

BSA President's report: 2021-2022

An unusual year. The combination of COVID and our increased national, societal and personal awareness of the horrific consequences of racial disparity led to several initiatives and changes in the Botanical Society of America.

Due to COVID-19, the annual meeting of the society moved to an entirely on-line platform for July 2020. By all accounts, the BSA's rapid pivot to an on-line format was **highly successful**, thanks to the very hard work of Johanne Strogan, our extraordinary BSA staff, and the tremendous enthusiasm of participants. The success of that meeting made it easier for the board to vote to continue with an on-line platform for *BOTANY 2021 Virtual*, given the uncertainty of the status of the pandemic at the time the decision was made (February, 2021).

A revised process for selecting committee members. In collaboration with student representatives (Shelly Gaynor, Ya Min and Imeña Valdes), the process of selecting/appointing committee members was completely revised and subsequently approved by the Board:

- 1.) With input from the President, the Board, and **especially the Student Reps**, Executive Director Heather Cacanindin overhauled information on the BSA web site regarding committees, so that each is now clearly described in terms of its responsibilities, terms of service, current members, etc.: <https://cms.botany.org/home/governance/finance-advisory-committee.html>.
- 2.) An on-line platform for an application process was established in which members were asked to complete a short application form that was approved by the Board. This process was advertised through BSA emails and social media.
- 3.) The Committee on Committees was expanded and now includes a representative from the DEI Committee.
- 4.) Applications were forwarded to the Committee on Committees who met to consider and approve appropriate external nominations as well as to encourage additional applications for those committees that did not receive enough applications.
- 5.) Appointments were reviewed and approved by the Board.
- 6.) All applicants were contacted, including those who were not appointed in this year's appointments.

With small modifications, this process will serve as the policy for committee member selection in future years.

Other DEI Initiatives. The President acknowledges only an indirect role in these initiatives—the *at large* Director for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion and the DEI committee itself (formerly the Human Diversity Committee) played a pivotal role.

- 1.) Development of a new demographic survey that was included with membership renewal. Data will be analyzed by BSA staff as baseline data for assessing the efficacy of current and new DEI initiatives.
- 2.) Centering DEI as a key strategic priority in the new Strategic Plan (see below).
- 3.) Creation of BSA SLACK channels for community building among affinity groups.

- 4.) Anna Monfils, along with help from Muriel Poston, Ann Sakai, Catrina Adams, and Heather Cacanindin, submitted a new PLANTS grant in response to a request from NSF.
- 5.) The Executive Director, Education Director and the Director *at large* for DEI evaluated multiple proposals for the new NSF LEAPS program and decided to commit to participation in four (but declined to submit a proposal spearheaded by the BSA due to resource limitations).
- 6.) BSA Staff participated in DEI and anti-racism training.
- 7.) The criteria for selection of major BSA awards (Emerging Leader and Distinguished Fellow) was modified to include service, with the intent that DEI activities will be recognized.

A new Strategic Plan for the BSA. Prior to 2020, BSA staff and the Board acknowledged the need for new strategic plan that would guide society activities for the next five years. In spring, 2020, the BSA contracted Michela Perrone, MMP Associates, to advise the strategic planning process. A Strategic Planning Working Group (SPWG) was established that consisted of Michela Perrone, the Presidents, Secretary, Treasurer, Program Director, and Executive Director. The SPWG defined four pillars or strategic priorities: 1. Diversity, Equity and Inclusion; 2. Research and Scholarly Excellence; 3. Organizational Impact and Visibility; and 4. Professional Development. On the President's recommendation, the Board approved a process of selection for the strategic planning committee that would involve both recommendations from the SPWG and a call for members to nominate themselves or others. The final Strategic Planning Committee (SPC) consisted of 31 members, each assigned to one of the four pillars. The Board also approved funding for Racial Awareness training: the Executive Director, in consultation with the President, contracted with Come Abide Here, L.L.C, who provided training materials, facilitated racial awareness "dinners" with small groups and an overall training with as many of the SPC who could attend. The SPC, facilitated by M. Perrone, then met over a two day period. During the first day, subgroups met to define goals and propose strategies. The remainder of the meeting was occupied by presentations of the subgroups to the whole SPC, general discussion, and a wrap up. Each subgroup was charged with producing a document listing goals, strategies, and tactics, if tactics were discussed. These documents were compiled by the President and subsequently revised in consultation with the subgroups into a draft of the 2021 SP that will be presented to the Board at the July 12, 2021 meeting. Following approval by the Board, the SP will be presented to the Society at BOTANY 2021 Virtual. Once the plan is approved, staff will begin work, in consultation with the Board, on an operational plan for each year that ties into the SP.

Salary increase for the Executive Director. One presidential responsibility is to complete the annual evaluation of the Executive Director and to recommend a salary increase. This year, the Missouri Botanical Garden instituted a new process of evaluation. In consultation with the Past President and President Elect, a very positive review resulted in the President recommending a 5% salary increase overall, which includes a cost of living adjustment.

Botanical Society of America Approvals and Endorsements.

- 1.) Climate Science Working Group letter to Congress to urge bold action on climate change.

- 2.) A consortium of scientists who work at field sites letter to NSF to urge support for field stations and field-based courses.
- 3.) A letter to President Biden initiated by the STEM Education Coalition asking him to re-launch the White House Science and Engineering Fair.

Respectfully submitted July 5, 2021
Cynthia Jones
President, Botanical Society of America