee collaborated with ASN and SSE Diversity Committees to host a special Story Collider event, where real scientists tell real stories. The three diversity committees solicited talks from members, met to evaluate the applicant pool, advertised ticket sales and the event, and worked with Story Collider and the societies to host this event. The event was hugely successful, and thanks to continued support by the three societies, we will have a second iteration in Cleveland at #Evol2020.

The interim Diversity Committee also nominated members for the selection committee for the new IDEAS award. This is a tri-society award, selected from member nominations, that honors a member for their outstanding service to promote diversity and inclusion in the fields of ecology and evolution.

*Potential Future Activities:* In the future, diversity activities at meetings should continue to highlight individual experiences, and how they lead to diverse perspectives and approaches that benefit us all. We should consider using our SSB Communications channels and social media to highlight members and their careers in systematics. A quarterly profile on a graduate student and a new PI is a potential avenue for this. We might also consider informal get togethers at the

meetings targeting different career or underrepresented groups, for networking and transfer of information about career experiences (for example, we might model this after the LGBTQA+ gathering sponsored by SSE in Providence).

***Recruitment and Retention:***

Attracting a diverse membership requires proactive efforts to make people aware of the community in SSB and what we do.

*Current Activities:* Communications Director Tracy Heath has increased efforts for dissemination of our message, through social media, society newsletters, and more recently through a proposal (which is supported by SSB funds) to SACNAS for a symposium focused on biodiversity and systematics. If chosen, the SACNAS symposium will attract early career biodiversity scientists and provide a perfect opportunity for recruitment of new members into our society.

*Potential Future Activities:* We need more efforts that target early career scientists and involve them in society activities. A travel grant for diverse and national and international students and post-doc attendees at meetings would be helpful initially, especially if students were also paired with senior students or scientists at meetings. Partnering with a local community college at a meeting to host a workshop for their students may increase early exposure to systematic biology for young scientists who have limited research experience at their institution. Early exposure can translate to increased recruitment of early career scientists to SSB.

***Mentorship and Professional development:***

*Potential Future Activities:* The Interim Diversity Committee has discussed a number of potential avenues, including a career-development workshop at a future SSB meeting geared toward job applications for systematic and biodiversity science positions, and a paired mentor-mentee program for first time attendees. Other potential workshops could include discussions on entering/applying for graduate school (given from the perspectives of a diverse group of graduate students).

***Informed decision-making:***

Shifting the participation and engagement of our society members in EID efforts requires us to make decisions as a community that take into account our diversity goals. This requires decisions about our leadership and recruitment efforts that are driven by data on membership, service, and where we want to get.

*Potential Future Activities:* Some data analysis on membership, meeting attendance, and survey data would be an excellent place to start, to better understand our constituency, and make informed decisions about where to focus our efforts. This is probably the activity area for a new diversity committee with the most potential for change.

## **Potential nominees for a new SSB Diversity Committee**

The interim committee discussed potential future committee members and chairs and identified the following SSB members that have a record of service in diversity work. Many of these members are currently serving in other capacities, but they reflect a diversity of perspectives and experiences. We have not yet contacted any of these individuals to inquire about their interest. This list is representative, and not intended to be exhaustive or prescriptive.

Rosana Zenil-Ferguson (University of Hawai'i Manoa)

Emily Sessa (University of Florida)

Graham Slater (University of Chicago)

John McCormack (Occidental College)

Janet Buckner (Louisiana State University)

Fellipe Zapata (UCLA)

Ryan Folk (Mississippi State)

Laura Laogomarsino (Louisiana State University)

Jessica Light (Texas A&M)

Hervé Sauquet (Royal Botanic Garden, Sydney)

Tracy Heath (Iowa State University)

Dean Adams (Iowa State University)

Brian O'Meara (University of Tennessee, Knoxville)

Jesus Martinez Gomez (grad student, Cornell)

Natya Hans (grad student, University of Florida)

Carrie Tribble (grad student, UC Berkeley)

Alexandra Hernandez (grad student, University of Florida)

## **Proposal for Establishment of an SSB Diversity Committee**

**Prepared by the Interim SSB Diversity Committee (Tracy Heath, Hervé Sauquet, Alexandra Hernandez, and Kelly Zamudio)**

### **Mission**

The SSB Diversity Committee will promote diversity, equity, and inclusiveness to enhance the study of all fields in systematics, and to foster the career of early career systematists.

### **Vision**

A diverse and inclusive SSB will foster innovation, creativity, and inclusion at all professional levels. Through independent activities as well as activities in collaboration with diversity committees of the joint evolution societies, our goal is to promote the advancement of the study of systematics among underrepresented groups by supporting the inclusion and retention of individuals of all identity groups.

### **Values**

The SSB diversity committee's goal is to celebrate and foster the inclusion of all social, racial, cultural, sexual, gender, and economic groups in the society by promoting the advancement of the study of systematics for all interested parties at all career stages. Our guiding principles are:

*Inclusiveness*: Improving the visibility of underrepresented minority scientists in the field.

*Recruitment and Retention*: Devising strategies to recruit and retain underrepresented scientists in our field of study.

*Mentorship*: Pairing young scholars with mid-career and advanced career scientists for mentorship in career development.

*Professional development*: Supporting our scientists through educational and/or development opportunities.

*Informed decision-making*: Basing decisions by all SSB committees on best practices and data collection initiatives, keeping diversity as a target at all levels of the society.

### **Diversity Statement**

The Society of Systematic Biologists (SSB) is dedicated to promoting a broader understanding of the relationships among all living beings, both past and present. The society focuses on theory, principles, and methods of systematics as well as phylogenetics, evolution, morphology, biogeography, paleontology, genetics, and the classification of biodiversity.

We encourage the professional development of our members and support increasing participation and access. At the scientific core of our fields are value for, and appreciation of, biological diversity and, reflective of this, we welcome, support, and celebrate the diversity of our members. We are sensitive to the ways that diversity changes and grows in modern society

and acknowledge that it is the responsibility of all members of the society, independent of their demographic status, to be part of the process.

As a professional society, we promote equity, inclusion, and diversity at all levels, and we encourage participation by individuals of all groups. We encourage an inclusive, supportive, and impartial work space free from sexual harassment, bigotry, bullying or violence of any kind. We aim to promote ethical and inclusive practices during the conduct of research, with special attention to the use of cultural resources and professional and safe conduct during field work. Finally, we will work as a society to eliminate the barriers that make achieving success in scientific careers more difficult for members of underrepresented groups.

### **Bylaws**

- 1. The diversity committee's agenda will be set by the diversity committee on a yearly basis and in consultation with the approval of the acting SSB president and Executive council.**
- 2. The diversity committee chair will nominate two members, in consultation with the President, to serve on the committee along with a graduate student nominated member.**
- 3. The diversity committee will meet in person or via videoconferencing twice yearly to discuss goals and progress.**
- 4. The diversity committee shall be empowered to assess the society's commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion and will be granted access to appropriate society data for these endeavors--e.g., membership lists, awards etc.**

### **Officers**

The four officers of the diversity committee shall be a chair and two members appointed by the president-elect for terms of three years. The president and council are encouraged to solicit nominations and self-nominations for the SSB Diversity committee, so as to reach the largest number of potential participants. A graduate student representative will additionally serve as a member but will be appointed by the SSB council. To foster continuity in action, the chair shall rotate from their duty following two years of service to then serve a final year of the committee as a member. The terms of all officers shall begin on the first of January following their nomination and acceptance of the position..