

## Toward a balanced Biodiversity Seminar Series

A goal of the seminar series is to inspire students and faculty in our Centre by bringing in exceptional scientists and speakers from a diversity of backgrounds, perspectives, regions, and specialties. Most procedures that we use to choose and nominate stellar individuals are well known to lead to biases that, when accumulated over the nominations from multiple labs, produce a final seminar list that is lopsided in favour of senior, white men. This is counterproductive, as it means we are not hearing from the compelling and outstanding science produced in other quarters. To achieve a better balance of genders, nationalities, ages, and so on, we request that as you or your lab prepares its nomination of a speaker for the series, you adopt one or more of the following steps:

- 1) **Wait.** When deciding potential visitors to nominate, make your list of names, and before submitting it, wait 5 minutes (or an hour, or whatever). This waiting period allows you to let your mind wander or to do a little exploring to see if you might also consider a few other possibilities. Who else is doing great work in the field? Are there perhaps less-senior, less-famous individuals whose work is really taking off, and who would make an exciting visitor? If you stick with your first choice after this exercise, then you can feel good that you considered other options.
- 2) **Compensate.** When nominating speakers for the departmental seminar, we suggest that you submit two or three names rather than just one. This will allow the seminar committee some freedom to use the variation present in your list to achieve a balanced seminar series overall. There is substantial evidence that women decline invitations more frequently than men. Therefore, including a couple of names of women would help compensate for additional declines.
- 3) **Complement.** If this is a lab-based nomination, give the person in charge of organizing the nomination in your lab the authority to complement your developing list by adding a few other names, with the goal of making the final short-list more balanced. If your lab members suggest six names, for example, and five of these are men, consider adding the names of a few women, or ask your lab for additional nominations from underrepresented groups (women, minorities, etc.) to round it out before you vote for your nominee.

We put these ideas forth with the aim of improving our seminar series, but please consider applying these steps more broadly, such as when thinking of possible names for awards, future conferences, and other circumstances in which nomination procedures often lead to imbalance.

You may be interested in the following posts:

<http://wildlifespits.wordpress.com/2014/08/05/women-at-the-conference-lectern-how-organizing-committees-can-do-more-to-achieve-gender-parity/>

<http://phylogenomics.blogspot.ie/2012/09/q-bio-conference-in-hawaii-bring-your.html>

<http://www.stemwomen.net/jonathan-eisen/>

<http://phylogenomics.blogspot.com.au/p/posts-on-women-in-science.html>