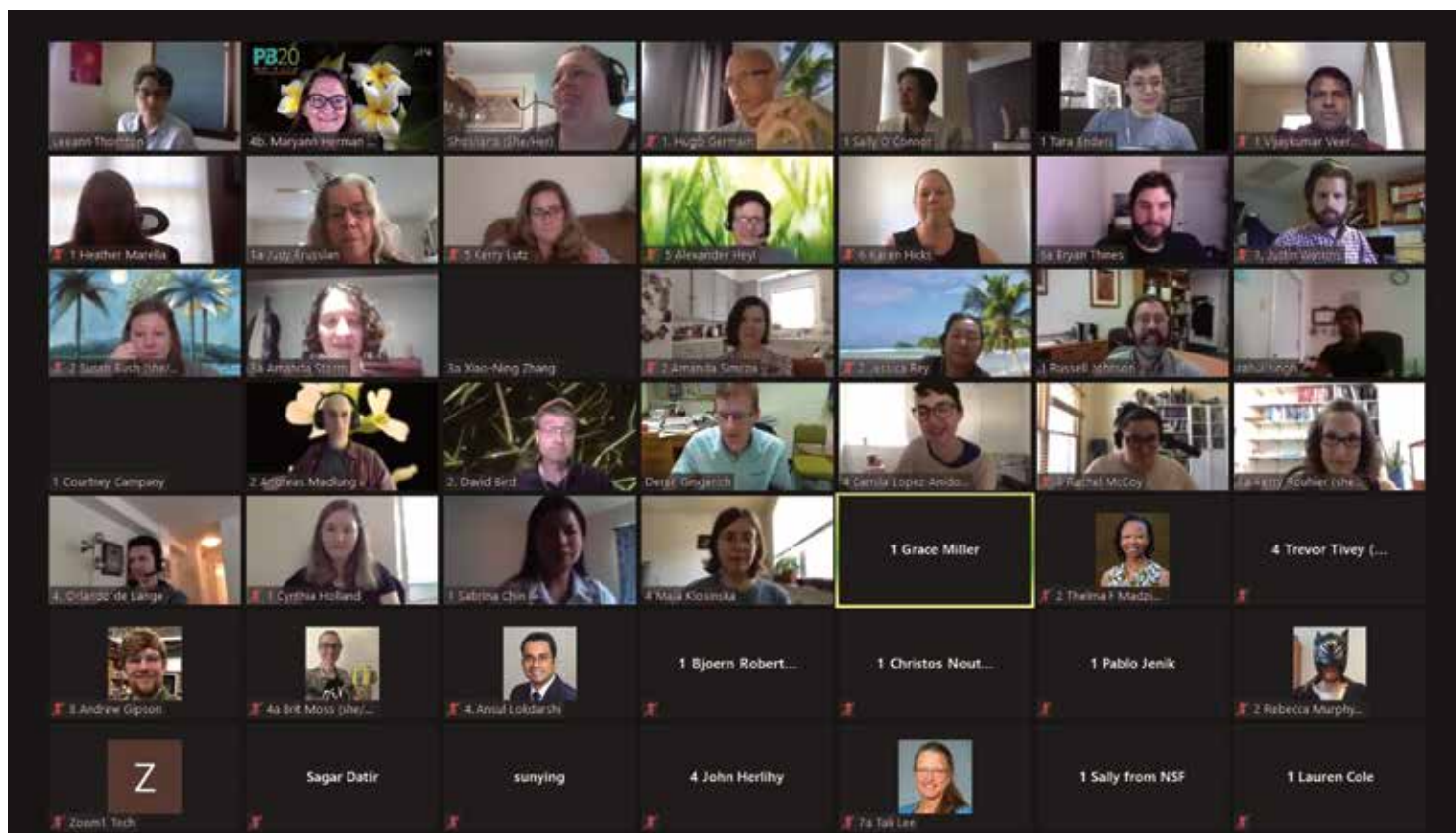


ASPB's Primarily Undergraduate Institution Section: Nearing the End of Our Probationary Period

