

Whittaker Elected Sigma Xi President

Joseph A. Whittaker was elected the 73rd president of Sigma Xi at the Society's 2008 Annual Meeting in Washington, D.C. He will serve as president-elect beginning July 1, 2009.



A Sigma Xi member since 1988, he is dean and professor of biology in the School of Computer, Mathematical and Natural Sciences at Morgan State University in Baltimore, Maryland, where he oversees more than 100 faculty members involved in research, training and educational activities in five academic departments.

Whittaker's own research has focused on neurotransmitter interactions and the development of respiratory control, as well as basal ganglia anatomy and physiology.

He joined the faculty of Howard University in 1991 and subsequently moved to Morehouse School of Medicine (MSM) in Atlanta.

While at Morehouse, he spearheaded an initiative to establish the MSM Developmental Neuroscience Program, which drove the design and construction of the current Neuroscience Institute, the first of its kind in a historically black college and university. It became a prototype for 12 additional NIH-supported Specialized Neuroscience Research Programs at minority-serving institutions.

Whittaker is a devoted teacher, researcher and leader and has been recognized for his many contributions to undergraduate, graduate and medical education as well as to research, faculty and institutional development in several academic institutions.

He has served at the national level on scientific review panels and committees at the National Science Foundation, the Center for Disease Control, the National Academy of Sciences and the National Institutes of Health.

Most recently, he has served on the NIH/NCRR Centers of Biomedical Research Excellence panel and the Scientific and Technical Review Board on Biomedical and Behavioral Research Facilities.

Over the years, Whittaker has served two terms as associate director of the Sigma Xi At-large Constituency and as a member of the Committee on Qualifications and Membership. •

From the President

A Call to Action



In 1925, Sigma Xi's Executive Committee met with delegates from Phi Beta Kappa, Alpha Omega Alpha (medical honor society) and the Order of the Coif (law school graduates) to discuss issues of import to the societies. One result of this meeting was the formation of the Association of College Honor Societies (ACHS, still active today) and a statement that an honor society "...confers distinction for high achievement in undergraduate, graduate and professional studies; in student leadership; and in the various fields of research; preserves valuable traditions and customs; and associates outstanding leaders in mutual understanding for the advancement of society in the art of democratic living."

Then obviously, Sigma Xi was an important entity in the 1920s. But the question I pose to you is, are honor societies still relevant more than 80 years later? Does Sigma Xi offer us valid reasons for continuing our active membership today? Can we justify an outlay of membership dues and volunteer efforts, in the light of our current economy and personal time constraints? In my mind, membership in our Society is even more valuable today than in the past.

I believe what motivates us, as scientists and engineers, is the desire and ability to make a difference in our world, e.g., to make a discovery, add a bit of knowledge and achieve something tangible in science, both in understanding processes and explaining them. Membership in Sigma Xi represents recognition by other scientists that we have done just that. Our initiation as a member gives us a feeling not only of recognition, but also an assurance that becoming part of this group of "zealous companions" will continue to enrich our lives as we grow in science.

In the 122 years of its existence, the Society has added a portfolio of amazingly invaluable programs that fulfill the mission of enhancing the research enterprise, fostering integrity in science and engineering, and promoting the public's understanding of science.

- Our award winning *American Scientist* magazine;
- An average of 465 Grants-in-Aid of Research awards to students each year;
- Significant annual recognition of researchers through the Procter, McGovern, Young Investigator, Monie Ferst and Walston Chubb awards;
- Major online presence for *American Scientist* and the Society; and,
- Distinguished Lectureships, *Science in the News*, local support for chapters and Science Cafés.

Today, however, we have fewer than 60,000 members funding these and other programs, with only about half of our members actually paying full dues to do so. Our present dues income from this number of members is not sufficient to continue to maintain the excellence of these programs, nor to add new programs and directions. However, by adding as few as 10,000 members, sufficient income would be provided to support these programs. There are several possibilities for achieving this goal, either by doubling our annual initiation rate or some combination of increased initiations and reactivations of lapsed members. For example, if we added only 7,000 members and reactivated 3,000, we also could reach this goal.

We are faced with a seemingly daunting task. Pointing fingers, expressing grave concerns and churning out negativity do nothing but lower our expectations and increase our stress. Now is the time for a change to the positive; now is the time to make this a personal quest for each member and each chapter. Because you care about Sigma Xi, the Society needs you to either recruit at least one new member or reactivate an inactive member. We need your energy, your contacts and your good will to meet this task. Why?—because Sigma Xi adds depth and value to our lives and encourages our companions and successors to pursue the best in research. We must remember that, once initiated into Sigma Xi, membership is for life—a life of honor, opportunity and companionship in science and engineering.

