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Feature Article

A Brief History of the Brazilian Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology (SBBq)

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The Brazilian Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology (SBBq) was founded in 1967 by a group of local biochemistry leaders. The Board of Directors was composed of José Moura Gonçalves, José F. Fernandes, and Francisco J. S. Lara. This group organized Biochemistry sessions during the Annual Meetings of the Brazilian Society for the Advancement of Science (SBPC), where scientific data were discussed and political strategies to develop experimental research in the field of Biochemistry in Brazil were analyzed.

The first autonomous meetings of SBBq were held at the University of São Paulo and included conferences and debates on political and organizational issues. In 1971, the members of the SBBq Executive Committee, under the leadership of Professor Carlos R. Diniz, decided to hold future annual meetings in Caxambú, a small town served by several hotels and known for its several mineral water fountains. The reason for choosing Caxambú was to maximize interaction among scientists, a difficult task in big touristic cities. In addition, this town is conveniently equidistant from Belo Horizonte, Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo and Campinas, the centers that, at that time, were responsible for the generation of about 90% of Brazilian science. The first meeting of the new SBBq, held in the Glória Hotel, Caxambú, in 1972, was attended by about 60 people including senior scientists, graduate and undergraduate students. Plenary lectures were organized on site and the students presented orally the results of their theses. It is worth mentioning that given the success of the SBBq meetings and because of the geographic and local characteristics of the town, in addition to the flavor of the typical Brazilian food served in the hotels, many other Brazilian scientific societies began to organize their annual meetings in Caxambú. In 1975,

these events were named 'The Brazilian Biochemistry Society Annual Meeting'. Since then, the encounters have grown in number and quality, in a proportion never imagined by the Society's founders. In 1978, the name of the Society changed to 'Brazilian Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology'. In 2005, the meetings moved to Águas de Lindóia (250 km from Caxambú) because the capacity and infrastructure of the hotels in Caxambú did not support the expanded number of SBBq attendees: over 3000 scientists, including participants, guests and exhibitors from a number of private and public enterprises. Like Caxambú, Águas de Lindóia is also a small town famous for its mineral water fountains.

Throughout its 35 years of existence, SBBq has played a decisive part in the growth and development of the Brazilian Biochemistry, proposing plans and actions which contributed toward a national policy of educational, technological and scientific development. SBBq also serves as a contact vehicle and source of qualified information for the Brazilian scientific community. More recently, with the increase of general interest in the area, SBBq also became a source of information for society in general.

SBBq supplements its regular activities by promoting national and international contacts in the general field of biochemistry. It is a member of the following organizations: Brazilian Society for the Advancement of Science (SBPC), Federation of Brazilian Societies for Experimental Biology (FESBE), Pan-American Association of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology (PABMB) and the International Union of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology (IUBMB). In February 1990, under the presidency of Professor Walter Colli, SBBq organized the VI PABMB Congress in São Paulo. The meeting was attended by 1000 scientists, 200 of which were from other countries, many as invited speakers.

Currently, SBBq has 726 active Ordinary Members, including many of Brazil's most important scientists from different segments of biochemistry and molecular biology. The Society also includes 353 Associate Members, who are mostly

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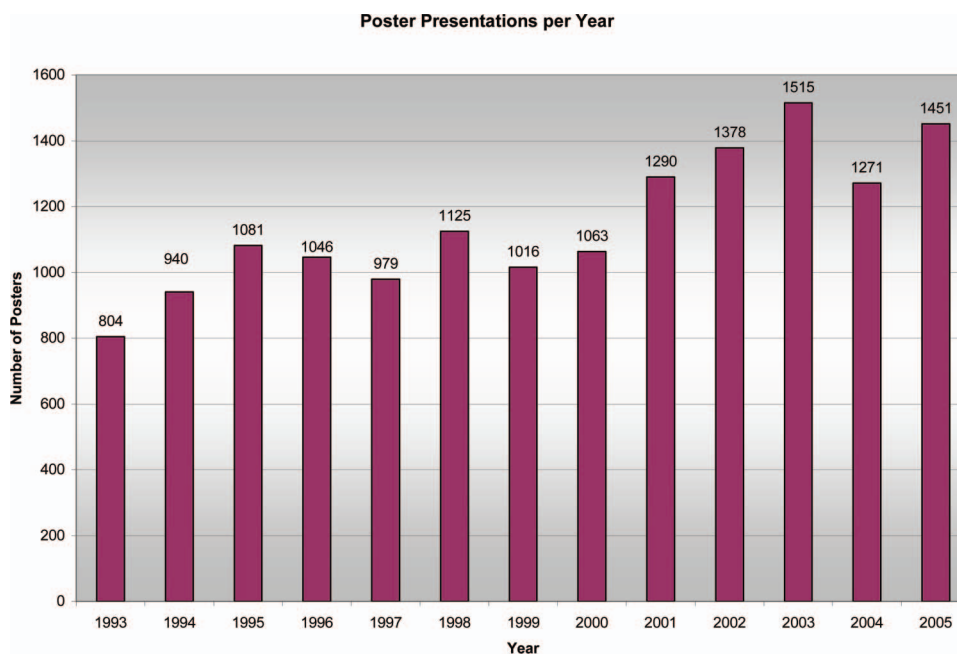


