

Summer 2020: Student Representatives Board Report

The Botanical Society of America

Officers

Outgoing: Min Ya (2018-2020)

Current: Shelly Gaynor (2019-2021)

Incoming: Imeña Valdes (2020-2022)

The spring and summer of 2020 had been very overwhelming due to the COVID pandemic (as well as some other major events), and we had tried our best to connect with our BSA student members through both Botany2020 related events and non-conference events. We have initiated a number of new events to connect with our student members and the feedback has been very positive. In this board report, we are going to briefly talk about 1) what we have done since the last board meeting in March, 2) what we planned for Botany2020, and 3) propose some ways to better engage with BSA committees and leadership, which **will require a vote from the board**.

Part I - Connecting with Student Members outside of Botany conference season

We have been connecting with student members through various avenues:

BSA Student Member Resources

We compiled a google document containing relevant resources for students. This has been shared in newsletters, on social media, and the Plant Science Bulletin. It contains information about:

- BSA Social Media - Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter
- How a student member can contribute to: Social Media, Newsletters, and the Plant Science Bulletin
- SciComm Interest and BSA
- BSA Student Social Media Liaison
- Leadership Opportunities within BSA
- Student Chapters
- Planting Science
- Involvement in Publications
 - AJB Early Career Advisory Board
 - APPS Reviewing Editor Board
- Grants, Fellowships, Travel Funding, and More: [Spring 2020 round-up](#)
- Online Teaching Resources
- Networking/Job Boards

Plant Science Bulletin

- Spring Issue:
 - Traditionally, the spring issue of PSB contains a round-up of funding and award opportunities in botanical/plant-science related fields. However, this year the spring issue was delayed due to the COVID pandemic, so we decided to share the list together with other resources we compiled (which mentioned in the previous section) instead of publishing it in PSB.
 - *This issue contained:*
 - Update on Botany conference
 - BSA Student Resources
 - How to Contribute to Newsletters or to the Plant Science Bulletin
 - SciComm Interest
- Summer:
 - Your experience during COVID-19 lockdown - Highlighting 17 students
 - Time Management - Summary of twitter collected responses directly featuring 2 students + 4 professional members
 - Getting to Know your New Student Representative, Imeña Valdes

Student Newsletters

- May and April Newsletters
 - Included [Book Reviews](#) by 5 students

Other Contributions by Students

- [#Morphology_Monday](#) (event by social media liaison)

Part II - Events at Botany 2020

Student-Related Events (Student reps organized events are colored in green)

1. **Careers in Botany Luncheon - 14 panelists**

We tried to make the virtual luncheon experience as close to in-person as possible and we have kept the same format for the luncheon as in previous years: students break up in small groups, panelists enter groups to talk to students, then panelists rotate between different groups. This year we have invited 14 panelists from various careers and careers stages, including post-doc, junior faculty at PUI, junior faculty at R1, senior faculty at R1, herbarium director/curator, high school teacher, startup executive, NGO, collection manager at Natural History Museum, FDA, consulting, botanical garden, and industry.

2. **SciComm Celebration Day – 16 SciComms**

This is a brand-new event at the Botany conference this year and it is created by us with two purposes in mind: firstly, we want to amplify the science communicators

(SciCommers) among the BSA membership and promote their SciComm content; secondly, this will in term help improve the online presence of the BSA and hopefully strengthen the communication and collaboration between the BSA members. We have received many good applications among the BSA members we know, and we have also reached out to a number of botanical science-based SciCommers to invite them to participate. A few SciCommers we will feature have also been very active during the #BlackBotanistsWeek. If this event is well-received among our members, it will provide a good starting point for the BSA to be a leading professional society, which aims to promote botanical sciences, as well as diversity and inclusion in the field of botanical sciences.

We have received a lot of help from the BSA staff (Amelia and Rich) and the BSA social media liaisons (Jared and Taran) from the planning to the execution of the event, for which we are deeply grateful! We are very thankful for the free registration gifted to four participants in the SciComm Celebration. We are also grateful for the one-year memberships gifted to all 16 SciCommers included this year.

3. Ace it! - Practice your Presentation, Get Feedback, Give a Better Talk
4. [Student Social](#)
5. Tips for Success: Applying to Graduate School
6. So you want a job: approaching the academic/research job market as a postdoc
7. [Daily CV Review Sessions](#)

We continued the CV review sessions at the Botany conference since it was well-received in Botany2019. We have offered 30 slots for students to sign up for CV reviewing this year and the slots were filled within hours since the initial email sent out to conference attendees. **This suggests that many students do not have accessible or adequate resources for professional development.** Since this is the second year of CV reviewing session at the Botany conference and the popularity is evident, we should consider **formalizing/standardizing the sign-up process for both reviewers and students and possibly scale up in the future.**

Facilitated Networking

1. [Botany 2020 - Virtual Job/Networking Board](#)
 - This was recommended by Makenzie Mabry and Paul Blischak. Columns were edited by Johanna Jantzen. Big thanks to Paul Blischak, Mike Barker, and Sarah Turner-Hissong for their guidance and help to recruit non-academic for the Open Position Tab.
2. Botany 2020 Slack
 - Committee on Human Diversity Led!

