A Transition Letter from the Outgoing and Incoming Chairs

As 2011 draws to a close and 2012 begins, the outgoing chair of the ASA Biopharmaceutical Section (BIOP) traditionally reflects on the past year’s activities, giving an “Auld Lang Syne” to all of the volunteers who have done the heavy lifting in supporting services and activities, and giving encouragement our members to get involved. This year, the outgoing and incoming chairs have decided to shake things up a bit by starting a new “tradition” -- a jointly authored “Transition Letter.” Not only will we provide our reflections that include well-deserved thank you’s for our many accomplishments from 2011, but we also express a future view which reflects the notion that the BIOP is an on-going entity –which responds to changes in our professional environment and simultaneously strives to continuously improve.

Like the agenda for any one of our three annual Executive Committee Meetings [this year at ENAR (Miami), JSM (Miami Beach) and ASA Headquarters (Alexandria, VA)], the work of the Section might be loosely categorized into 5 areas: 1). committee work; 2) meetings; 3) communication/collaboration; 4) professional education and 5) member support. Each of these areas is represented and supported by your BIOP peers. These individuals are volunteers who have devoted their time, energy, enthusiasm, talents, thoughts and ideas to make BIOP work for you during 2011. Please thank them when you get the opportunity and please forgive us, if we have inadvertently left anybody out. And the envelopes please …

The BIOP Executive Committee

With Matilde Sanchez as our Treasurer, we always knew where the money was and where it was going. Thank you, Matilde, you are a joy to work with (… and, just think, you get to do it for another two years!).

With Rick Caplan as our Secretary, we never worried about being well-documented and gently kept to the business-at-hand. Over the past three years, Rick has carefully provided precise meeting minutes by combing over recordings of our business meetings. Thank you, Rick, you were always ready, always the first one to the meetings and always thinking. We will miss your stable hand as our Secretary but are glad you will continue to serve the EC in your new role as Policy Liaison.
Jeff Maca and Carmen Mak, serving as BIOP Program Chair and Program Chair-Elect, respectively, for the JSM 2011 did a tremendous job. They led the charge and kept all of the “plates in the air,” with 5 invited sessions, 28 contributed sessions, 2 short courses and 14 roundtables. There was never any doubt that it would all come out right, as they coolly and professionally handled all of the details.

Devan Mehrotra our Publications Officer, always considerate and patient, kept us current on our AMSTAT News reporting obligations, making certain that BIOP-supported events and activities were publicized.

Alex Dmitrienko, David Breiter and Stephine Keeton intelligently kept us connected to the ASA Council of Sections through reports from the JSM meetings, as well as off-line updates such as updating charters, changing student competition deadlines, and issues on proposals for new sections. They facilitated energetic discussions among the BIOP EC, and ultimately represented BIOP interests. We especially thank Alex for his 3 years of service as COS representative and look forward to his continued service to BIOP in his new role on the Fellows Committee.

The BIOP Advisory Board -- Appointed Members of the Executive Committee

At-large Executive Committee members Tom Keefe, Veronica Taylor, Patricia Stephenson, Anna Legedza, Jose Pinhiero and Joan Buenconsejo demonstrated their commitment to BIOP -- listening, assessing and sharing -- providing us with an effective “sounding board,” always ready to volunteer and “be there.” We thank Tom, Veronica, and Anna for their years of service to the EC in this capacity and look forward to their future contributions.

Jose Alvir, Deb Panebianco and Amit Bhattacharyya, serving us as the editorial board for the Biopharmaceutical Report, pushed us to think about our science and talk about who we are and what we do (and get it all in on time). As Amit is transitioning to his new role as Chair-Elect in 2012, we thank him for his service as Associate Editor.
Daniel Christen served as the webmaster pushed to keep us informed on the internet. Over the past many years, he has set the framework for the current website and initiated an archive for EC documents. As Daniel transitions out from this responsibility, we thank him for his many years of service to BIOP and keeping our formal contact to the world as the internet has matured.

