

Get to know your council: interview questions with Bill Nauseef

1. What inspired you to become a scientist?

Answer: Circumstance, not inspiration, defines my career path. I always wanted to be a physician and excitedly entered medical school keen to become a primary care physician and serve in a small community. Clinical experiences and professional interactions in medical school and internal medicine residency redirected my attention towards the subspecialty of infectious diseases, and I entered my infectious diseases (ID) fellowship to pursue the goal of acquiring expertise both in infection control and in the clinical consequences of neutropenia in patients with hematologic malignancies. However, the ID program at Yale *required* fellows to spend time in a laboratory, so I was forced (against my will) to join a lab, despite my clear and deeply rooted certainty that the experience would be both unpleasant and irrelevant to my career. It took very little time in the lab for me to appreciate the challenges and gratification that comes from dissecting complex biological problems in a reductionist fashion. Unexpectedly, I discovered too that the same critical analytical approaches that are essential to providing sound clinical care are equally valuable in the lab. Who knew? Since that time, I have endeavored to become a physician-scientist.

2. Who was a significant mentor for you during your career and why?

Answer: During my ID fellowship, I had two mentors: the late Richard K. Root, who was head of the division, and Harry L. Malech, then a newly appointed assistant professor and now Chief of the Laboratory of Host Defenses, and Head of the Genetic Immunotherapy Section at the NIH. Being the more junior mentor, Harry was more engaged with me on a daily basis. Harry is a remarkably gentle soul, and exhibited great patience with my inexperience in the lab and naïveté regarding research. My four years with Harry and Dick provided me with a sound foundation for subsequent work, including the important recognition that it is essential to remain a student, always pursuing and testing new approaches and paths.

My good fortune continued as I took my first faculty position in the ID division at the University of Iowa. The division was undergoing revitalization, with the recent recruitment of Robert A. Clark as director and Peter Densen, both from Boston University. The research focus of the division was to be host-microbe interactions, and Bob's expertise in neutrophil biology together with Peter's work on complement provided an ideal setting for me to begin my career as a faculty member. Both Bob and Peter proved to be, and remain to this day, great mentors, and Bob and I continue to enjoy a very productive collaborative relationship.

How do you balance work and life issues?

Answer: This question is difficult for me to answer, as my life encompasses my profession. Simply put, I do what I enjoy and avoid, as much as possible, anything else.

3. What keeps you happy outside of science and work?

Answer: Work in the gardens (esp. our prairies), cooking, and cycling keep me occupied.

4. In this age of limited research resources and growing competition for grant awards, how would you advise young faculty who are just beginning their adventure in science?

Answer: Regrettably, there are no gimmicks. Keep your eyes and ears open, beware of flash and glitter, respect substance when you encounter it, and do your best. Your mother's advice still applies.



Bill in phagocyte cycling gear.

5. Why is SLB important for you? What made you decide to run for SLB council? What is the most challenging aspect of being an SLB councilor?

Answer: I joined SLB in 2002 when I was nominated for Treasurer. After attending a few annual scientific meetings and participating in SLB Council, I appreciated the special strengths of SLB. On the scientific level, SLB fills an important niche, as scientists interested in the cell biology of phagocytes and their products have no other true home. Organizations dedicated to immunology or to cell biology have limited interest in phagocyte cell biology, leaving only the biennial Gordon Research Conference on Phagocytes as a place to meet in the US. [Our European colleagues have a very strong phagocyte group that provides them with a venue to meet each year.] Quite honestly, I think that everyone in the phagocyte field should be an SLB member.

On a personal level, SLB is small enough to focus on the needs and interests of its membership, to provide a genuine sense of community, and to invest in its more junior members, those who are the future of SLB.

6. What do you think are the challenges for the SLB in the future?

Answer: As a small society without established associations with industry or foundations, SLB is especially vulnerable when funding to individual scientists is limited. However, Luis Montaner and his team have done an excellent job with the *Journal of Leukocyte Biology*, a financial asset for SLB, and a strong sense of community amongst the SLB membership should allow us to endure during harsh financial times.

7. What motivated you to start working in your chosen field of research?

Answer: Patients.

8. As a past president and an outgoing councilor, what have you enjoyed most about your time on the council?

Answer: I was extraordinarily fortunate during my term as SLB president to work with an outstanding Council, and to enjoy great administrative support from John Lord (former Executive Director, FASEB) and Jen Holland (current Executive Director). For me, highlights of that tenure include:

a) Revamped and, in a few cases, new Task Forces/Committees

We had a fantastic response from the membership to the call for volunteers for these initiatives. The 40+ individuals who offered to join the Publications Committee presented the welcome challenge of how best to accommodate so many new members. Staggering the terms of appointment allowed all to join the committee, either immediately or in the near future. The Membership Committee has been working on new ways to enrich the value of SLB membership. The new Task Forces have been an incredible success. Miki Rahat and the Website Task Force completely transformed our previous website, and continue to adopt new features, including “New Archive Content”, and provide a simple way to relay suggestions to the SLB leadership (see the suggestion box). The Women and Diversity Task Force has created a speaker list (also on the website) to serve as a resource to scientists planning meetings. Furthermore, the W & D task force organized a hugely successful open forum at the 2011 meeting in Kansas City. Chaired by Vijaya Iragavarapu and Julia Kzhyshkowska, two members of the task force, the session featured an address by Sharon Wahl and then discussions by Marty Cathcart, Liz Kovacs, and Jill Suttles. In addition, the Professional Development Committee held an informative session entitled “How to Write Your First Grant Application”. Organized and overseen by Julian G. Cambroner, the event was oversubscribed and very well received. An overview of the content of that session is available, in part, on the website and will be published in *Nature Immunology*.

b) Creation of *iSLB*

We replaced the written newsletter with *iSLB*, the electronic newsletter of SLB. Silvia Uriarte has assumed editorial responsibility for *iSLB* and is doing an excellent job of keeping the membership informed in a timely but measured way.

c) Linked more closely with other like-minded organizations

With Attila Mocsai in Budapest, we created new ties between SLB and the European phagocyte group, posting each others’ activities on both our website and theirs (www.phagocytes.net).

d) Membership input in the annual meeting

In response to a call for suggestions for topics for the 2010 meeting, we received more than 60 specific ideas and potential speakers. We incorporated both suggested topics and personnel in formulating nearly 50% of the 2010 meeting, and I believe that the meeting was richer because of that input.

e) Membership input in organizing a meeting

The very successful 2011 meeting in Kansas City was organized by Doug Drevets and Pieter Leenen, two SLB members who volunteered to organize a meeting in response to my call for meeting organizers.

Although incomplete, this list of what I consider as the successes of SLB during my presidency has several themes. All involve SLB volunteers coming forward to participate in the activities of the society. Because each activity has persisted or grown since its inception, I am confident that the initiatives met a need and that the prognosis for each (and for SLB) is good for the future. My goal in these initiatives was to engage more members in the activities of SLB so that they can assume leadership positions in SLB. I think that we succeeded in tapping into the fantastic reservoir of talent, energy, and creativity of SLB members, and I anticipate that the best is yet to come.



Bill watering down the burning ditch.