

American Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology, Office of Public Affairs

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The American Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology is a nonprofit organization representing over 12,000 research scientists. ASBMB has a long time commitment to increasing the participation and success of minorities in biochemistry and molecular biology, particularly through the work of its Minority Affairs Committee. ASBMB understands that the American research enterprise cannot flourish if its work force does not reflect the diverse values, interests and culture of our nation's population. Data from the 2008 U.S. Census indicate that underrepresented minorities (URM)

the different programs within NIH, we would hope that this platform eventually could be expanded to include minority resources from the extramural community as well. Creating a “one-stop shop” where minority scientists could easily access information on scholarships, training programs and mentoring/networking groups would be exceptionally valuable to the minority research community.

a) Play a primary role in publicizing minority resources to all levels of the biomedical research pipeline.

The NIH should capitalize on its position as the leading resource for the biomedical research community to disseminate information and resources for minority students and investigators. ASBMB recommends recs 0 09o5(e)f.

process.

Serving on an RO1 study section provides researchers with invaluable insight into the grant-review process. However, investigators already must be funded to participate in these study sections. Since minority investigators are funded at lower rates, they have even more limited opportunities to learn more about the grant-review process through study section participation. ASBMB recommends that the NIH identify and implement new ways to give postdocs and junior investigators exposure to the grant review process. Greater exposure to the grant-review process would be particularly valuable for minority students and researchers.

(2) The NIH should continue research efforts to identify the cause of the difference in NIH funding success rates for URM researchers.

While the Ginther et. al. study⁵ presented several suggestions as to the cause of the disparity in the funding success rates of black researchers, it was unable to specifically identify the cause. ASBMB recommends continued investigation of this question to determine the cause(s). The possibility of racial biases, whether conscious or unconscious, in the peer-review process is particularly disturbing to the research community. To address this issue, ASBMB recommends performing additional case studies in which grants are reviewed multiple times, one in which the identifying information is included and one in which various pieces of identifying information are removed, to ascertain if racial biases are playing a role. ASBMB strongly believes that to eliminate the disparity in funding success rates of minority researchers, we must first understand the cause.

Extramural

(1) Professional societies are strongly encouraged to foster mentor-mentee relationships that can reach across institutions.

Mentor-mentee relationships in the research community are widely considered one of the most valuable assets a researcher or student can have. However, for minority students and researchers, these relationships can be difficult to foster or even establish because of the disproportionately low numbers of URMs at universities and research institutions. For example, data from 2006 showed 16.5% of students graduating with a B.S. degree in biology were URMs, but only 3.8% of faculty members at the top 50 biology departments were URMs⁶. Because an individual university may have few minority researchers, ASBMB recommends that professional societies provide opportunities to develop mentoring relationships beyond a single research institution. Some possible suggestions