

Society News

The mission of the American Society of Human Genetics (ASHG), which represents an international membership of ~7,000 geneticists, is to promote and expand research, apply knowledge to enhance health care, train the next generation of genetics professionals, and educate and inform the public about genetics. This new feature of the *Journal*, *Society News*, will highlight current and planned ASHG activities that support these goals. In addition, the ASHG Web site (<http://www.ashg.org/>) includes regularly updated information on these and other projects. The vision for *Society News* is to inform ASHG members about Society activities and to more fully engage the talents and expertise of members in promoting, guiding, and fulfilling Society endeavors.

In Bethesda, to facilitate ASHG operations, a professional staff of 15, including the executive vice president, manage the day-to-day operations of the ASHG and the Genetics Society of America (GSA), with the support of meetings management professionals from the Federation of American Societies of Experimental Biology (FASEB). In this inaugural *Society News*, an overview of the organization of the Society as well as of ASHG initiatives will be provided. Primary activities of ASHG, well known to the membership, are the publication of *The American Journal of Human Genetics* and the annual scientific meeting. The *Journal* is highly regarded and continues to grow in stature among scientific publications. Attendance at the annual meeting has been >4,300 for the past 3 years, representing an impressive international group of basic and clinical scientists.

In addition to these prominent examples, ASHG offers many other programs. Policy and scientific organizational activities are coordinated by the executive vice president, and educational activities are developed and orchestrated by a new director of education, Kenna Shaw. In addition, ASHG currently has two fellowships—for a policy fellow, sponsored in collaboration with the National Human Genome Research Institute, located in Washington, DC, and a public health genetics fellow, sponsored by and located at the Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta. ASHG member services have been greatly enhanced, and this year's new activities include a career services Web page (<http://ns2.faseb.org/careerweb/classified.asp>) for candidates seeking a position and employers looking for qualified genetics professionals. This service, free to individuals seeking employment, was initiated in the Fall of 2005 and has significant potential to provide the genetics community with a primary point of contact between candidates and employers.

ASHG is currently focusing on such policy and legislative issues as genetic nondiscrimination legislation through participation with the Coalition on Genetic Fairness, federal funding for research (especially through the National Institutes of Health) through collaborative activities with FASEB, direct-to-consumer genetic testing, and stem cell legislation. ASHG rep-

resentatives participate in policy meetings and conferences related to a wide variety of scientific issues, to assure that the membership remains current and that the policy discussions reflect accurate scientific content.

A vibrant committee structure carries forward the soul of the Society, and members actively participate in a variety of committees, including Awards, Information and Education, Nominating, Professional Ethics, Program, and Social Issues. At any time, members may make inquiries or suggestions to the leadership, directly to the committees or via the executive vice president (jboughman@ashg.org). The Awards committee identifies individuals recognized for scientific and educational contributions and will soon initiate a new ASHG award for public service. The Information and Education Committee hosts student-teacher workshops and education sessions at the annual meeting, promotes grades K–12 educational activities through the Mentor Network, and interfaces with national educational organizations. The Nominating Committee prepares the slate of members for election to the Board of Directors and selects distinguished individuals for consideration for president-elect. The Professional Ethics Committee has focused on the development of a statement on ethical principles for the Society. The Program Committee selects and organizes the scientific program for the annual meeting. The Social Issues Committee considers and develops policy statements for the Board of Directors and hosts sessions on social issues relevant to genetics. Reports from the Committees to the membership are made at the annual business meeting of the Society held at the annual meeting.

In its goal to provide educational opportunities to trainees and other special initiatives, the Society recently established a Development Fund. Contributions can be made directly through the ASHG Web site at <https://genetics.faseb.org/ashg04d/adfm.htm>. Additionally, an Emergency Relief Fund was established and quickly implemented to help students and post-docs displaced by hurricane Katrina; the ASHG provided financial assistance to 31 individuals.

Founded in 1948, the ASHG is proud to represent a membership of individuals with a commitment not only to excellence in research, health care, education, and public policy in genetics but also to the global citizenship of the communities in which they live. If you are not a member of the ASHG, join today! Then, follow *Society News* monthly to take pride in the many activities of your organization.

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