



Unity & Diversity



From the President

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In the biological world, we see unity and diversity, and consider these characteristics, which we explain as an outcome of evolution, positive. Diversity is a characteristic of a healthy and resilient system, one that can withstand perturbations and has the potential for change. Unity is explained by common origin and the passing of information from one generation to the next. The NABT is also characterized by unity and diversity. All of us are committed to excellence in biology education, and that shared interest leads to the types of collaboration and communication – in this journal, at conferences, and through electronic media – that we all enjoy and value so much. The diversity is evident in our sections, programs, breadth of articles, and membership characteristics. We benefit from the perspectives and insights of others and we do so because of the unity in our common theme – excellence in biology education. Yet we each have our own perspectives, influenced by others, by the students we teach or roles we play in education, and so we too have our own focal points of interest.

My focal point of interest is the first-year biology experience. I teach and coordinate a large introductory biology course that serves both majors and nonmajors. I am proud of and passionate about it. Not surprisingly, I see it as the focal point for NABT. It is the meeting point between secondary and postsecondary. It is the common course taught in two-year and four-year colleges. It is the course for which precollege instruction prepares students and that prepares students for their subsequent courses, whether that is providing majors with essential conceptual understanding of a common core or improving all students' understanding of the nature and process of science, critical thinking, collaboration, time management, study, and other skills. It sets the curriculum for AP instructors and serves as the training ground for future college faculty, helping them gain teaching experience and develop their research skills. At my institution, we also use it as a “field” experience for preservice teachers, where they practice conducting inquiry-based labs and evaluate the prior knowledge and skills of entering students (who were exiting seniors two months earlier). Because it does all of this, I connect to a diversity of NABT members.

When I attended my first NABT conference, I was still making the transition from traditional research (I was educated as an ethologist) to a focus on biology education and, therefore, my ignorance abounded (as it still does). I learned about a diversity of techniques and gained a diversity of ideas from the presentations of secondary-school teachers and incorporated them into my course or encouraged others to adapt and adopt them in their courses. I still do this. Because college readiness is important to me, I need to interact with secondary instructors. Because outreach and attention to broader impacts of the research I do on teaching and learning among

first-year students are important to me, I relish the opportunities to interact with outreach and informal science educators. Because we share common goals in teaching introductory biology and concerns about articulation and transfer students, I value my interactions with AP and two-year college instructors. Bringing global perspectives into my classroom and learning about developments in education in the international community prompt my interactions with NABT's global-perspectives community. Because the best practice in teaching introductory biology is informed by research, I benefit from the examples of practice and the research presented in this journal and at conference.

If the unity and diversity in the biological world are a result of evolution, is evolution also a part of NABT? We have evolved considerably since 1938. At the recent conference, I met speakers and first-time attendees who remarked that they “didn't know that NABT was involved in...” or “didn't realize that NABT had so many members that...” In each case they perceived us as less than we are. We should work to change that perception. We are diverse in our perspectives and skills but unified in our pursuit of excellence in biology education. We are forming new partnerships with other organizations that help us provide new tools for biology educators. We use the lessons from interactions among sections, committees, and educators at all levels – through journal articles, position papers, conference presentations, and workshops; and through many other types of direct or indirect interactions to inform, promote, and disseminate best practices.

While I see introductory college biology as the fulcrum for NABT, I am sure that each of you has your own focal point at the elementary, secondary, postsecondary, graduate, or informal level. It's like examining a three-dimensional graph – each viewpoint is valid, has its merits, and provides different insights. Thus, each should be appreciated and shared. As president, my role is to further the mission of the society and to attend to our unity and diversity. It is what makes us a healthy and resilient society, able to withstand perturbations and to change as the educational environment changes. As you read the articles in this issue, think of your perspective and focal point and feel free to let me know about it (dfrench@okstate.edu).

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