

Aquarium-Museum Panel 2005-2006 Annual Report

From: Russell Moll, Panel Chair
To: Chair, Committee on Committees

I am pleased to present this report summarizing the activities of the Aquarium-Museum Panel for the 2005-2006 academic year. In brief, this Panel serves as a source of faculty advice to the Birch Aquarium at Scripps (BAS). This Panel addresses issues pertaining to the operation, intellectual direction and interactions with the Scripps Institution of Oceanography (SIO). The Panel met four times in the 2005-2006 academic year with each meeting lasting one and a half hours. Several small subcommittees were created during the course of the year for more in-depth look at a specific issues by Panel members.

The topics considered by the Panel in 2005-2006 covered three broad categories BAS operations, providing a better exchange of information between the BAS and SIO faculty, staff and students and providing better access to the BAS by SIO faculty, staff and students.

Under the category of BAS operations, each Panel meeting commenced with a discussion on the current status of the BAS by Director Nigella Hillgarth. Her presentations touched on a variety of issues such as the financial status of the BAS, near-term and long-term exhibit plans, recent trends in BAS attendance, collaborations with other Aquaria in the US and overseas. The most salient message from these discussions was the reassurance to the Panel that the BAS is on an excellent trajectory with stable financial footing and exciting, high-quality exhibits planned for the next few years.

Under the category of enhancing exchange of information between the BAS and SIO, the Panel developed several recommendations. One of those was that Director Hillgarth gives informal seminars at SIO on how the BAS operates as a means of helping faculty, staff and students learn more about the BAS. The motivation for these seminars is that by increasing the general knowledge of the BAS at SIO this will promote more interaction with the faculty, staff and students. In the 2005-2006 academic year Director Hillgarth delivered two seminars. The Panel assessment of this activity was that the seminars were well received. The Panel encouraged Director Hillgarth to give more seminars as time permits.

The issue of providing better access to the BAS was the source of much dialogue by the Panel and several issues were raised under this general category. Perhaps the biggest success was the development and implementation of a program providing free access to the BAS for SIO graduate students. This popular program is now up and running and the net result is an increase in graduate student visits to the BAS. The Panel turned their attention toward developing incentives to increase faculty and staff access to the BAS, although a final resolution on such a program was not reached in 2005-2006. Another issue discussed by the Panel was how to bring hot topics from the SIO research arena to the BAS in a timely manner. Ultimately the Panel settled on the concept of having a small amount of display space that can serve as a location for bringing these topics to the BAS without a long lead time as is the case for large exhibits.

Further, if at all possible those hot topics should be presented within the context of related larger exhibits.

The last Panel meeting of the year concluded with a brief discussion of topics and issues for consideration during the 2006-2007 academic year.