Ann H. Williams

Iowa State Chemist Wins 2008 Monie Ferst Award

Chemist John D. Corbett at Iowa State University received the 2008 Monie A. Ferst Award from the Georgia Institute of Technology Chapter of Sigma Xi.

The award is given annually to an educator in engineering or science who has made "notable contributions to the motivation and encouragement of research through education." It includes a \$5,000 prize.

The Ferst Award is named for an Atlanta engineer and businessman who received his engineering degree from Georgia Tech in 1911.

A symposium was held in October at Georgia Tech in Corbett's honor, focusing on the research accomplishments of his many former students, five of whom were speakers.

A member of the National Academy of Sciences, Corbett has been a staff researcher at the U.S. Department of Energy's (DOE) Ames Laboratory and a faculty member in Iowa State's chemistry department since 1952.

During that time, he has served as a division chief and program director at the federal laboratory and as chair of the ISU chemistry department.

Throughout his career, Corbett has mentored 41 Ph.D., 14 M.S. and 65 postdoctoral students. He has published more than 445 articles in peer-reviewed journals and has presented more than 345 invited seminars around the world.



Georgia Tech Chapter President Richard Neu (left) congratulates Monie Ferst Award-winner John Corbett.

His research interests revolve around inorganic solid-state chemistry, emphasizing strong metal-metal bonding.

According to the award citation, "Corbett's enthusiasm for chemical research has contributed significantly to the growth and development of solid state chemistry, in particular, as an academic discipline, and has also inspired numerous scientists to participate in this field."

He is considered a pioneer for imaginative synthetic principles or procedures that have often revealed new species, many of which have been included in chemistry textbooks.

A Sigma Xi member since 1949, Corbett has served as a visiting professor at the Max-Planck-Institut and the Technical University of Denmark as well as Oxford and Justus-Liebig universities. He is a Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

Among his many honors are three American Chemical Society awards in inorganic chemistry and for distinguished service in the advancement of the field.

He has also received a Senior Scientist Award from the A. V. Humboldt Foundation, two DOE Awards for Outstanding Scientific Accomplishments and Sustained Research in Materials Chemistry and the 2005 Spedding Award from the Rare Earth Research Conference. •

Awards Recognize Outstanding Sigma Xi Chapters

Certificates of Excellence were awarded to eight Sigma Xi chapters at the 2008 Annual Meeting and Student Research Conference.

The annual awards recognize exceptional chapter activity, innovative programming and community leadership during the past year.

Nominees are chosen by the Constituency Directors based on chapter annual reports, and winners are selected by the Committee on Qualifications and Membership.

Award-winning chapters for 2008 included **Kirkville**, **Columbia-Willamette**, **South Dakota State University**, **University of Nebraska at Kearney**, **Pace University**, **New Mexico Highlands**, **Texas A&M University** and Sigma Xi's Georgia International Partner.

Program Awards

Also presented at the Annual Meeting, Chapter Program Awards recognize chapters for a single outstanding program, especially one that other chapters can emulate.

Nominees are chosen by the Regional

Directors based on chapter annual reports, and winners are selected by the Committee on Qualifications and Membership.

2008 Program Awards went to the **Lehigh University Chapter**, for a multidisciplinary celebration of Darwin's birthday; the **University of California, Merced Chapter**, for a symposium on gestures and the chapter's graduation recognition; and the **Alamo Chapter**, for its CPS Energy Lecture Series and the Exxon-Mobile Science Fair.

Also receiving Program Awards were the **Columbia-Willamette Chapter**, for its lecture series; the **South Dakota State University Chapter**, for the Eastern South Dakota Science and Engineering Fair; and the **University of Nebraska at Kearney Chapter**, for an outstanding Science Café.

Diversity Awards

Diversity Program Awards are presented annually to chapters that have organized

outstanding programs to promote diversity within the science, engineering and research communities.

Nominees are chosen by the Regional Directors based on Chapter Annual Reports and by the Diversity Award Program. Winners are chosen by the Society's Diversity Committee.

This year the committee singled out the **University of Puerto Rico Mayaguez Chapter** for its lecture series.

Top Electing Chapters

The following chapters were recognized for initiating the most new members in 2007-2008:

Princeton, **Brown University**, **Massachusetts Institute of Technology**, **Claremont Colleges**, **Swarthmore College**, **Loyola Marymount University**, **Carleton College**, **Smith College**, **Amherst College**, **Union College**, **Washington University**, **Oberlin College**, **Mount Holyoke College**, **Williams College** and **Denison University**. •