

nature chemical biology

Meetings of the minds

Most of the daily work of practicing scientists involves the execution and analysis of experiments designed to advance a research project. However, repeating experiments, solving technical problems and reformulating hypotheses, all of which eventually lead to “Eureka!” moments in science, can be frustrating and sometimes isolating parts of bench work. This is one reason why the interactive and social aspects of science are so important. By meeting with colleagues in our universities and companies, we identify research solutions and initiate collaborations. By attending meetings for the chemical biology community, we expose ourselves to new scientific ideas and worldviews, communicate our results to a broader audience and expand our network of scientific colleagues. Meetings and conferences offer an important forum for scientists to socialize and discuss frontier research, which is central to the advancement of science.

For most of us, our laboratory’s research meetings were our first exposure to scientific meetings. The formats and frequencies of group meetings vary widely in the chemical and biological communities. However, principal investigators generally agree that, from a training perspective, there are several components to successful laboratory meetings. First, research reports by laboratory members provide a regular forum to discuss primary data and solve research problems. In this context, researchers have the opportunity to practice their presentation skills in a safe environment, while learning that the scientific process includes debate and criticism. Second, most laboratories emphasize the acquisition of broader scientific knowledge by reading and discussing the scientific literature. For chemical biology laboratories, literature group meetings offer an important opportunity to enhance group members’ scientific breadth at the chemistry-biology interface.

Although laboratory meetings are important for training students and advancing projects, extramural scientific meetings are an essential component of the intellectual lives of scientists. Larger meetings, organized by societies such as the American Chemical Society (<http://www.acs.org>) or Federation of European Biochemical Societies (<http://www.febs.org>), frequently have thousands of delegates and exhibitors and feature diverse scientific programs. These large meetings also provide career development and employment fairs, as well as exhibitions. In contrast, smaller meetings, such as the Gordon Research

Conferences (<http://www.grc.uri.edu>), are more scientifically focused and restricted to fewer attendees. These meetings have the major advantage that delegates can interact directly with their peers in a more casual setting.

What meeting format is optimal for the chemical biology community? Although meetings of major scientific societies feature excellent scientific programs, they tend to attract either chemists or biologists, but not both. Perhaps more chemical biology conferences could focus on a specific biological problem or process, which might bring together biologists and chemists with similar interests who would not normally overlap at traditional meetings. Additionally, small workshops and conferences such as the Horizon Symposia (<http://www.nature.com/horizon/home.html>), the Keck Futures Initiative (<http://www7.nationalacademies.org/keck/index.html>) or the Frontiers in Chemical Biology Forum (<http://www.rsc.org>) offer unique opportunities for participants to engage in conversations about the future of chemical biology. The interdisciplinary nature of chemical biology research may be best served by these new conference formats.

With the many demands on a research scientist’s time, no chemical biologist can attend every relevant meeting. For this reason, *Nature Chemical Biology* features meeting reports that highlight key chemical biology conferences. Last month, Stephan Jaroch and Hilmar Weinmann described advances in chemical genomics that were discussed at a meeting held in Berlin earlier this year. In this issue, C. Jamie McKnight and Matthew Cordes report on the Nineteenth Annual Symposium of the Protein Society (<http://www.proteinsociety.org>), which was held in Boston in July. Through future meeting reports, we look forward to highlighting major scientific meetings as well as bringing to your attention smaller conferences of interest to the chemical biology community.

The *Nature Chemical Biology* editorial team attends many meetings and conferences, and particularly enjoys speaking with members of the chemical biology community. We met many of you at the American Chemical Society National Meeting in Washington, DC this August and at other conferences over the summer. We are always interested to hear about exciting research at the interface of chemistry and biology and to talk with you about how we can continue to make *Nature Chemical Biology* the premier chemical biology journal for our authors and readers. ■