

2007-2008 REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

For the Year Ending June 30, 2008

Fiscal year 2008 needs to be viewed from several perspectives. For the vast majority of members, the year may have seemed like previous years and generally normal. Most individual members derived their interactions and impressions of Sigma Xi from the local chapters. Chapters continued to serve the members with excellent programs that help achieve the mission of the Society. The *American Scientist* arrived on time and remains one of the premier science publications available today. On the other hand, the volunteer leadership and committee members experienced noticeable changes. These changes included turnover in the executive director position and several committees being inactive due to personnel and programmatic changes. Depending upon your own involvement and interaction with Sigma Xi, you may recall the events of the past year differently.

The accomplishments and the challenges of the past year can be summarized into three categories: membership, fiscal health and programs. There is obviously overlap but each will be reviewed below.

Membership

The trend line for membership continues to decline. This decline is not a new challenge. Since 1982 membership has steadily declined from ~120,000 members to ~60,000 members. Scientists and engineers have tended to become more specialized while Sigma Xi philosophically represents a broad interdisciplinary view of science and engineering. While new specialized societies have emerged, the societies that represent broad segments have diminished.

In 1986, then-Executive Director C. Ian Jackson, writing for the *American Scientist*, asked what niche Sigma Xi could appropriately fill? The September-October issue celebrated and recognized a century of service by the membership and the Society to science. As we approach the 125th anniversary, we need to ask the same question. Each of us can assume responsibility and seek opportunities to promote Sigma Xi and the broader scientific community. We do control our future, and we can assist with increasing membership. Multi-disciplinary research has become mainstream for leading research institutions. Only Sigma Xi chapters and members can bring scien-

tists of diverse disciplines together in close contact to "promote the health of the scientific enterprise, reward excellence in scientific research and encourage a sense of companionship and cooperation among scientists in all fields."

There are numerous opportunities everyday for us to make a difference. Research misconduct has exacted a huge cost to society, not just to the individuals caught cutting corners or worse. We must mentor younger scientists, and we should reward exemplary performance. Chapters and members can provide programs that will make a difference.

I believe each and every member of Sigma Xi knows at least one scientist, with the appropriate credentials, who has never been approached about being nominated for membership. It is time to fulfill the promise you made when you joined Sigma Xi to nominate colleagues and students.

Fiscal Health

The fiscal health of Sigma Xi is not acceptable. The reason is really quite simple. As membership declines, so does our major source of revenue. Plus, our full dues-paying members have always contributed the largest portion of our dues revenue, and this is the category that has lost the greatest number of members over the years. The professional staff members have worked very hard to control expenses over the past few years. However, they have only limited or no control over the revenue. To increase revenue, the chapters and individual members must take responsibility. If we add 6,000 full dues-paying members each year, we would add nearly \$500,000 to revenue, and if each member gave just \$10.00 more each year, we would add an additional \$600,000 revenue to our annual funds.

In the fall 2007 survey of the membership, greater than 90% of respondents indicated that the *American Scientist*, public understanding of science, ethics in science, and science education were essential activities for Sigma Xi. The Grants-in-Aid of Research (GIAR) program consistently is recognized as an important program to support. When you evaluate the amount paid for annual dues and deduct the amounts allotted to chapter support, GIAR and the magazine, you will quickly realize that we run an extremely tight ship. It is now time for the revenue side of the equation to receive greater attention by every member.

Programs

We can easily identify several programs affiliated with Sigma Xi that showcase the contributions that we make for the benefit of the public and our society. We also can identify a couple of programs that need to be revitalized.

The number of science cafés hosted by chapters and partnerships with other organizations increased significantly in fiscal year 2008. Many chapters have found that the science café concept has increased participation by their members and has also provided a unique venue for engaging the public in science discussion. The science cafés have increased visibility for many chapters and have led to additional opportunities to improve the public understanding of science. The variety of topics and locations is a testament to how science can be shared with the public, as well as colleagues. The Sigma Xi web page contains additional information on setting up a café as well as contacts for additional information. I encourage each chapter to review this information and initiate a café in your community. Members-at-large can also get involved with a café in their community.

Grants-in-Aid of Research continued to support hundreds of young scientists with modest contributions to their projects. Each member of Sigma Xi can share the credit of supporting the program through their annual dues payment. Many individuals also made significant contributions above their dues to the annual fund supporting GIAR. In fiscal year 2008 Sigma Xi awarded \$297,308. There were 360 grants awarded from 1556 proposals submitted in 2008, and of these grants, 24 were awarded to recipients outside of the United States. If you care about the success of our GIAR program, please add a small contribution to your dues payment this year. Our students will thank you for this in years to come by continuing to contribute to the scientific enterprise.

The *Science in the News Daily* and *Science in the News Weekly* subscription services provide the membership with a practical source of current events and news. Professional staff members at Sigma Xi scan more than 30 media outlets everyday for the latest science news. *Science in the News Daily* and *Science in the News Weekly* are delivered free of charge directly to subscribers e-mail addresses. *Science in the News Daily* provides at least 10 science and technology news stories every weekday. The *Weekly*, delivered on Monday (or Tuesday in the

event of a holiday), draws on those 50+ news items that provide highlights from the previous week's news. *Science in the News* seeks to inform about important scientific developments, shed light on what research makes news and how it's covered by the media, and show how research interacts with policy and society at large. These e-newsletters are essentially electronic versions of the science section—now a rarity among daily newspapers—available to scientists, students, journalists, educators and anyone else with an interest in science.

In FY 2008 several programs were restructured or activities were suspended in an effort to help contain or reduce costs. These efforts did achieve the goal of saving money, and the Society's expenses for the FY2008 were less than budgeted and even less than predicted. There remains a need to re-examine our programs in education, ethics, diversity and international development. Can we afford to increase or eliminate these previously successful Society programs? As we look to FY2009 and beyond, we need the ideas, input and commitment of every member to serve and achieve our goals.

All in all, in my relatively short tenure as executive director of Sigma Xi since April 2008, I believe we have made progress in moving our Society forward in accomplishing the mission of Sigma Xi. I hope you will agree that we are moving in the right direction and will help work toward a brighter future for the Society.

Working together in FY 2009 we can achieve our goals. The professional staff members are committed to working smarter for you. We have implemented some internal restructuring that has the potential to improve efficiency while still providing excellent service. We seek partnerships that can leverage joint resources to bring greater recognition of your achievements and expertise while promoting the research enterprise. The members are the foundation and your involvement can make a difference. If you want to participate, we can find a place for you to serve.

Jerome F. Baker, Ph.D.
Executive Director
