A New AIBS for the Age of Biology

In these early years of the 21st century, scientific discovery and understanding are playing an important and growing role in meeting the challenges—environmental, human health, economic—facing societies everywhere. At the forefront are advances in biology. Indeed, it is reasonable to say we are entering the Age of Biology, paralleling in many ways the Age of Physics in the first half of the 20th century.

Three broad research programs will account for much of this new biological fundamental. The first is genomics. It has already reshaped biological inquiry in fundamental ways, and as genomics and proteomics meld further with developmental/cell biology and the agricultural sciences, our world will be transformed. That change has already begun, but the full effects of this revolution are just beginning. The second research area is what I will call "evolutionary biodiversity science." This name describes the product of uniting evolutionary and systematic biology with the environmental sciences—namely, comparative, functional, and integrative biology whose center of gravity is understanding Earth's biological diversity at all levels of organization. The rapid emergence of evolutionary biodiversity science in recent years foreshadows its increasing importance in shaping global environmental and economic well-being in the decades to come. The third research program, bioinformatics, is the glue that will bind the other research efforts together. It will create entirely new fields of research as it integrates genomics-related sciences and evolutionary biodiversity science into earth sciences, chemistry, and other disciplines.

The challenges to achieving the full potential of the Age of Biology are formidable. Ensuring that support for biological research diversifies and grows is central to success. Training the next generation of biologists—and finding them meaningful careers—is a pressing priority. And building a bioliterate society is critical.

We at AIBS believe that the future vitality of biology depends on a sustained, unified effort within a framework of creative collaborations. This is why the AIBS Board of Directors has established a new organizational structure that will broaden and facilitate the participation of the biological community in our activities. AIBS has long been known as an umbrella organization representing about 80 societies and institutions, with a combined total membership of nearly 250,000 professional biologists and educators. That core participation will continue, of course, but we hope to amplify our collective voice: The reorganization will create membership classes for academic units at educational institutions of all levels and expand participatory opportunities for institutions engaged in biological research and public education, as well as for corporations that share our goals and aspirations. More details about this reorganization can be found on p. 1048 and on our Web site at www.aibs.org/organization-membership.

For biology to thrive, biologists must speak up for one another and have a united voice, one that will be heard by the public and policymakers. AIBS is committed to making this happen, but we cannot do it alone—there is truth to the saying about strength in numbers. That is why we invite all individuals and biological organizations to join with AIBS and play a stronger, more influential role in the Age of Biology. Contact us. We’ll tell you more about the benefits of working together.

JOEL CRACRAFT
President, AIBS