BY MARYANN AB HERMAN
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In 2008, I began the job I'd always aspired to and that mirrored my own experiences in college—a faculty position at a small primarily undergraduate institution (PUI). Finally, I could develop close mentoring relationships with my undergraduate students, explore innovative teaching strategies, and develop my own research program. Despite having done my homework on this type of position, I found that facilitating undergraduate research projects with limited equipment,

supplies, and funding with a 12/12 contact hour teaching load was a bit daunting. I found collaborators in my department and across the college, but I still felt isolated from colleagues in plant biology. I searched for a professional society with a broader reach beyond my subfield of plant pathology, one that would provide a strong network of individuals focused on research and teaching and allow me to advance my scholarly pursuits—and found ASPB.

I attended my first Plant Biology meeting in 2011—apprehensive, curious, and a bit overwhelmed by the sheer size of it! The PUI breakfast, teaching symposium, and an entire poster section devoted to pedagogy motivated me to attend; little did I know the integral role ASPB would play in my professional career. I met future collaborators and strong female role models at my first PUI networking breakfast (which has developed into a half-day

workshop before Plant Biology meetings). To my surprise, my undergraduate research adviser was there as well! Over the six Plant Biology meetings I've had funding to attend, I've developed my own professional mycorrhizal network of colleagues and friends. I leave each meeting energized and brimming with new ideas to begin the next academic year. With each ASPB meeting I attend, I learn more about the network of PUI folks who have *continued on page 10*

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been gathering for the past 25+ years to discuss and tackle unique challenges faced by PUI faculty. As a newcomer, I was welcomed and encouraged to take an active role in the group. The momentum from years of dedicated PUI-associated ASPB members paved the way for a group of us to propose the formation of a dedicated PUI section in 2017.

Fast forward to 2020: the PUI section is nearing the end of its probationary period. Highlights of the section during this time include securing an NSF grant to fund travel to Plant Biology 2019, hosting the annual PUI Faculty Development Workshop and many informal networking events, organizing the first PUI career panel at Plant Biology 2019, drafting and approving

the section's constitution and bylaws, and initiating (with ASPB President Judy Callis) the recruitment of more PUI-associated individuals to ASPB.

The section's membership stands at 107 dues-paying members, about 3.8% of total ASPB members. This past summer, the PUI Section Steering Committee reached new levels of creativity in light of the challenges associated with Plant Biology 2020 moving to a fully online format. Our workshop on building research collaborations was condensed, and the four panelists, Tali Lee, Kerry Lutz, Kerry Rouhier, and Bryan Thines, prerecorded introductions to their research programs and collaborations. Seventy people participated in a discussion with the panelists, learned about NSF funding opportunities specific to

PUIs from Sally O'Connor and Mandy Simcox, and experienced small group discussions in breakout rooms, the latter mirrored in many of our classrooms this fall. Following the conclusion of Plant Biology 2020, we hosted our annual business meeting, discussing short- and long-term goals and initiatives to build synergy between PUI plant biologists and the broader ASPB community.

The PUI Section is already looking forward to Plant Biology 2021 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, planning a workshop focused on inclusive research practices and applying for travel grants to support conference attendance. As I step into my role of past PUI Section chair, I can envision various ways the PUI Section can continue to provide the roots linking PUI-associated people to ASPB. The first of our monthly

Zoom PUI networking events was held Wednesday, October 21, hosted by one of our newest PUI Section Steering Committee members, Amanda Storm. Further details will be provided at <https://community.plantae.org/organization/pui-section/dashboard> and in an email to section members. Please reach out to our section chair, Karen Hicks (hicksk@kenyon.edu), if you are interested in greater involvement with ASPB's PUI Section. We are grateful to all who have supported and contributed to our mission to expand support for PUI plant scientists through ASPB. ■

Editor's note: ASPB's Board of Directors voted in early December 2020 to approve both permanent status for the PUI Section and the section's Constitution and Bylaws.

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