



Rosalind Franklin Society Founding Board to Hold Its First Meeting

The first meeting of the Founding Board of the Rosalind Franklin Society will take place on April 6 at The Rockefeller University in New York City.

“The Rosalind Franklin Society will significantly honor the achievements of this pioneer in the discovery of the structure of DNA, whose accomplishments were not fully recognized during her lifetime and were not awarded posthumously. They are still not completely acknowledged,” said Mary Ann Liebert, publisher of *Genetic Engineering News* (*GEN*), who founded the society.

“Women continue to be under-appreciated in science and technology,” she added. “The issues that prevent or hold back opportunities for women who choose careers in the life sciences must be addressed more proactively in order for them to most fully contribute to scientific research advances and education. And while there is more recognition of women’s achievements today, universally prestigious honors still lag significantly behind those awarded to men.”

The international Society will highlight the work of prominent women sci-



Mary Ann Liebert

entists, encourage greater opportunities for women in the biomedical sciences, and motivate and educate, by example and mentoring, young generations of women who have this calling. The Founding Board (*see Table*) includes notable researchers, educators, administrators, and biomedical science advocates who will steer the Society toward its goals.

Recommendations and Initiatives

At the meeting on April 6, the by-invitation Founding Board will analyze the issues, consider policy recommendations, and prioritize initiatives. A dinner for Founding Board members will take place April 5 in New York City.

“The collective brain power of this most illustrious board ensures that the Society will be successful in confronting the issues that disadvantage women in the sciences and help identify and implement innovative policies and commitments that ensure that the careers for

women in the sciences are both productive and rewarding,” said Jo Handelsman, Ph.D., department of plant pathology, University of Wisconsin–Madison, and acting president of the Rosalind Franklin Society.

There is progress. Six of the thirteen NIH Director’s Pioneer Awards for 2005 were given to women. In 2004, Linda Buck was awarded a Nobel Prize, the seventh woman to have received an award in the category of physiology and medicine.

However, noted Ms. Liebert, women scientists are also ignored or given less consideration for many other prizes or invitations to join



Jo Handelsman,
Ph.D.



Rosalind Franklin, Ph.D., (1920–58) was a British x-ray crystallographer. Her work producing x-ray images of DNA was crucial in the discovery of the structure of DNA by James Watson and Francis Crick.

Science Source / Photo Researcher

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elite institutions and academies. There are still prevailing perceptions that women do not have the same talents and abilities as their male colleagues in industry as well as academia and government, she maintained.

“The leadership opportunities for women have not kept pace with those of men,” said Ms. Liebert. “For instance, there are very few biotech companies that have been started by women, and corporate boards also reflect this disparity.”

“I really don’t know why there is such a striking absence of women-started and/or women-led companies. Perhaps it is a result of the aggregate effects of other broad adverse circumstances,” adds Linda Powers, managing director and co-founder of Toucan Capital Fund II, L.P., a \$120-million venture capital fund focused on seed and early-stage life science and advanced technology investments.

“For example, women scientists still

receive disproportionately low portions of the grant monies awarded. Women also still seem to have a harder time getting published, especially in top journals and especially in regard to novel, paradigm-shifting (i.e., dogma-busting) discoveries—the kind that startups get built around. One can’t start or build a company without funding, and venture capitalists themselves may be contributing to the problem. VCs often look to fund on the basis of ‘names’ and profiles, which women scientists will be less likely to have for the reasons just cited.”

Within its purview, the Rosalind Franklin Society will also seek to educate the public and members of the press about the magnitude of the important research and outcomes that women have made, are making, and will continue to make to the biomedical sciences.

Mary Ann Liebert, Inc., has provided the funding and staff for the new Society.

For additional information, e-mail mliebert@liebertpub.com. **GEN**