

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

PROMOTING THE SOUTH DAKOTA ACADEMY OF SCIENCE: A NEW VISION

Address to the South Dakota Academy of Science
Dakota State University
October 29, 2022
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Many of the long-time members of the South Dakota Academy of Science realize that membership in our organization has declined significantly over at least the past five years. Part of this is due to the former practice of renewing membership at our Annual Meeting, which has traditionally been in the spring. From 2018 through 2020, we had a series of unfortunate events that required the cancellation of our Annual Meeting. First there were two years in a row when the meeting was canceled due to spring blizzards, then in 2020 the meeting was canceled due to the Covid-19 pandemic. In 2021, we moved our meeting online due to ongoing issues with the Covid-19 pandemic. With no in-person annual meeting, there was less opportunity to recruit new student and regular members, and to network with colleagues and long-time friends.

As more transmissible strains of Covid-19 appeared in 2022, the Executive Committee decided to postpone the 107th Annual Meeting this year to the fall. It is encouraging to see both returning and new members in attendance this year and your continued support is appreciated. To ensure our continued ability to meet our mission, we need to expand our efforts to recruit new members. Therefore, I have several new suggestions.

First, I suggest recruiting scientists from local research institutes. To encourage participation, we could offer them free access to a recruiting and/or a vendor's fair if at least one of their researchers do an oral presentation, which might attract both new organizations, undergraduates, and graduate students. Examples of such institutes might be Sanford Research, Avera Health, Poet Bioproducts Institute, and researchers from the USGS EROS center near Sioux Falls. Some of these institutes are actively recruiting student interns, which might give our undergraduate and graduate students a reason to attend our Annual Meeting.

Amateur scientists have made great contributions to science in South Dakota in the past and continue to do. There are South Dakotans who organize and participate in the Audubon Society's Christmas Bird Count and the Great Backyard Bird Count who might be interested in our organization, and possibly even doing a presentation. There are numerous citizen scientists who also participate in data collection by reporting records of flora and fauna to databases such as iNaturalist. Many of these people might not even know of our existence. The best way to

let them know about our organization is just to extend a personal invitation. If we all invited someone who we know outside of our institution, it would make a big difference.

Collectively, we all know hundreds of undergraduate and graduate students who have gone on to work as researchers following matriculation from South Dakota post-baccalaureate institutions. Many of these former students are doing cutting-edge research. If we invite some of them to come back for a visit and ask them to do a presentation at our meeting, they could see what a welcoming and friendly group we have and might come back again. We might even offer a reduced registration fee for first time attendees or a special breakfast for first-time presenters.

For most of the history of the SDAOS, we've had the philosophy of "build it and they will come." This strategy doesn't seem to be working. We are competing with other meetings, teaching and grading activities, on-going research, and busy family life. If we are to survive, we need to expand our reach beyond academia.