

About the American College of Neuropsychopharmacology

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The American College of Neuropsychopharmacology is an honorific research society which was established in 1961 following a series of meetings to discuss guidelines and parameters of activities (1). The College has always had as its central focus its annual meeting, which, as everyone who has attended agrees, is the best meeting of its type in the world.

That view of the annual meeting has developed, I believe, from a few basic concepts that have held from the beginning: the membership of the College, the developmental process of the program at the annual meeting, and the overall mission of the College. I will comment on each of these.

First is the limited membership of the American College of Neuropsychopharmacology (ACNP). In the early years, the number of members was severely restricted (180 total), and the frequent phrase "you could not become a member until someone died" was almost true. Things have changed over the years, but membership is still greatly restricted, and competition for the limited membership is high. As a result, the credentials committee, which evaluates nominations for new members (no one applies for membership—you must be nominated by a member), is one of the most important and highly regarded committees of the College.

The key to election for membership is research quality. There is no restriction on level or type of terminal degree, area of training or work, professional identity, or status outside of the brain/behavior/drug area (very broadly conceived). To ensure that inbreeding does not occur, the College has established an outreach committee whose sole purpose is to search out "rising stars" who may not be at institutions where they would have an opportunity to be known by ACNP members. Another source of potential

nominees for membership comes from the invitations to nonmembers to be part of a panel at the annual meeting. This gives those individuals great exposure and a chance to prove themselves. A third source is the extensive competitive travel award program (mentioned later).

The focus on research quality has been quite successful, and the College lists four Nobel Laureates among its 700-plus members, as well as a plethora of individuals who have received other major awards in our area of science.

The second reason our annual meeting always receives the highest rating is that the science is outstanding, consistently. Only members, or members in collaboration with nonmembers, can submit panel proposals for consideration for inclusion in the annual meeting program. The program committee—all ACNP members—spends much time evaluating the proposals, including a full-day, face-to-face meeting of the 20 to 40 committee members, to winnow the submissions to 40 to 50 panels (six or seven simultaneous sessions) for inclusion in the annual meeting program. Always there are checks to ensure that all relevant areas are included—or consciously excluded—so that the program from year to year reflects well the changing nature of our field.

When an organization has proposals submitted by the best and most productive workers in the field (ACNP members), and they are vetted with 50% being rejected by a committee of the best and most productive workers in the field (ACNP members), that organization ends up with the best annual program in neuropsychopharmacology in the world (the ACNP meeting)!

A third reason the ACNP meeting is so desirable to attend is that the College has an educational mission and supports three travel award programs aimed at identifying the best young investigators internationally in our area of research. These programs provide those selected competitively with an invitation, travel, lodging, and a mentor in their area of research, who acts as their guide and counselor during the annual meeting and, as much as possible, also when they return to their work/training place after the meeting. These young investigators are provided with 3-

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year invitations to the annual meeting (only the first year is financially supported), and this gives these "promising unknowns" an opportunity to see and be seen.

There are special programs and opportunities for networking by young scientists at the annual meeting. Additionally, the program is generally designed to facilitate interaction and to make it easy to meet people. Some of the travel awards and assistance programs are aimed at minorities and at the traditionally minority schools. The College is very attentive to the need to foster the development of young researchers from minority schools and is working hard to maximize our effectiveness in reaching out and drawing these minority researchers into the field of neuropsychopharmacology.

Those are the structural features of our annual meeting that help make it superb. There are other features as well. One is the fact that this is the only meeting where one is almost certain to see all of the major researchers in neuropsychopharmacology from around the world. We have foreign corresponding fellows whose admission standards are even higher than those for members from North America. Not only can one see and hear these major players, but one can talk with them individually. It is a more level playing field, and some of the most interesting science discussions take place on the beach or at the very active wine and cheese poster sessions each late afternoon. Another reason is that we have been meeting recently in Puerto Rico or Hawaii in early December. In the early years, the meetings were held in Washington, D.C. The members noticed that they could fly very inexpensively to the warmth of the south and improve their meeting location while even reducing the cost of the meeting!