Part III - Standardized Applications of BSA Committee Student Representatives.

As a student, it is often difficult to gain non-academic skills (e.g. leadership, management, event organization) at school, but it could be an opportunity for their professional societies to offer. Because of this, the BSA Board initiated two years ago that every BSA committee should have at least one student representative. The BSA leadership and committee also benefit from having input and perspective from current students in decision making. We surveyed both the current BSA Committee Student Representatives and the Committee Chairs to learn more about the Student Representative Roles on each committee. Based on the survey of the current BSA Committee Student Representatives about their appointments we found:

1. Some are appointed by advisor or people they know without a selection process
2. Responsibilities remain unclear
3. Unknown term length

In this board report, we would like to propose a few changes to improve the ways of how students are appointed/selected on the BSA committee, with the purpose of creating equal and easy access to a more diverse group of students to participate in and contribute to the BSA.

1: Create accessible descriptions of each committee seeking a student representative.

Based on the survey of the current committee student representatives, and our own understanding of these positions, it is unclear what it means for a student to serve on a committee. We need to make a concerted effort to recruit students from diverse backgrounds for these positions.

A clear description of these roles should at least include for all roles 1) who is eligible (e.g. BSA student member; whether or not seniors/last year graduate students can apply), 2) how long is a term; as well as specifics for each committee, including: 3) a list of responsibilities, and 4) a list of expectations. Each committee description should aim to be student accessible, with the hope that a brand new BSA member could easily understand the purpose of each committee.

In addition, BSA should consider **holding a BSA officer office hour/information session** at the Botany meetings. This is a great way to explain the committee responsibilities and recruit good committee members (not just students) that are outside of the current leadership's social circle. This kind of event is seen in conferences organized by other societies (such as SDB, SICB) and they are always well-received by their members.

2: Optimize the nomination and application process.

We cannot judge students based on their name alone, which is the idea of self-nominations. Historically, sending only your name has been the standard process of self-nomination for BSA student leadership positions. Only comparing students based on their name is not sufficient, the "standard" ways of getting to know an academic (through the personal website or publication lists) might not apply to many students, particularly junior

students. Therefore, we need to adjust and optimize our application and selection process to overcome this situation.

To this end, we can obtain some inspiration from other professional societies when reforming our own protocol:

- Society for the Study of Evolution requires a CV and short responses to specific questions as an application to their Graduate Student Advisory Council.
- The International Neuropsychological Society requires a CV and cover letter from students as an application for student representatives on Committees.

We suggest a CV and cover letter be added to the application process, this will allow fair comparison among the applications. If our efforts in broadly advertising open leadership positions (which is mentioned in the previous section), we would expect an increased number of applicants from students. In addition, we will recruit applications from diverse backgrounds. An application would give the committee chairs or a specific committee designated to review these applications more information about these students including why they want to serve on that committee.

3: Frequency and number of appointments

Increasing the frequency of these appointments (every 1.5 years) will give this opportunity to more students, but retaining the bylaw indicated a 3-year term and just overlapping terms will allow students to train each other. The length of 3 years should be revisited and reassessed frequently, however, we did not want to propose a change to the bylaws at this time.

Potential limitation: The 1.5 year split would mean that a student's term would not start at the same time as other members on the committee. If this is an issue, we could revise the bylaws to 2 or 4 year terms, electing new students to every committee at the same time every 1 to 2 years.

Overall proposal:

The Student Representatives of the BSA Committee should be appointed based on recruited applications including CV and cover letters from BSA student members every 1.5 years. There should be two BSA Committee Student Reps on each committee at all times with each representative as a 3-year term. Applications should be solicited at standard intervals, reviewed at standard times, and reviewed by the Committee on Committees and President-elect (review is designated in the Policies/Bylaws).

Looking-forward:

- Currently, all BSA committee student reps are graduate students (1 master student, 7 PhD students), what about the undergraduates?
 - Action item: Survey BSA undergraduate members to gauge interest and current limitations (knowledge of positions, time restraints, ect).

- Recruitment of students with diverse backgrounds is important - the student representatives will work with Amelia and Heather, along with the Social Media Liaisons, to develop a recruitment strategy.
 - Future consideration: Registration or membership incentives for BSA Committee Representatives may increase participation.
- As part of strategic planning, it may be important to define the role of students in leadership positions in BSA:
 - What do BSA Committees hope to gain from having students in leadership positions?
 - What would students hope to benefit from serving on professional society committees?

