Early Career Members

Making Our Voice Heard: Reflections on Accomplishments of the Early Career Members

This is a hard article to write because I have so much to tell in only a few words. My involvement with the Early Career Members Committee (ECMC) has been instrumental to my overall professional development and general success. Early Career Members (ECMs) have made great strides in our Societies over the last decade, and especially the last few years. Our Society leaders have been instrumental in helping us have a greater presence and voice within the organizations. I am writing entirely from my own perspective as an ECM and as someone who has been involved in these transitions over the past few years. I have just finished my term as the past-chair of the ECMC, have served on the Graduate Committee, and am currently the ex-officio ECM representative on the SSSA board of directors.

The voice of ECMs has been heard recently. During 2010–2012, the ECMC re-defined its policies to include everyone within 10 years of a terminal degree because the landscape for ECMs has changed. Many people now take on (or are required to take on) two- to five-year employment or post-doc positions and aren’t able to benefit from the previous seven-year ECM distinction. This has many meanings, such as the ability to serve on our Society committees and be eligible for ECM awards, etc. Mainly, it takes ECMs some time to establish themselves in a position, especially after a two- to five-year employment or post-doc position.

There have been many other accomplishments as well. The ECMC has worked with the Societies to establish and coordinate three Society-based ECM awards. This is an improvement from the past. We participated in the effort to reduce some of our journal publication fees as well as registration fees at our Annual Meetings for ECMs. This is a major benefit to ECMs, and we applaud the Societies for their progressive thinking and action on these topics. As a major development, we worked with Society leaders to establish ECM representatives on the ASA and SSSA board of directors and placed representatives on several other early career, graduate student, or award committees. This was a major accomplishment for us as ECMs that will establish our participation in future Society-based activities. Over the past couple years, the ECMC also increased its Annual Meetings involvement to five to six professional development workshops, which were received very well by >500 people per year (mainly ECMs and graduate students). Lastly, the ECMC expanded its outreach activities by establishing links with several other groups, including the National Academy of Sciences; National Society of Consulting Soil Scientists; the ASA, CSSA, and SSSA Science Policy Office; SSSA Early Career Members Committee (S359); and the Women in Agronomy, Crop, Soils, and Environmental Sciences. The creation of the SSSA Early Career Members Committee (S359) was a welcomed addition to our collective effort and voice.

In 2013, I’m particularly looking forward to helping with the inaugural SSSA Field Camp, which is targeted to ECMs. This is a week-long soil field techniques workshop being held in late August in Wisconsin. I’m also looking forward to our continued collaborations with national agencies on workshops and funding opportunities, not only at our Annual Meetings, but throughout each year.

Moving forward, I am happy that the 2013 ECMC representatives are a devoted and motivated group, and I look forward to the new activities they conquer and the ideas they develop. You, as an ECM, can pass along your thoughts to the ECMC at any time, and they will be heard. I’d like to thank past ECMs for their voice to get us to this point… I know we can continue to have a great voice. It has been a pleasure to serve as a member of the ECMC.