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The *Biophysical Society Newsletter* (ISSN 0006-3495) is published twelve times per year, January-December, by the Biophysical Society, 11400 Rockville Pike, Suite 800, Rockville, Maryland 20852. Distributed to USA members and other countries at no cost. Canadian GST No. 898477062. Postmaster: Send address changes to Biophysical Society, 11400 Rockville Pike, Suite 800, Rockville, MD 20852. Copyright © 2016 by the Biophysical Society. Printed in the United States of America. All rights reserved.

President's Message

Back in the Day



Suzanne Scarlata

Although I like to think of myself as being young, I'm really not. Lately, as a sign of aging, I find myself telling my students how life was like "back in the day." One of the things that has changed most for me is gender equality.

Perhaps I'm more aware of this is because

there is a good chance of having a US female president. Perhaps I'm more aware of this because of my recent move to a university that was all male until the 1970s and now has a woman BPS President. Or, perhaps I'm more aware of this because I never had a female professor in college or graduate school and our department has hired two new women faculty.

Now, "back in the day," we (myself and my friends) knew there were women professors around, but we never saw them. In graduate school there was a highly respected female scientist who came to the university as a package with her famous husband (there was a message there). There was only one female scientist in my field (who also came to her university as a package with her famous husband) whose papers I read over and over and I staunchly defended her work, despite knowing little about the methods she used. In graduate school I had many female peers, and we saw woman after woman receive doctorates, but it was unclear where they went after — we rarely, if ever, saw women going into faculty positions or presenting talks at scientific conferences. We knew they were out there and hoped that eventually we would see more of them.

That was "back in the day." Today, of course, women are well-represented in industry, government, academics, and on the programs of BPS meetings. The BPS is no longer a Society of white men. *However*, many other meetings and conferences still lack female representation. Some conferences still have one woman out of

30 speakers and feel like they've addressed diversity. They haven't.

While my personal reflections have focused on gender, the same can be said about underrepresented groups on faculty and in scientific programs. There are many reasons why organizers should consider diversity when arranging their programs. Most importantly, new and different people bring new and different ideas and perspectives to a conference. Diverse speakers enhance the science of a program and generate models that are not nearly as probable when the same "old boys" are together. Additionally, meeting sponsors would also like to see diversity in meeting programs since women and individuals from underrepresented groups write grants, buy reagents and instrumentation, and head scientific companies.

Many years ago, the BPS made a commitment to inclusivity and diversity and not at the expense of scientific excellence. This commitment is reflected in the composition of our committees and governance structure. Our committees work hard to educate our membership on issues of diversity and inclusion. Importantly, we make sure that our meeting program reflects our membership in regards to gender, race, geography, and scientific discipline. Our program committee works hard to solicit names and ideas to ensure that the scientific content of our program contains new and exciting work given by a variety of scientists. I appreciate that the organizers of smaller meetings might not know many women or minority scientists in their field. However, there are both women and minority established scientists out there — you just need to know where to look and who to ask. The BPS has two committees that are here to help — the Committee for Professional Opportunities for Women and the Committee on Inclusion and Diversity. I am encouraging meeting organizers to reach out to them for recommendations of speakers who are doing cutting-edge work and who will greatly enhance the quality of their meetings.

Did I mention how fast I could run a 10K "back in the day?"