Figure 1. The growing number of poster presentations in the last 10 years.

graduate students. In recent years our interactions with the Biochemistry community of Uruguay has increased and many Uruguayan researchers are becoming members of SBBq, which accepts applicants of any nationality. Last year, four senior investigators and 20 graduate students from Uruguay attended the SBBq meeting. Another example of international cooperation of SBBq is the interaction with the Portuguese Biochemistry Society in issues that involve scientific discussions and biochemical education.

The Annual Meeting of SBBq is one of the most traditional events of the Brazilian Scientific Community. For three decades, these meetings have provided the scenario and forum for debates concerning the advancement of biochemistry and its employment for social benefit. The meetings have two central targets: first, to offer an opportunity to present and discuss research themes and their future perspectives for Brazilian biochemists, and second, to focus on a few selected areas of interest. This strategy has been successful and achieves the objective of maintaining the visibility of Brazilian scientific productivity. At the same time, every year the program emphasizes the presentation and discussion of subjects at the research frontiers of biochemistry and molecular biology.

A feature that deserves special attention is that the scientific program for every meeting is entirely the result of the initiative of ordinary members, coordinated by the Scientific Committee. In recent years, the program included over 20 plenary lectures, about 25 round tables, 12 sessions of short oral presentations, Young Investigator presentations, and evening poster sessions. Most of the plenary lectures and

at least one speaker at each round table are outstanding foreign scientists suggested by ordinary members and invited by the Society. Thus, our annual meetings include at least, 40 foreign senior scientists providing an international flavor to the meeting. Most of the conferences and round table presentations and all the posters are presented in English. Students from all Latin American countries are invited to take part in the competition for Young Investigator presentations and prize.

An important feature of SBBq is the large number of undergraduate and graduate students attending the meetings, accounting for 30% and 45% of our conferees, respectively. Thus 41% of our conferees are under the age of 25. We note that 59% of the participants are female, showing that the gender issue is well taken care of in our Society. The growing number of poster presentations in the last 10 years is shown in Fig. 1.

The growth in poster presentations noticed between 2000 and 2003 was a result of SBBq's efforts to attract related areas, which also utilize biochemical and molecular biological approaches.

In order to guarantee the meeting's quality and avoid excessive growth and complications derived from it, in 2004, SBBq adopted more rigorous criteria for the acceptance of communications to be presented in poster form, and limited abstract presentations. Currently, each registered participant can present only one abstract. Graduate and undergraduate students have to be linked to an active ordinary Society member, registered at the meeting. An active ordinary member must participate in the meetings at least once every three years,

assuring a minimum quorum of ordinary members and the interaction of students with senior scientists.

SBBq is administered by a Board of Directors which includes the President, Vice President, Secretary and Treasurer, with advice from a Scientific Advisory Board composed of 8 outstanding scientists elected by the ordinary members. A permanent Secretariat, currently including three full-time employees led by Cynthia S. Bando, was established at the Instituto de Química, Universidade de São Paulo, since 1990.

For the last two years the SBBq has included a Round Table in its annual meeting whose participants are chosen by the Biochemistry Societies of different Latin American

countries. The main idea is to discuss the status and perspectives of biochemistry in the continent.

Our policy to increase our interactions with IUBMB, PABMB and other national biochemistry societies of South America can be evidenced by the organization of joint meetings with IUBMB and PABMB in 2007 (21–25 Salvador, Bahia) and with PABMB in 2008.

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