



EDITORIAL

# Membrane physiologists of all kinds meet at Woods Hole

Janice L. Robertson<sup>1</sup>  and José D. Faraldo-Gómez<sup>2</sup> 

The March issue of the *Journal of General Physiology* is a collection of peer-reviewed articles contributed by participants of the 72nd Annual Symposium of the Society of General Physiologists (SGP), held in early September last year in Woods Hole, MA. This collection showcases multidisciplinary quantitative approaches to interrogate the molecular structure and mechanisms of the cell membrane. The meeting was kindly sponsored by Rockefeller University Press, among other organizations, in celebration of the long-standing partnership between the SGP and the journal, dating back to 1961. It was a fitting event for the JGP centennial: Jacques Loeb, who held his summer laboratory at Woods Hole, and Winthrop Osterhout, who carried out research there for many years, were both at the helm of the journal when the premier issue launched 100 years prior, nearly to the day. Reflecting on the science presented in the meeting and its historical backdrop, it is remarkable to see the progress that has been made in our field since the SGP meetings began in 1946. At the time, the very existence of a cell membrane was still under debate! The field has changed in other significant ways, too. Physiology is no longer a purely experimental science and can now reach new heights of analysis through computational modeling. It is also a much more diverse field, from a gender and ethnic perspective.

The overarching theme of the meeting was integration. Scientists focused on structure–function studies of channels and

transporters mingled with experts on lipid membrane biophysics and protein folding (<https://www.sgpweb.org/2018symposium>). Across all of these subthemes, the exciting though still imperfect synergy between experiment and computation was apparent. Remarkably, out of the 41 speakers, 20 were women, 20 were in the early stages of their careers, and 5 were from underrepresented groups. Most attendees were early career scientists, many of whom were sponsored with travel awards. Several families with young children attended the conference and were supported with a childcare subsidy. Encouragingly, 90% of the attendees found the conference to be representative of the true demographic diversity of our field and also thought that the meeting advanced the development of trainees and early career investigators. Alternative options for reporting inappropriate or unprofessional behavior, including sexual harassment, were laid out at the beginning of the conference; after its conclusion, attendees were asked via an online survey and none reported having experienced or witnessed any instance of such behavior. The 2018 SGP symposium thus stood as clear evidence that scientific and demographic diversity and a safe-for-all environment are perfectly compatible with a world-class research program; indeed, attendees rated the meeting 9/10 for the overall quality of science presented in seminars and poster sessions. The collection of articles included in this issue is a sample of this high-quality research and of this increasingly diverse field.

<sup>1</sup>Department of Biochemistry and Molecular Biophysics, Washington University, St. Louis, MO; <sup>2</sup>Theoretical Molecular Biophysics Laboratory, National Heart, Lung & Blood Institute, National Institutes of Health, Bethesda, MD.

Correspondence to José Faraldo-Gómez: [jose.faraldo@nih.gov](mailto:jose.faraldo@nih.gov); Janice L. Robertson: [janice.robertson@wustl.edu](mailto:janice.robertson@wustl.edu)

The SGP symposium was supported by a conference grant from the National Institutes of Health/National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke (R13NS108696).

© 2019 Robertson and Faraldo-Gómez. This article is distributed under the terms of an Attribution–Noncommercial–Share Alike–No Mirror Sites license for the first six months after the publication date (see <http://www.rupress.org/terms/>). After six months it is available under a Creative Commons License (Attribution–Noncommercial–Share Alike 4.0 International license, as described at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>).