

## **Sigma Xi Newsletter July 2005**

### **UW Chapter Needs Support of Members**

You may recall that the last newsletter (sent by mail in January 2005) informed you that our chapter's former president, Dr. Linda Chalker-Scott, had moved on to a new position at Washington State University in Puyallup. It also included a renewed request for nomination of officers and for members willing to serve on committees. Involvement of members is particularly important at this time because the **Annual Meeting for the national organization will be taking place this November 3-6 in Seattle**, and this is a chance for the UW Chapter to revitalize and enjoy renewed connection with other chapters in Washington and the nation. That request went unanswered, and was recently followed up by an online survey from the national administrative offices, to which a small number of chapter members responded. Efforts are now underway to revitalize our chapter ahead of the annual meeting.

### **Chapter Revitalization in Progress**

The UW chapter is relatively large, with approximately 500 active, dues-paying members. However, since the resignation of our president, activities have seen a sharp decline as no one has stepped up to fill officer vacancies, and there are no operating committees. It simply is not possible for any one person to keep things moving! To this end, the UW chapter is working with the national organization and a part-time, temporary administrative assistant on the following projects:

- Ramp up of communication with current and past members
- Network with other UW organizations (e.g. AWIS, American Chemical Society, Phi Beta Kappa) to enable co-sponsorship of events and visibility for Sigma Xi on campus
- Recruitment of officers and committee members
- Recruitment of volunteers for annual meeting assistance
- Assist national organization with setting up a Grant Writing Workshop during the Annual Meeting
- Encourage nomination of new members
- Update the website
- Plan a chapter social event in advance of the annual meeting

### **UW Chapter Sponsors Two Science Café Events**

These events are FREE, and co-sponsored with PBS's NOVA Science Now program. Participants gather in a casual community setting such as a bookstore, community room, or UW faculty club. NOVA provides a brief presentation about a current topic. This is followed by open discussion between participants. These events further the mission of Sigma Xi by encouraging networking and sharing of interdisciplinary science.

Two such events are planned. One in September, and another on November 2<sup>nd</sup>, just prior to the annual meeting as attendees begin to arrive in Seattle. Once details are in place, you will be invited to both of these events.

### **Meet Dr. Sylvia Earle, Ira Flatow, and Dr. Bjarne Stroustrup!!!**

These are just some of the noteworthy attendees who will make presentations at the annual meeting. Dr. Earle is an oceanographer, author, explorer and advocate for the world's ocean ecosystems. Mr. Flatow is the well-known moderator of NPR's 'Talk of the Nation: Science Friday' series. Dr. Stroustrup is a computer scientist, professor, and author, famous for inventing the C++ programming language. The annual meeting will have workshops, presentations and social gatherings of various kinds, including grant writing, postdoc-oriented topics, and use of computational science resources to enhance the teaching of difficult topics. For more detail about the annual meeting, visit the event's web site at <http://sigmaxi.org/meetings/annual/index.shtml>.

Volunteers from our local chapter are needed. As a volunteer you will enhance your opportunities for networking and allow the UW chapter to make its best impression. See below for information about how to contact Liz Van Volkenburgh, chapter Treasurer/Secretary.

### **Recall the Mission of Sigma Xi**

Sigma Xi is an international, interdisciplinary honor society of scientists and engineers that was founded in 1886. Members (past and present) include over 200 Nobel Prize winners with familiar names, such as Einstein, Fermi, Feynman, Svedberg, Pauling, Watson & Crick, and Krebs. Its mission, in part, is to foster interdisciplinary communication between scientists, to support the research process, and to increase the public awareness and understanding of science. In addition to a number of other involvements, the national organization provides the local chapters with budgets that allow them to further these goals.

### **Postdocs get special attention from Sigma Xi**

Recently, Sigma Xi, with funding from several other partners, completed an extensive survey of postdocs at 46 US institutions (academic and otherwise). The survey results, which can be viewed at <http://postdoc.sigmaxi.org>, reveal that the quality and satisfaction of a postdoctoral experience can very much depend upon the institution or PI with which the candidate lands an appointment. Generally, institutions and/or PI's with little or no oversight of postdocs tend to provide a significantly lower satisfaction rate than institutions and/or PI's that provide some oversight, such as a requirement for a research plan, performance evaluations, and the presence of a postdoctoral office on campus. Another striking finding of the survey is the widening gap that exists between a postdoc's expectations for future job prospects, and the reality that awaits him or her. Statistics show that well over three times as many postdocs are coming through the system as there

are academic positions coming available each year. The survey results led investigators to draw a number of conclusions about how to improve productivity and satisfaction amongst postdocs. The Special Supplement to American Scientist, May-June, 2005, Doctors Without Orders, makes the following statements, "The fastest and most effective way to bring about positive changes would be for funding organizations to require a minimum amount of administrative oversight for postdocs...grant-makers should support institutions in the creation of postdoc offices, the establishment and dissemination of skills-training programs and various other initiatives."

