

Is Sigma Xi Really an International Society?

Sigma Xi should put in more efforts to make the Society truly international—This was agreed by all discussants in one of the chapter sessions of Sigma Xi's Annual Meeting in Detroit. In the session entitled "Is Sigma Xi Really an International Society?", panelist Dr. Antonio Pita, Director of the Canadian/International Constituency Group, mentioned that although Sigma Xi has endeavored to build its international membership, only a few active chapters and partners currently exist. He raised a question whether Sigma Xi should strive to be truly an international scientific society. If so, how should its efforts be directed, and how could Sigma Xi be a driving force in promoting international science and engineering (S&E) partnership. Another panelist, Dr. Michael Crosby, Executive Director, U.S. National Science Board, informed that NSB was examining the role of the US Government in supporting international S&E research partnerships and how such partnerships might be used to achieve benefits beyond just doing "good" science. According to him, Sigma Xi, as an international, interdisciplinary honorary S&E research society, should be uniquely positioned to facilitate international partnerships. The session was attended by current and future presidents of the Society, its executive director and a host of other Society leaders. All of them stressed the need for more involvement of the Society internationally and expressed their full support in spearheading this mission in the coming years.

The salient points that have transpired from the deliberations by the members of the panel and discussants are as follows:

- Science, due to its nature, is universal and should cross political boundaries. Therefore, there exists inherent reason for spreading out Sigma Xi's activities internationally. However, it is necessary to plan and implement these activities of Sigma Xi in a strategic way;
- Active involvement of Sigma Xi in the United Nation's study on Climate Change is one of the glaring examples of its opportunities to contribute in the international arena;
- Multi-disciplinary character is one of the major strengths and uniqueness of Sigma Xi. It should be upheld and propagated to the scientific community;
- A substantial number of Sigma Xi's members in the USA are foreign nationals. This group of members can play a positive role in promoting Sigma Xi's activities internationally;
- Many Sigma Xi members in the USA have professional linkages with scientists in other countries. They also visit those countries from time to time. These scientists may act as catalytic agents in spearheading Sigma Xi's mission, recruiting new members and forming new international chapters in those countries;

- Sigma Xi's annual membership fee prevents many scientists from developing countries to join as full members. However, Sigma Xi's Board of Directors has approved a new system that allows scientists from selected countries to join the Society as a group named "Sigma Xi International Partner," and pay their dues at a reduced rate. Under this concept three Sigma Xi International Partners have already been established. There was a suggestion to determine dues for international members based on per capita GNP;
- Sigma Xi is an "honor" society. While the concept of honor society is well understood in most of the developed countries it is quite an alien idea in many parts of the world. The latter group of countries likes to see some tangible benefits from joining Sigma Xi;
- A concept of "Sister Chapter" might be introduced. Under this concept an international chapter will be tagged with another chapter in the USA or other country. It is believed that through this exchange of experiences and views the international chapters might get some insight on success stories of sister chapters. However, chapters from both sides should participate in this program voluntarily;
- It might be useful to undertake a study to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the Society's international activities.