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Advertising correspondence: Scherago Associates, Inc., 10th floor, 1515 Broadway, New York, NY 10036; (212/730-1050).

Editorial and business address: *BioScience*, American Institute of Biological Sciences, 1401 Wilson Blvd., Arlington, VA 22209; (703/527-6776).

Editor's office: William G. Van der Kloot, Department of Physiology and Biophysics, School of Medicine, Health Sciences Center, State University of New York, Stony Brook, NY 11794; (516/444-3049).

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Opinion

Up with AIBS!

Scientific societies have their ups and downs, and AIBS has not been immune to this problem. I am happy to report, however, that the star of AIBS is now on the rise, and the number of critics of AIBS should soon be on the decline. Perhaps the following anecdote will show how one of the severest critics of AIBS has been won over and has now become its strongest supporter. While President of the American Society for Photobiology (ASP), I successfully defeated moves by the Council to make ASP a member society of AIBS because AIBS was then sitting in the trough of its sine wave of accomplishments. After I left the Council of ASP, membership in AIBS was approved, and perhaps as some perverse joke, I was appointed ASP representative to the Governing Board of AIBS. At my first meeting of the board, I found many aspects of AIBS that I was still very unhappy about, but there was an element of growing optimism among the members of the board concerning the future of the institute, and new long-range plans were being formulated with special emphasis on the Public Responsibilities Program.

Every scientific society holds meetings and provides useful publications for its members, but AIBS is a unique organization and, therefore, must provide a unique service for its members. Two strengths of AIBS are the proximity of its headquarters to Washington, DC, and the expertise of its members and professional staff to provide timely information and testimony on the biological aspects of national problems.

Occasionally AIBS has neglected to see its members as its customers and to remember that unless an organization serves its customers well, it can lose them. Although AIBS serves its members well in many areas (e.g., working for better funding for NSF, helping to preserve the Endangered Species Act, etc.), it has not informed its members adequately about its good works.

AIBS is rightfully proud of *BioScience* and continues to search for ways to make *BioScience* even more responsive to the needs of its readers. However, belonging to AIBS means much more than just receiving the monthly issues of *BioScience*. Being a member of AIBS also means providing financial support for the other activities of the institute and participating directly in its efforts to improve research opportunities for biologists, to improve education in biology, and to make certain that laws affecting the life sciences are written in collaboration with experts in the relevant areas of biology. AIBS is doing good work for its members and for biology in general, but the members need to be constantly informed of these activities so that they can share in the pride.

Most scientific societies simply do not have the breadth of scientific expertise to speak authoritatively at the national level for the science of biology. This is the unique role and talent of AIBS. I am convinced of the necessity, especially in these troubled financial times, of maintaining a strong AIBS, through which biologists can speak out in behalf of the science of biology. It is now my job to instill in the members of AIBS the pride I feel about participating, both with my money and my time, in the good works of this organization. It is also my job to encourage people to join AIBS so they too can share in this pride. Since the main purpose of AIBS is to serve the needs of its members, let me hear from you.

KENDRIC C. SMITH
President