### **What has the UW Chapter Accomplished?**

- Thousands of your local chapter dollars have been distributed to graduate students to assist with the costs of their research. This local UW Chapter Grant-In-Aid program provided \$3500 in grants in 2004.
- Lectures and other social events provide chances for chapter members to present their research, network, and to hear current findings from top scientists. The UW Chapter of Sigma Xi contributed \$500 to the McNair Research Symposium in Spring 2005. From their website: The Ronald E. McNair Program prepares undergraduates for doctoral study through involvement in research and scholarly activities. The purpose of the McNair Program is to assist in the academic and professional development of undergraduates whose goals are to teach and research at the college level. In order to help students achieve those goals, the program sponsors and supports undergraduate experiences that lay the foundation for a successful graduate school experience. By fostering mentoring relationships, promoting undergraduate research, assisting with GRE preparation, and encouraging students to attend and present at conferences, we aim to produce highly competitive graduate school applicants who have the skills and experiences necessary to succeed in their programs.
- Our Chapter sponsored several lively round table discussions on Environmental and Scientific Ethics with the UW chapter of Phi Beta Kappa in 2003-4
- The University of Washington Postdoctoral Association successfully put forward a proposal to the University requesting formalized support for postdocs across campus. Our Chapter has participated in discussions with the UWPA as they formed and developed their proposal, and recently contributed \$250 toward their first UWPA Family Picnic to be held in August 2005.
- Over the past two years, we have elected 10 new members.

## **What simple things can you do to boost the vitality of the UW chapter?**

- Nominate a potential new member (see below)
- Be in contact with the chapter at: Liz Van Volkenburgh 206 543 6286 or [lizvanv@u.washington.edu](mailto:lizvanv@u.washington.edu). Constructive criticism and ideas are appreciated.
- Volunteer a few hours of your time each year. This does not have to be a time-draining experience. Short-term, specific tasks can be found for anyone willing to help out. Examples:
  - Help with updating the website
  - Put up posters about a sponsored activity (posters are provided)
  - Help with an administrative task
  - Pick up and deliver refreshments to a sponsored activity
  - Propose a speaker or activity

### **Welcome to the following new members:**

- ❖ Emil A. Cherrington, Emily Lena Jones, Joshua J. Tewksbury, Ellen Renee Harju, Michael Devlin Harney, Carissa Joy Leeson, Jing-Jiang Wu, Mei Xu, Heather Rebecca Smith, Cheryll Joy B. Alipio.

**Please Note \*\*\*\*\*** If you received this newsletter by mail - Save our chapter the cost and time of printing and mailing newsletters to you by providing a current email address. By email you will receive shorter, and more timely communication with your chapter. Please send your email address to [Lizvanv@u.washington.edu](mailto:Lizvanv@u.washington.edu). Thank you!

### **Nominating potential Sigma Xi members:**

Membership in Sigma Xi is by nomination. Those who have shown potential as researchers are invited to join as associate members. Full membership is conferred upon those who have demonstrated noteworthy achievements in research. Any active (dues paying ) full member may nominate an individual for membership. Individuals who meet the qualifications for membership may request nomination to membership. Nomination Forms are available, along with Qualifications for Membership at the Sigma Xi web site: <http://sigmaxi.org/member/join/index.shtml>. If you have any questions or need additional information, contact either the UW Chapter Secretary (Liz Van Volkenburgh, [lizvanv@u.washington.edu](mailto:lizvanv@u.washington.edu), 206-543-6286) or the national administrative offices, [memberinfo@sigmaxi.org](mailto:memberinfo@sigmaxi.org), or call 800-243-6534 or 919-549-4691.

### **Coming up in the next newsletter**

- ✓ More news about the upcoming cafes
- ✓ Specifics about the Annual Meeting agenda