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## **Connecting Branches To Student Activities**

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# Connecting Branches to Student Activities

As the new chair of the Student Membership Committee for the ASM, one of my responsibilities is to encourage the establishment and maintenance of Student Chapters. I also want to increase the number of student members in the national ASM organization as well as in the local Branches. If we want the future of microbiology to be vibrant, each of us needs to help to recruit students in some way. One way to do this is through local ASM Branches. Some Branches have been associated with universities, and students are an integral part of Branch activities. Other Branches have been instrumental in clinical microbiologists' networking activities and may or may not actively involve students. Each of us appreciates that interested students represent a robust pipeline of future faculty, investigators, clinicians, and technologists, as well as people to fill sales, government, and industrial positions. How can Branches support student activities? Here is a list of examples:

- Host a symposium or poster session at which undergraduate and graduate students can present posters and papers. Give prizes for best poster in a category; it doesn't have to be a big prize—a gift card or a book from ASM Press would be fine.
- Participate in a local science fair as a judge. Schools and districts are always searching for judges; sponsor a prize for the best project involving microbiology. Give a prize to the student and one to his/her teacher (prizes can be an ASM book—for example, Infections of Leisure or The Other Side of the Microscope are popular titles).
- Invite a microbiology educator (or a panel of several) to talk about their teaching activities—you will be surprised how creative and innovative they are.

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- Partner with a community college colleague in teaching microbiology.
- Sponsor an undergraduate student's summer project in your lab.
- Organize a career day for microbiology students. Have members of your Branch give talks about their different careers—what they do and how they trained for their jobs.
- Have an annual lecturer whom the students invite—many very busy and prominent scientists are much more likely and willing to accept if invited by students.
- Help to sponsor a Student Chapter by providing funds for a group of faculty to network. I have organized such a group in eastern Pennsylvania, with the help of the Eastern Pennsylvania ASM Branch and have written about the details of this network of about 17 other microbiology educators in Focus on Microbiology Education. We have funding to meet three times each year—once each semester (faculty only) to talk about teaching (in the spring) and research (in the fall) and once during the summer so that our students can present posters at a symposium that features a keynote speaker.

Those whose jobs do not involve much contact with students will find these activities energizing, and you will see great promise for the future of microbiology. If all who students see are professors, they might not realize that there are other jobs for those with our training. For those who are educators, this is an opportunity to expand your network and to meet potential guest speakers or research mentors for your students. Branches have several free student memberships to give to interested students; perhaps the officers of the Student Chapter could be considered to receive those benefits.

We look forward to a reinvigoration of Student Chapters and Branch interactions. If you are a student or full member of ASM or would like to become one, or if you are interested in local Branch activities and helping with Student Chapters, please feel free to contact Amy Cheng Vollmer, Chair, Student Committee, about student activities. The grass roots activities of the Student Membership Committee are coordinated through the ASM Membership Board, chaired by Toby K. Eisenstein.

Amy Cheng Vollmer