

Feature Article

PABMB: From 1994 to Present

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My interest in PABMB resulted from my having three post-doctoral students who came to my laboratory from Argentina in the late 1980s and from enjoying very much the VII PAABS meeting (Pan American Association of Biochemical Societies) in Ixtapa, Mexico, the fall of 1992. It was a beautiful resort area and the meeting was of a very high quality having many eminent speakers not only from the Americas, North, Central and South, but also from Europe and Asia. That was the meeting when the PAABS Council decided to change their name to PABMB, the Pan American Association for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology. At that time I was a member of the American Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology (ASBMB) Education Committee and we had a subcommittee that dealt with Latin American educational affairs. Leopoldo de Meis from the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil would sometimes attend the ASBMB meeting and we had some occasion to discuss with him what he was doing with respect to training of undergraduate as well as graduate students in Brazil. In 1993 I received a call from him asking me if I would be interested in being the Secretary General of PABMB, effective, 1 January 1994. There was hesitation on my part as I was not really interested in taking up another administrative job. But Leopoldo was insistent and I agreed.

At that time the PABMB Chairman was Marino Martinez-Carrion who was Dean of the School of Biological Sciences at the University of Missouri - Kansas City. The others on the Executive Committee were Vice Chairman, Manuel Krauskopf from Chile, Treasurer, Armando Parodi from Argentina and Immediate Past Chairman, Antonio Peña from Mexico.

PABMB consists of Societies of Biochemistry and/or Molecular Biology and equivalent organizations in the Americas (including the Caribbean), designated as Constituent Societies. Similar organizations outside the geographic area of the Americas, but culturally related are designated as Adherent Societies. The Council and the Executive Committee

conduct the business affairs of PABMB. The Council is composed of one delegate from the Constituent and Adherent Societies of PABMB. The Constituent Societies at that time were the biochemical societies from, Argentina, Brazil, Canada (known as the Canadian Society of Biochemistry and Molecular & Cellular Biology; CSBMCB), Chile, Mexico, Peru, Venezuela, ASBMB and the American Chemical Society-Division of Biological Chemistry. In addition there are two Adherent Societies, the Biochemical Societies of Spain and Portugal. Their delegates are non-voting members of the Council.

As indicated in the Statutes, the purpose of the PABMB is to promote and support the growth and advancement of the sciences and education of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology particularly among the Biochemical Societies in the Western Hemisphere. In doing this, PABMB has sponsored, promoted and supported a number of meetings between the PABMB-associated societies in presenting and discussing scientific discoveries in Biochemistry and Molecular Biology. It has also sponsored and helped organize special courses for advanced students in Biochemistry and Molecular Biology and has sponsored the exchange of faculty and students between institutions engaged in research and teaching. In the furtherance of these aims, the Association has worked closely with other organizations having similar objectives, for example, the International Union of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology (IUBMB).

Indeed it must be said at this point that the IUBMB has been a most supportive organization of PABMB and very much in financial support. PABMB is very happy to be a regional organization associated with IUBMB. With IUBMB support and with the dues provided by the Constituent and Adherent Societies, PABMB has been able every third year to sponsor a PABMB Congress meeting. Indeed ten Congress meetings have occurred with the last one, the PABMB Congress in Pinamar, Argentina in December, 2005. These meetings have brought many scientists from the Latin-American countries together with scientists from the USA and Canada. The main representatives from Latin-America usually are from Brazil, Argentina and Chile with the largest

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group usually coming from the country that is hosting the meeting.

There have been other activities that PABMB has done to sponsor research and promote associations with other biochemical organizations. PABMB has sponsored a PABMB Lecture Award. It has been made known to the PABMB biochemistry and molecular biology societies and other regional organizations that PABMB would provide for their meetings, partial support for travel and subsistence of a highly eminent speaker, who is designated as the PABMB Award Lecturer. The lecturer is also awarded a commemorative plaque. Many of the Societies and Associations have positively responded and PABMB has had PABMB Award lecturers at IUBMB, ASBMB and FEBS meetings and of course, at the annual meetings of many of the PABMB Constituent and Adherent Societies. A most important activity has been providing travel support for students and young scientists from the Latin-American countries and Canada and USA to the PABMB Congresses as well as to international meetings such as the IUBMB Congress and FEBS meetings. Depending on the meeting size and budget support, the number of students supported could range anywhere from 20–30 to about 200.

PABMB had a very successful joint meeting, ‘New World Science for the Next Millenium’, with ASBMB, CSBMCB and the American Chemical Society-Biological Chemistry Division from 16–20 May 1999 in San Francisco. This was actually the ninth PABMB Congress and as planned was in the United States. Two hundred and thirty-five Travel awards were provided to young scientists/postdoctoral/graduate student registrants (\$400 + free registration). These young scientists participated in the special Symposium Program on 15–16 May organized by Frank Vella of Canada. There were two oral sessions on 16 May as well as poster presentations. The speakers (24) had 10 minutes for their presentations. There were also 234 poster presentations.

The PABMB-sponsored lectures were the IUBMB/PABMB Lecture (Bruce Alberts, National Academy of Sciences, USA ‘Science, Society and the University: The Many Challenges Ahead’), Luis Leloir Lecture (Eric Lander,

MIT, USA, ‘Genes and Genomes’), PABMB Lecture Award (Joan Guinovart, Spain, ‘Translocation of Mammalian Glycogen Synthases’) and the FEBS/PABMB Lecture (Diane Mathis, France, ‘Engineering Autoimmunity’). PABMB also sponsored four Symposia (‘Subcellular organization of carbohydrate metabolism’; ‘Calcium signalling and transport systems’; Glycan structure and Syntheses in lower eukaryotes’; ‘Neurochemistry’), co-sponsored one seminar with ABRF (‘Core facilities in the Southern cone’) and co-sponsored one education symposium with ASBMB entitled, ‘Biochemical Education across the Americas’.

Another very successful meeting was also held in collaboration with FEBS in their 27th meeting in Lisbon, Portugal 30 June–5 July in 2001. They also collaborated with the CSBMCB and IUBMB in organizing the IUBMB 2003 Congress that was to be held in Toronto. Unfortunately the SARS outbreak caused a postponement of the meeting. However, the IUBMB congress was rescheduled as a part of a Joint IUBMB/HUPO (Human Proteome Organization) Congress in Montreal on 8–11 October 2001, with PABMB giving its full support particularly for the Young Scientist Program (YSP), a popular feature of IUBMB congresses for several decades.

Also during 2001 the PABMB initiated a WEB site at Michigan State University, Michigan, USA and now the website is in Uruguay: <http://pabmb.fcien.edu.uy/main1.htm>. The website lists the mission of PABMB, the member societies, scientific meetings to be held in the Latin-American countries, and its Statutes and By-laws that were modified in 2001. In the website, PABMB has also maintained its logo which was first used in 2001. The logo was created by Dr Mirta Sivak, originally from Argentina, who now resides in the United States.

In the 12 years (1994–2005) when I served as Secretary General, Vice Chairman and Chairman of PABMB, I have seen the organization grow and establish itself as a very able and vital organization. Societies from countries such as Cuba, Panama and Uruguay have entered as new members of PABMB. I believe PABMB will grow even more in the future under the leadership of Sergio Ferreira and the current Executive Committee.