Recognizing opportunity and potential, Steve Gulyas and new chair Margaret Minkwitz have continued to vision and support the Web as a means to promote our profession to K-16 students. 2011 brought phase 3 of this project into action, and a renewed committee has taken a holistic look at content including interactive maps of employers of BIOP members and degree programs which prepare students for these professions, updated links to statistical methodology, and the initiation of RSS feeds for Pharmaceutical industry news. Please have a look at and share their handiwork at http://www.biostatpharma.com.

In 2011 Mani Lakshminarayanan and Venkat Sethuraman continued to serve as the Distance Learning Committee for BIOP, designing, adding to and promoting a series of excellent webinars that is becoming a substantial body of knowledge and educational opportunity for our profession. As a testament to their leadership, currently, 10 of the 14 webinars currently listed in the “LearnSTAT on Demand” webinar series from the ASA are products of this Biopharm Series)! Congratulations, and we look forward to an exciting program in 2012!

With more than 800 participants, 6 tutorials, 37 sessions and 60+ Roundtables, Brenda Crowe, Joan Buenconsejo and a very large crew of volunteers hit a “home run” this year with the 2011 ASA Biopharmaceutical Section FDA-Industry Workshop – “the biggest and best ever”! We know that Jingyee Kou, Alan Hartford and many of you are already well on your way to pull off an encore performance for 2012!

It is very impressive to see how much volunteer work goes on before, during and after the JSM each year to support the quality of the program and our professional development. This year John Johnson, ably assisted by Qi Jiang, Veronica Taylor, and a host of “conscripted” volunteers (you know who you are) became the Contributed Paper Award Committee (quickly recognizing how much work it really is – many thanks to Heather Thomas for her many years of service).
Christie Clark with her crew of judges (as the Student Paper Award Committee) completed (yet) another year recognizing, promoting and awarding students for their intellectual contributions to the meeting. As we write this opportunity, the committee is reviewing 10 papers which is a local maximum for the competition in recent years. Although Christie will be retiring from this role in 2011, we look forward to her new role as Council of Sections representative.

With the able leadership of Yongming Qu, (assisted by Jingli Song and Jerry Wang) the Contributed Poster Committee continues to flourish in only its third year of existence by encouraging poster presentations at JSM as a viable medium for sharing research. All of these competitions provide friendly competition for our Section members and ultimately benefit all of us with a higher quality program on topics of mutual interest. We thank Yongming Qu for being a fantastic leader in starting this committee with such a flourish, and look forward to his contributions as Associate Editor to the Biopharm Report in 2012.

Ready to support you in gaining recognition for your years of thoughts, contributions and services to our profession, the Fellows Committee, chaired by Neal Thomas (assisted by Greg Campbell, Stacy Lindborg, and Demissie Alemayehu) promoted our processes and efforts during the year to put together Section-supported nominations to the ASA. We know that you are out there and we want you recognized… these are the BIOP volunteers who are ready to help you. We thank Greg and Stacy for their years of service to the committee and keeping nominations for our deserving members going.

In the spirit of “saving the best for last,” special credit and thanks need to be pointed in the direction of Kathy Monti, the 2011 Past Chair. Her crowning achievement as Past Chair has been the complete and total overhaul of the Manual of Operations – the “Bible” of responsibilities for the Executive Committee. After years of neglect, Kathy spearheaded this major effort and it already has paid dividends in helping the EC operate more efficiently. Kathy has devoted many years of service to BIOP and to the ASA, she has always “been there” with good advice, great ideas and friendly smiles. Although her active service has ended for now, we certainly hope you will not become a stranger to BIOP!
Looking Ahead

As we have turned the calendar into 2012, a number of new faces, roles, and initiatives will be taking their place. In addition to the transitions of EC members noted above who are continuing in new roles, here is a quick tour of what other changes are on the horizon:

A new role of Policy Liaison has been created as an appointed position, and Rick Caplan will be serving a 3-year term as the founding figure in this capacity. Rick will be working with Steve Pierson, Director of Science Policy Director, to keep abreast of ASA issues in the news and politics, strategize about what implications these might have for Biopharm, bring issues back to the EC for debate, and lead the communication on our responses to these issues. Initially, Rick will also be engaged in the ongoing debate over publishing of clinical trial results in medical journals and furthering BIOP’s position in this arena to ensure it is heard.

