

Report on December 1999 Workshop

AWs
'99

Achieving XXcellence in Science

*Advancing Women's Contributions to Science
through Professional Societies*

Sponsored by
Office of the Director
National Institutes of Health
in conjunction with
National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences
The American Society for Cell Biology

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Foreword

As we enter a new millennium, we are poised on the brink of exciting and unprecedented opportunities for women in science. The increasing emphasis on women's health issues and growing recognition of the contributions of women in all scientific disciplines pave the way for us to make significant strides toward equity for women scientists. This report documents a huge step in the right direction — the December 9–10, 1999 workshop entitled “AXXS ’99” (Achieving XXcellence in Science).

AXXS ’99 spotlighted the role of professional societies in helping to advance the careers of women in science. The 1 1/2-day event focused on five areas of concern, generated a practical vision of the future, identified barriers to success, and produced 14 recommended initiatives for achieving excellence in science by advancing the careers of women scientists. These initiatives form the foundation for activities within and across scientific societies to promote women in leadership roles, provide mentoring programs, replicate best practices, and share relevant resources and information.

Participants in AXXS ’99 came together from diverse societies, educational institutions, organizations, and businesses to demonstrate their commitment, voice their opinions, and learn from each other. Their ultimate goal: to help women succeed in scientific careers and thereby bring about scientific advances from which all persons could equally benefit, regardless of cultural and ethnic origins, geographic locations, and socioeconomic strata.

The Office of Research on Women's Health (ORWH) is proud to have co-sponsored this successful meeting as part of its overall efforts to increase the numbers of women in science. We are hopeful that the recommendations put forth at AXXS ’99 will inspire further action by societies, corporations, and academia — wherever scientists work or are represented. It is only with your enthusiasm and participation in the next steps, and the steps to come, that we can turn these initiatives into reality.

Vivian W. Pinn, M.D.

Director, Office of Research on Women's Health
Associate Director, Research on Women's Health
National Institutes of Health

Preface

“Why do synthetic organic chemists eat their young?” asked a participant at the summer 1998 retreat hosted by the National Institute of General Medical Sciences on that topic. In response, all 25 attending scientists began to hypothesize why fewer synthetic organic chemistry proposals were being submitted and funded in recent years. Late in the final session, their discussion turned to the even smaller number of women and minority academicians in this field. One participant observed that “some scientific societies do a really superb job of mentoring and advancing their young faculty, through mock study section meetings, sessions on how to write a grant, discussions of how to get tenure, and mentoring lunches organized around career issues. Other societies are only beginning to address the problem for the young scientists in their disciplines.”

Around the same time, in August 1998, Madeleine Jacobs, Editor-in-Chief of *Chemical and Engineering News*, spoke to the Women Chemists Committee Luncheon.¹ She detailed nine suggestions for how women scientists could promote the careers of the women who were their juniors. As she challenged attendees to come up with their own magic bullets and fire them into action, an interesting idea crossed my mind: “Why not address and enhance the scientific contributions and career progression of women through their scientific societies?”

Encouraged by colleagues and friends, I proposed to the Office of Research on Women’s Health (ORWH), in January 1999, that we plan an action-oriented meeting, full of working sessions, not speeches, to figure out how to carry forward this new idea. We formed a small planning committee,² wrote a statement of purpose, and interviewed and selected facilitators. The National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences agreed to review and manage a cooperative agreement to support the workshop, which would be funded

¹ “The Challenges for Women Chemists in the New Millennium, The XYC2K Problem, The XY Chromosome Year 2000 Problem.”

² The “dream team,” which planned and executed AXXS ’99, consisted of Donna Dean, Senior Advisor to the Deputy Director, NIH; Elizabeth Marincola, Executive Director, The American Society for Cell Biology; Pamela Marino, Ph.D., Program Director, National Institute of General Medical Sciences; Joyce Rudick, Director, Programs and Management, Office of Research on Women’s Health, and Anne Sassaman, Director, Division of Extramural Research and Training, National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences. Dina Dariotis, Presidential Management Intern, supported the planning phase and developed the annotated bibliography, which will be posted on the website growing out of the workshop. Thanks to each of you for making this such a uniquely productive experience.

by ORWH. The American Society for Cell Biology volunteered to host the gathering as a satellite session to their annual December meeting.

About 20 scientists from across the country, from all walks of science, including academia, industry, and government, met in July 1999 to develop a broad outline for the workshop. Their energy and the facilitators' skills and dedication³ created one of the most productive sessions I had ever participated in, for it led us to an overarching conclusion: A trained scientist represents an investment that should not be wasted. Anyone who wants to be a scientist should be limited only by her or his own skills and intelligence, not by the environment in which she or he works. In such a world, all would contribute according to their abilities — women and men alike, including persons with disabilities, regardless of their race or ethnicity. Thus was AXXS '99 shaped.

As this report details, more than 100 participants assembled for a dynamic day and a half of hard work. Twenty institutes and centers at NIH endorsed the workshop's goals. Dr. Ruth Kirschstein, now Acting Director of NIH, inspired us with her leadership. Dr. Vivian Pinn, ORWH Director, encouraged us with her words, claiming, "We can do that! Our office will support you." Workshop participants developed concrete action plans to

- enhance and acknowledge women's scientific contributions,
- keep women from leaving science for friendlier careers,
- support women's scientific career advancement, and
- help the next generation of women scientists readily make their contributions to the scientific community.

These same participants eagerly agreed to take the next steps to ensure that the action plans developed during AXXS '99 are transformed into a grand plan, and real action, paving the way for AXXS 2000. It's action long overdue!

W. Sue Shafer, Ph.D.
Assistant Vice Chancellor
Research Administration
University of California, San Francisco
(Formerly Deputy Director
National Institute of General Medical Sciences)

³ Many thanks to Michael Milano and Rae Thompson for their help in planning and pulling off AXXS '99. They contributed materially to the growth of the concept and led the team of 14 additional facilitators who helped the participants develop concrete action plans. They kept us right on target.

AXXS '99 Co-sponsors

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National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research
National Institute of Mental Health
National Institute of Nursing Research
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Note: AXXS '99 was presented as a satellite meeting of The American Society for Cell Biology Annual Meeting.

Notice

This report was prepared by Murphy & Milano, Alexandria, VA, for the Office of Research on Women's Health, Office of the Director, National Institutes of Health; the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences; and The American Society for Cell Biology. While it is primarily a record of the process and products of the December 9–10, 1999 workshop, it contains some interpretative content based on the review, compilation, and synthesis of data collected during AXXS '99. In addition, all reported comments are paraphrased.

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