

Expanding the Reach of Undergraduate Education Programs at Regional Meetings: Model Programs at Four Regional SOT Chapters

Author Block: J. P. Gray¹, L. M. Williams², L. M. Aleksunes³, D. Hardej⁴, J. Sacco⁵, E. D. Slotter⁶, and C. P. Curran⁷. ¹US Coast Guard Academy, New London, CT; ²Bates College, Lewiston, ME; ³Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, Piscataway, NJ; ⁴St. John's University, Jamaica, NY; ⁵Drake University, Des Moines, IA; ⁶Charles River, Ashland, OH; and ⁷Northern Kentucky University, Highland Heights, KY.

Regional meetings are excellent opportunities for undergraduate students to learn about toxicology and to interact with a variety of professional toxicologists. However, the scientific programs at these meetings are often at depths beyond an undergraduate audience, and absent targeted recruiting, undergraduates typically attend only if recommended by an SOT member adviser. The Faculty United for Toxicology Undergraduate Recruitment and Education (FUTURE) committee supports regional chapters with grants and materials to provide undergraduate programming. Several features of undergraduate-focused programming at the SOT Annual Meeting have been successfully adopted at the regional meetings. "Lunch With an Expert" provides an opportunity for undergraduates to interact with toxicologists from alternative career paths to academia, such as industry or government. Undergraduate poster sessions provide an opportunity to present data that is more preliminary, preparing them to later present at national conferences through practice and critical feedback. An undergraduate breakout session has also proven popular among attendees. An "Introduction to Toxicology" slide set provides an overview of career paths and active learning exercises such as the "Opioids" activity have been used at two regional meetings. Both are available at the SOT website in the Learning Resources area for undergraduate educators. A keynote speaker can provide a career-focused talk that describes a pathway to becoming a professional toxicologist. Participants are subsequently encouraged to apply for the national meeting's Undergraduate Diversity Program, or, if they have an abstract, the Pfizer SOT Undergraduate Travel Award. A new unified online program assessment survey was used to provide undergraduate feedback for different aspects of each program for the four regional chapters awarded grants in 2019-2020. Likert scale and free-form responses indicate high satisfaction with all programs, as do comments such as "enjoying meeting people", "enjoyed keynote speakers discussing toxicology and education presentations", and "enjoyed undergraduate breakout session."

