

### Trainees Are Special People at ASHG

It may sound cliché, but trainees are the future of human genetics. Trainees have always been highly valued members of the American Society of Human Genetics (ASHG) community. Indeed, our trainee members have long benefited from various programs, and new initiatives are always being implemented to continue to engage and foster the development of trainees in the field of genetics and within ASHG.

ASHG's special efforts to reach out to trainees include offering special trainee membership rates, holding special workshops and events at the annual meeting, offering a variety of new career services and activities online and at the annual meeting, sponsoring fellowships, and creating a new postdoctoral committee.

### Membership

Trainee membership in ASHG is open to postdoctoral fellows, residents, and students in degree-granting programs in the Americas. The overseas affiliate membership category is similarly open to those from other countries. Trainees are invited to participate in all activities of the Society, with the exception of receiving continuing education credits or serving on the board. Currently, dues for the trainee category of membership in the Americas are priced to be very affordable and to encourage trainees to join. Details of the membership dues, which start at \$25 per year (without the *American Journal of Human Genetics* subscription) and \$65 (with the *Journal* subscription), are found at the ASHG Web site (<http://www.ashg.org>).

### Annual Meeting

The annual meeting of ASHG is a central focus of the Society each year, and many efforts are made by the board and the Program Committee to provide opportunities for trainees. Registration costs for the annual meeting of ASHG are greatly reduced for trainees.

All abstracts, no matter who their first authors are, are reviewed in the same pool. Each abstract is assigned to a category of content, as selected by the submitter, and is reviewed and scored by three geneticists. Those abstracts with the best scores are selected for platform presentation, and the very best are presented in the plenary session on the first day of the meeting. In the past 2 years, 3 of 12 plenary presentations have been pre-

sented by student or postdoctoral first authors. A similar proportion of the other 286 platform talks are presented by trainees.

For many years, ASHG has awarded trainees for outstanding scientific presentations at the annual meeting. Awards are made in six categories: predoctoral basic, translational and clinical and postdoctoral basic, translational, and clinical. As abstracts are submitted, mentors may nominate the trainee for consideration in a particular award category. The ASHG Awards Committee then reviews the finalist abstracts, attends the platform or poster presentations of the trainees, and presents the awards on the final afternoon of the annual meeting. During this process, several senior scientists are fully engaged in the review and evaluation of the work, providing a clear opportunity for trainees to interact with the leading researchers in their fields of endeavor. Each year, the editorial board of the *Journal* selects two outstanding articles from the previous year that have pre- or postdoctoral trainees as first authors. At the annual meeting, these authors are presented the C. W. Cotterman Award for their notable contributions to the field.

In addition to these awards, the program of each annual meeting provides several opportunities for students, postdoctoral fellows, and young investigators to interact with more senior members of the organization. Trainees are encouraged to attend the ASHG Business Meeting to learn more about the Society and to prepare for a future leadership role. On the first full day of the meeting, ASHG sponsors a Student-Mentor Luncheon, at which ~20 well-known investigators have lunch with trainees who have registered for the event. Each investigator chats with 8–10 trainees, answering questions and providing advice from his or her perspective as a mentor, lab director, and experienced investigator.

In addition, for the past few years there has been a professional development workshop on grantsmanship, designed to represent a mock study section. This format has provided the opportunity for young investigators to observe the grants review process. This has been a well-attended and highly regarded program. For 2006, the topic of the workshop will be demystifying the publications process. Key editors and staff from the *Journal* and other genetics journals will be presenting information and inside tips about the process and will be available to answer questions at this special session on Wednesday evening.

For the first time, there will be a session organized specifically for trainees, which will be planned by a new Ad Hoc Postdoc Committee appointed by the president and will be held on one of the open evenings. The preliminary plans include inviting a variety of geneticists to form a panel to talk about several types of professional opportunities, including academic tracks, industry-based positions, policy, and other “alternative” career options. As the program is developed, information will be posted on the annual meeting Web site (<http://genetics.faseb.org/genetics/ashg/menu-annmeet.shtml>).

### **Career Services**

ASHG continues to expand the career services portion of our Web site, including job opportunities and support services for those seeking assistance with resumes. For the second time, we will also have a Job Fair Meet and Greet on Tuesday, where those seeking positions can interact with all those advertising openings at their universities or companies. In our initial year, the response was overwhelming, and expanded accommodations will be made available this year for this event. Again in New Orleans, the Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology (FASEB) Career Services Office will have a booth on the exhibit floor, with professionals available to assist with resume preparation and to give advice on job searching and interviewing.

### **Fellowships**

For several years, ASHG and the National Human Genome Research Institute (NHGRI) have partnered to sponsor a policy fellowship. The fellowship is 15–16

months long and involves several months in the NHGRI Policy Office, 8 months as a free agent in a Capitol Hill legislative office, and several weeks with ASHG, where the fellow will participate in policy issues within the not-for-profit sector. ASHG also works with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to place a fellow at the CDC for a 2-year period. The goal of this fellowship is to enhance the interaction between the genetics and public health communities, as well as to provide a direct opportunity for genetics trainees to train in public health genetics. A future article in this series will focus on these fellowships.

### **New Committee**

An Ad Hoc Postdoc Committee has been appointed with the following charges: (a) to plan and present a special session at the annual meeting, (b) to propose additional approaches or programs that ASHG could develop to assist young scientists in their early career development, and (c) to provide a report to the Board of Directors that summarizes activities and proposes innovative actions based on discussions with trainee members of the Society. Dr. Derek Scholes has been appointed chair of that group, and the committee will be advised by Kenna Shaw ([kshaw@ashg.org](mailto:kshaw@ashg.org)) and staffed by Jane Salomon in the ASHG office ([jsalomon@ashg.org](mailto:jsalomon@ashg.org)).

We look forward to the participation of many students, postdoctoral fellows, and young scientists in the many activities and opportunities provided by ASHG.

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