Descriptions

Eligibility: BSA student members (undergraduate and graduate) of any level are eligible to apply for these positions.

Term length: The term length of each position is 3 years. The student should be a student at the start of the term, but does not need to remain a student for the length of the term.

Each committee may have student representation at the discretion of the committee and the Executive Board of the Society.

Key: blue - waiting for approval by Committee Chair; yellow - no approval has been sought, black - description has been approved by the Committee Chair(s).

Committee on Human Diversity

The Committee on Human Diversity (HD) meets one or two times per year (plus ad hoc meetings), discussing policies and activities that can help to address the needs of diverse groups within BSA and can help to build a more diverse and welcoming society. Committee members are expected to attend HD meetings (in person or virtually), but any additional time spent on these activities is done on a volunteer basis. Programs and events that were initially discussed in the HD committee include the PLANTS program, several social events, Diversity Lunch speakers, and special symposia on diversity and inclusion. Student perspectives are especially valued on this committee.

Education Committee

The Education Committee meets two to three times per year, as well as during the Botany meeting. The education committee focuses on all matters relating to teaching, training, and professional education in the plant sciences, including informal, K-12, undergraduate, and graduate biology education. The goal of a student representative on this committee provides a student or early-career researcher's perspective on how best to keep evolving the education

efforts of the BSA. For example, a recent focus of this committee has been on how to shape up the educational outreach portion of the BSA website.

Election Committee

The Election Committee oversees the BSA board election during the Spring semester every year. The chair of the committee, which is the past president, collects the nominations and/or reaches out to potential candidates when the situation permits (e.g. no nomination) for the next election cycle. Then the student representative votes on those nominations that will make it on the ballot. Once it is established who will be on the ballot, the student rep contacts the student nominations and gathers a bio-sketch for each student. After the votes are cast, the rep informs the nominated student of the results.

Investment Committee ** Does NOT want a Student Representative **

The committee is responsible for determining long-term investment strategy for the Society. The student representative on this committee actively learns about the BSA investment strategy and gains a lot of insight into how the society manages their investments.

- “The investment committee needs people with as much experience as possible looking at investment portfolios and thinking about the market. These criteria exclude the majority of students, although there may be a few who have the required set of interests. I'm not sure how we would find them though.”
- The counter-argument from the current BSA student representatives: Having students on committees serves two purposes: (1) to incorporate a student's perspective in the decision-making process and (2) to help the student grow professionally. In the cases of the investment committee, it is likely that there will be little input from the student representative since the issues this committee deals with are highly specialized. However, it is not a sufficient reason to exclude a student who is interested in sitting on the investment committee to learn, which can play an important role in shaping the future career of this student. As long as the description of the committee's responsibilities is clear, and students know what they should expect (i.e. might not be able to contribute much in the beginning) before they apply to the position, there is no valid reason to exclude a student representative on the investment committee.

Public Policy Committee

The Public Policy Committee meets at least quarterly (ideally every other month), as well as during the annual Botany conference. This committee provides input from the BSA perspective on public policy documents, strategic plan documents from federal agencies, and reports requesting input from plant biologists. They work closely with numerous societies including the American Society of Plant Taxonomy (ASPT) and American Institute of Biological Sciences (AIBS). A student representative on this committee would attend committee meetings, vote on candidates for awards (BSA Public Policy Award, Botany Advocacy Leadership Grant), respond to information related to sign-on letters, and provide feedback on policy documents in development.

Publication Committee

The Publications Committee meets two to three times per year and provides input on issues relating to BSA's publications (including the [American Journal of Botany](#) and [Applications in Plant Sciences](#)). For example, the committee provided input on how to solicit articles for and advertise the new AJB review article category. The student representative on this committee is expected to provide general feedback about BSA's publications, or specific issues as the need arises.

Technology Committee

The Technology Committee meets one to two times per year and provides input regarding IT support needs of members, works with the IT staff to preview new programs or beta test new programs developed for member services (membership directory, awards portal, ect.), and offer suggestions to improve the society's web presence. The student representative for this committee would provide input and feedback on how students interact with BSA through technology and how we can help BSA do a better job supporting membership's needs in this area. A student rep would keep us up-to-date and grounded in current technology and issues of accessibility.

The International Affairs Committee - No Response

The International Affairs Committee aims to link BSA with other national botanical societies outside the U.S. and connect BSA members to international botanical events, including the [International Botanical Congress \(IBC\)](#) which is held every six years. The committee seeks to support young botanists attending the IBC, as well as other important international meetings. The committee informs the society regarding international activities impacting the study of plants through articles in the Plant Science Bulletin, symposiums and colloquium at the annual Botanical meetings, and other activities.