Olga Marchenko has joined the Executive Committee to reinvigorate the Membership Committee as its chair. She will be evaluating the need for a new member survey in 2012, as well as putting her ear to the ground for other ways our membership can be served. She will also be considering other membership issues such as engagement of graduate students as BIOP members as well as the retention of members through the free section initiative from ASA membership. Please let Olga know if you have ideas on new things BIOP can be doing for you, and/or if you would like to volunteer to help out.

We welcome Dionne Price back to the EC in her new role as Secretary. Having served as Program Chair previously, Dionne is already very familiar with section business, and we look forward a smooth transition in her taking the reins over from Rick Caplan. In addition to her role in keeper of meeting minutes, she will also be involved in the maintenance of our very current Manual of Operations.

2012 Program Chair Carmen Mak and Program Chair-Elect Estelle Russek-Cohen are already assembling another successful conference program for JSM 2012 and ENAR 2013. In particular, further expansion of roundtables are in the works and are likely to include graduate student topics at JSM in San Diego. Additionally, they will be assessing the program at the new Conference on Statistical Practice and evaluating BIOP’s
presence there for 2013. Both Carmen and Estelle are seasoned veterans in BIOP business, and we look forward to yet another year of increased quantity and quality of sessions, continuing education courses, and roundtables. Thanks to Carmen and Estelle for hitting the ground running in their roles!

The Fellows Committee also has some new but familiar faces this year. In addition to Alex Dmitrienko joining, past chair Brian Wiens will also be joining. Neal Thomas will continue to serve as chair in what will likely be his last year, and Keith Soper will remain serving as well. We know that our deep bench of fellows will keep turning out deserving nominations which will yield future fellows to be named from BIOP.

Our three new at-large Executive Committee members will be Gary Aras, Jim MacDougall and Kjell Johnson. Gary brings over 20 years of experience in the pharmaceutical industry to this role across a variety of roles in government, academia, and industry. Jim brings 12+ years of experience to the position and also has served as an officer in the Boston Chapter of ASA. Kjell has nearly 15 years of industry experience, has previously served as MBSW Chair, and will be a welcome addition to represent our nonclinical efforts within the EC. As Gary, Jim, and Kjell settle in to the EC role, we are confident they will find initiatives of their own to champion. Please join us in welcoming them aboard!

Our web efforts will also take a renewed presence but led by with familiar faces in 2012. Past Chair Anna Nevius and our previous membership survey lead Ed Luo will be co-chairing the BIOP webmaster duties. They will be adapting the format of our section webpage, including our Executive Committee page, and looking to leverage the ASA Community portal. Additionally, they will embark on a major effort to collate and archive many of our section documents to make them available on-line as we strive for more of a paperless medium. Development on the K-16 interactive web outreach program will continue as well, being led by longtime EC member Margaret Minkwitz. Please join us in welcoming Anna, Ed, and Margaret in keeping BIOP at the forefront of internet activity in 2012.

The Student Paper Committee will take on new leadership from Richard McNally and the Contributed Poster Committee chairmanship will also transition to Jerry Wang. We welcome both Richard and Jerry into their new roles and look forward to each of them
working together with the ASA to present their respective set of winners during the JSM program this summer.

And if that wasn’t enough, a flurry of new ideas is also percolating amongst the EC and will likely emerge in 2012. For the contributed paper competition, BIOP is looking towards blazing another trail by evaluating the potential for Smartphone voting during JSM sessions. In the Distance Learning Committee, podcasts of seminars and virtual journal clubs are being discussed. And at the EC level, efforts to consolidate a professional development curriculum for “Statisticians as Leaders”, improving real-time communication via Twitter and texting alerts, and a continuous improvement initiative are being discussed. The latter four areas are in need of a champion, and the Section invites interested members to come forward to assist.

As you can see, BIOP is as vibrant and healthy as ever, and we look forward to an exciting 2012. As always, there is room for one more volunteer in these and other capacities, so please reach out to any of us listed above if you would like to further your contributions to our section.

Steve Wilson, Chair 2011
Steve Gulyas, Chair 2012