

Summary

The Diversity in Agronomy, Crops, Soils and Environmental Sciences Committee (ACS528) proceeded with its main objectives to: 1) increase the number of high school students attending 2014's ASA, CSSA and SSSA meetings; 2) increase graduate student participation in the Minority Student Poster Competition. The high schools students participating in the Gateway Scholars Program (previously known as Platinum Scholars Program) of the ACS 528 enjoyed activities and displayed great interest and enthusiasm at this year's meeting. Overall, the Diversity Committee's activities during the Annual Meeting were a success. This report, including minutes from the Annual Meeting, highlights various activities and achievements of 2014. Acknowledgment of donors and supporters, and suggestions for improvement are also presented.

1. Mission Statement (updated)

Diversity in Agronomy, Crops, Soils and Environmental Sciences Committee (ACS528), under the auspices of the American Society of Agronomy, Crop Science Society of America, and Soil Science Society of America, is committed to enhancing participation of underrepresented students and professionals in the three Societies, thereby strengthening and diversifying the potential workforce in agricultural and environmental sciences. The Diversity Committee endeavors are to recruit students for careers in agriculture and environmental sciences through the Gateway Scholars Program, that sponsors the participation of local high school students and teachers at the ASA/CSSA/SSSA annual meetings, where they obtain first-hand experience on agricultural and environmental issues, cutting-edge scientific knowledge, and enhanced understanding of the role of the Tri-Societies in finding solutions to national and global problems concerning production of food, fiber, fuel, and the environment.

2. Minutes of Monthly Teleconferences and Annual Business Meetings

Teleconferences:

Monthly teleconferences were regularly held this year to keep the members abreast with the committee's activities and to enhance their involvement in the efforts to achieve objectives of the ACS528 committee. During these monthly teleconferences, subcommittees were created to help carry out the activities of the Diversity Committee for this year's Annual Meeting. The subcommittees were as follows: Graduated Student Poster Competition Committee, Gateway Scholars Program Committee, Gateway Scholars Funding Raising Committee, and the Gateway Scholars High School Identification Committee.

Annual Business Meeting - 2014

This year's annual business meeting was held on November 3, 2014 at the Long Beach Convention Center, Long Beach, California. It was attended by the members of the ACS528 and other members of the societies (ASA-CSSA-SSSA) representing underrepresented groups across the world. A total of 35 people attended this year's annual business meeting. Dr. Annette James, Assistant Professor from Prairie View A&M University (Chair-2014), presented the 2014 Committee's Activity Report. The Chair-elect for 2016 and secretary for 2015 were elected through voting. Committee members and guests discussed ideas of how to improve and expand the activities of the Diversity Committee in preparation for Minneapolis in 2015. One suggestion was to reach out to the MANRRS (Minorities in Agriculture, Natural Resources and Related Sciences) group to increase minority participation at the ASA meetings.

3. Diversity Graduate Student Poster Competition, ASA-CSSA-SSSA International Meetings, November 3-6, 2014, Long Beach, California, FL

Every year, one of the major activities of the Diversity in Agronomy, Crops, Soils and Environmental Sciences Committee (ACS528) is to recognize outstanding posters presented at Annual International Meetings of the three societies (ASA-CSSA-SSSA) by graduate students from under-represented groups. A total of 10 graduate students belonging to underrepresented groups participated in this year's competition. The participants also had the opportunity to explain their research to the High School students attending the Gateway Scholars Program of the ACS 528 (please see Item-4 below). The interaction between the graduate students presenting posters and the ones participating in the Gateway Scholars Program was outstanding and very encouraging. It helped achieve our objective of motivating high school students to think about pursuing a career in agricultural and environmental sciences. The three award winners declared for the Diversity Graduate Student Poster Competition were Ananda Bandara (1st), Dilooshi Weerasooriya (2nd), and Debjani Sihi (3rd).

4. Gateway Scholars Program, ASA-CSSA-SSSA International Meetings November 2-5, 2014, Long Beach California

The 'Gateway Scholars program' was initiated in 2010 under the name 'Platinum Scholars Program'. The ACS 528 committee voted for a change in the name of this initiative to align better with the Society's other programs. This program was designed to introduce high school students to the multitude of scientific disciplines in which members of ASA, CSSA and SSSA are engaged in by inviting students and teachers from local high schools to attend the annual conference. The goal is to introduce the next generation of scientists to these research areas and identify and motivate the future leaders in these sciences. This year students and teachers from four schools (North, Perris, Heritage, and Eagle Rock High Schools) participated in this year program. The Gateway Scholars were guided to attend oral and poster sessions of their interest and were introduced to participants of *Diversity Graduate Student Poster Competition* (Special Session 159). The Gateway Scholars visited College/ University booths and vendors in exhibit hall. At the end of the program, the students attended the Gateway Scholars Motivational Program (Special Session 165 held at 2:00 to 5:00 pm) where leading researcher Dr. Bikram S. Gil (Kansas State University) delivered a motivational lecture to the students. A panel discussion was created made up of a Senior Scientist - Dr. Ramble Ankumah (Tuskegee University), Mid-Career Scientist - Dr. Francisco Calderon (USDA-ARS), Early Career Scientist - Dr. Shalamar Armstrong (Illinois State University), Post Doc - Dr. Terrance Gardner (North Carolina State University), and Graduate Student - Mr. Wayne Roper, (North Carolina State University) to allow high school students attending the Gateway Scholars Program the opportunity to ask questions related to pursuing careers in agriculture and environmental science related fields. The student and teachers accompanying the student was given a survey to obtain feedback in order for Diversity Committee to make future improvements to its Gateway Scholar's Program Activities.

5. Request for Endorsement from Societies' Presidents of New Chair, Chair-elect and Member

ACS528 submits to the Societies' Presidents the following names for endorsement:

2015 Chair: Dr. Mark Ibekwe (USDA-ARS, Riverside, CA)

2016 Chair Elect and New Member: Dr. Dedrick Davis (Alabama A&M University, Normal, AL)

2015 Secretary and New Member: Dr. Elica Moss (Alabama A&M University, Normal, AL)

6. Acknowledgment of Supporters, Donors and Motivational speakers

ACS 528 Committee is grateful to the Agronomic Science Foundation and our own societies (CSSA-ASA-SSSA) for monetary support. The Committee would also like to thank the Noble Foundation, USDA-ARS, Alabama A&M University, University of Illinois, University of Wyoming, Yorktown State University, Prairie View A&M University and NOSB for providing promotional gift items and other support for the Gateway Scholars Program.

We would like to also thank student volunteers who served as guides for the high school students. We would like to thank the teachers from North, Perris, Heritage, and Eagle Rock High Schools for allowing their students to attend the Gateway Scholars program.

We would like to thank Dr. Bikram S. Gil for his informative and interesting motivational presentation and panelists, Dr. Ramble Ankumah, Dr. Francisco Calderon, Dr. Shalamar Armstrong, Dr. Terrence Gardner, and Mr. Wayne Roper, of the Gateway Scholars Program. In addition, we are grateful to Dr. Ann Marie Thro, National Program Leader (NIFA), for providing goodies for the Gateway Scholars.

The Committee is deeply grateful to the ASA - CSSA - SSSA for supporting all our events. We also thank everybody in the headquarters of all three societies, for providing assistance to the Diversity Committee. We would like to specially thank Mr. Alexander Barton for facilitating funding from Agronomic Science Foundation and Ms. Emily Fuger for serving as the Committee's liaison with the Societies.