The ACNP has tried to expand its impact on federal science policies and research funding over the years, first by frequent visits by the officers to Washington and then by developing a grassroots approach, which included educating members about ways to build relationships with legislators. Others may disagree, but I believe those efforts have been for naught overall. We will continue trying new approaches.

Generally, the College describes itself as a professional organization of leading scientists. Members are selected primarily on the basis of their original research contributions to the field of neuropsychopharmacology, which involves the evaluation of the effects of natural and synthetic compounds upon the brain, mind, and human behavior. The membership of the College is drawn from scientists in multiple fields, including behavioral pharmacology, brain imaging, chronobiology, clinical psychopharmacology,

epidemiology, genetics, molecular biology, neurochemistry, neuroendocrinology, neuroimmunology, neurology, neurophysiology, pharmacology, psychiatry, and psychology.

The principal functions of the College are research and education. Our goals in research are to afford investigators an opportunity for cross-disciplinary communication by means of annual scientific meetings and to promote the application of a broad range of scientific disciplines to the study of the effects of drugs on brain and behavior with application to mental illness and alcohol and drug abuse. Our educational goals are to encourage scientists to enter research careers in neuropsychopharmacology and to develop and provide accurate information about behavioral disorders and their pharmacological treatment.

The ACNP puts much effort into the educational component of its mission. The broad educational emphasis to nonmembers began early with the publication of *Psychopharmacology: A Review of Progress, 1957-67* (2). This book covered many of the main areas of our field with chapters written by world experts in those areas. From that humble beginning evolved the now-classic "Generation of Progress" series (3-6). These volumes were published every 5 to 10 years and were the authoritative reference books in the field at the time of publication. As electronic publication and online access to the chapters of these books have evolved, the need for this type of publication has changed, and a College committee is now (2006) debating the best way to identify and present outstanding reviews of the major topics in our field.

A second giant step that expanded on the education mission was the beginning of our journal, *Neuropsychopharmacology*, in 1987. Through a series of outstanding editors and editorial boards, the journal has grown in size and stature and today has an impact factor of almost 5.0 and is read and cited around the world!

The premier annual meeting in neuropsychopharmacology; the outstanding classic "Generation of Progress" series of books; and the highly rated journal, *Neuropsychopharmacology*, merge successfully into an educational/outreach program second to none in this field. The continuing outreach and mentoring program, which competitively selects up to 70 young scientists a year, is the other good evidence that the ACNP is working hard to ensure the future of the field.

The annual meeting of the College is kept small by opening attendance only to those participants from around the world who have made major and significant research or clinical contributions in our area of special interest and expertise. Because of our intense concern with and in-

volvement in the education and training of tomorrow's research and clinical scientists, the College selects, through an international process open to all beginning researchers, a small number of young scientists to be invited to the annual meeting. This meeting program, a cornucopia of the best brain and behavior state-of-the-art research in the world, is designed to encourage dialogue, discussion, and debate by those attending.

Everyone talks about the problem of herding cats. Herding cats is easy if they are hungry and can see and smell the cream. ACNP members have a clear focus when it comes to the College—science, education, training, and friendships. Every member has passed the “I’ve arrived” test and no longer has to prove anything. There are still, of course, the anxieties and maneuvering seen in any group of alive people (!) but it is not a major problem. The members generally move toward common goals.

As is true of all organizations and people, changes occur. The science base is now well established. Major issues today that no one thought of in the early days of the organization are still in the preliminary stages: conflict of interest, extent of financial support from pharmaceutical companies. I could write pages about the ACNP, but I must stop. I had the good fortune to become a member of the ACNP in 1966 and served as the executive secretary from 1979 through 2005.

Serving as executive secretary of the ACNP has had a great impact on my personal career. It has certainly given

me national and international visibility and name recognition, which I would not have achieved otherwise. It has affected my status as a university departmental member since my time for academic committees was very limited, and my focus on the ACNP was not always appreciated by departmental chairs or other faculty members.

My 26-year tenure as executive secretary has been a real ball. It has given me the opportunity to work with outstanding scientists whom I admire and respect and from whom I could learn much. Most of them are outstanding human beings as well. It has been an honor and privilege for me.

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