
State of SBSA: a review of 2017 and thoughts on future directions

May 22nd, 2017



Dear Biosciences Community:

As the Stanford Biosciences Student Association (SBSA) transitions to an exceptional new leadership team and looks forward to the year ahead, I would like to take a moment and give the Biosciences community an overview of SBSA's mission, goals for the past year, new initiatives and what we accomplished, and how we can improve going forward (with your help!). SBSA is nothing without the students who volunteer their valuable time to make all the events, programming, and activities a success, so I will liberally name and thank those who had a hand in making this year so successful.

Before diving in, a reminder of SBSA's mission: *It is the belief of the Stanford Biosciences Student Association (SBSA) that each Stanford graduate student is valuable and is capable of realizing a self-defined vision of success. Therefore, the mission of SBSA is to empower Biosciences graduate students to make the most of our graduate experience by building community, promoting student wellness and happiness, facilitating student-run programs, and advancing student interests.*

2016-2017 Goals To keep in line with this vision, going into the year I had several goals for SBSA: improve awareness and understanding of what SBSA is and does, increase community involvement, and broaden our ties with other student organizations within and outside the Biosciences. These would make SBSA more accessible to the general student body and thus better able to respond to new issues as well as provide programming better suited toward changing needs. In short, I believe we succeeded with the first, can improve the second, and greatly expand on the third both within and outside the Biosciences.

Helping SBSA achieve these goals was a fantastic Executive Board. For community involvement, [Zintis Inde](#) helped with the new Program Proposal system and getting feedback from the Home Program Representatives (HPRs). [Joshua Eggold](#) improved our financial accounting and helped ensure SBSA going forward will have a consistent tracking of programming outcomes. To enhance awareness, [Abby Simmons](#) and [Vivian Chen](#) boosted SBSA's presence via broadening our social media, poster on campus, and upgrading our website. Going forward, the new Executive Board can better clarify SBSA's role and mission—including how we interact with Committee on Graduate Admissions and Policy (CGAP) and other administrative bodies—by more frequent reminders to the community, holding more joint events with other Biosciences organizations, and having the HPRs spread the word to home programs.

Normal programming SBSA has consistently run events and programs designed to increase social interaction and improve professional development. [James Thomson](#) and [Alex Sockell](#) did a superb job running a slew of Biosciences only and joint happy hours with SMSA (medical school), GSEE (engineering), and GSB SA (business school) along with the GSC/SBSA sponsored Fall/Spring BBQs and Holiday Happy Hour. [Mary Mirvis](#) continued running the mentorship program and has laid the groundwork for SBSA to partner with [BioPeers](#) to further improve mentoring and wellness for students in their 1st year and beyond. And [Susanna Brantley](#) further advanced the fellowship program and ran a Grant Writing Retreat.

Several others helped with incoming student and alumni related events. [Cosmos Wang](#), with OGE's help, ran the well-attended post-Orientation Poster Session and Interview Weekend happy hour (joint with [BioAIMS](#)). [Charlie Starr](#), [Anton Jackson-Smith](#), [Sabrina Ergun](#) ran the successful POWR 1st year camping trip generously funded by Stanford Medicine Alumni Association ([SMAA](#)). [Miles Linde](#) and [Bryan Xie](#) acted as liaisons to SMAA and organized the ongoing SOAR dinners; we look forward to the new ideas from the incoming liaison [Kartik Bhamidipatil](#). Many of the above programming has worked quite well and can benefit from increased coordination between the different officers to potentially offer new, better programming. Further, given Stanford's push toward improving graduate student wellness, there are areas where the programming can be improved, such as incoming mentorship chair [Dirk Spencer](#)'s idea to have more "community building activities like quarterly board game nights and movie nights".

Home Program Representatives The Home Program Representative (HPR) program was initiated to make sure SBSA would hear from a larger number of voices within the Biosciences community and ensure that SBSA programming was inclusive of the entire student body. The HPRs represent each home program and the founding representatives (see goo.gl/de1TOL) helped with Proposal Program review, provided

some feedback and raised awareness on student issues, and gave valuable input on improving the HPR program. Going forward, better, more regular interactions with the HPRs and having them give more timely feedback on both pertinent issues and areas where individual home programs have students covered (e.g. Stem Cell with internships) can both reduce duplicate efforts and better target SBSA's programming.

Program Proposal system To increase community involvement and make SBSA more responsive to student needs going forward, SBSA began piloting the Proposal Program, which allowed students to submit proposals that are reviewed and revised by Home Program Representatives and SBSA's executive board and are funded upon approval. We were able to fund a variety of programming, from senior citizens outreach ([Niki Goularte](#)) to lab equipment sharing ([Trinidad Cisneros](#) and [Molly Uyeda](#)). See a list and description of all funded proposals at goo.gl/0f1vQA. While there were some bumps along the way, the first year of this program has allowed us to identify how to more fluidly run both the proposal and review process along with what types of programming SBSA will fund. Look forward to a streamlined process along with many more events and activities stemming from the Program Proposal system. See goo.gl/bckqGb if you are interested in submitting a proposal.

Community There were several times throughout the year when outside events caused upheaval within the Biosciences and greater community. After the election, SBSA and BioAIMS hosted a Post-Election De-Stress event. In response to executive orders earlier this year, many students commented that communication between the administration and students could be clearer. [Justin Norden](#) (SMSA), [Alejandro Schuler](#) (BioAIMS), and I met with Dean Minor to discuss how to enhance two-way communication going forward; this is an area that can be greatly improved by the incoming SBSA leadership. Others—such as [Miranda Stratton](#), [Jonathan Turner](#), and [Megan Conlon](#)—helped push for more town halls and community discussion along with organizing students to be better prepared going forward. In the future—through the Proposal Program, partnerships, and general meeting discussions—SBSA should aim to provide better support for student like the above who are taking active roles in the community.

SBSA's fall 2016 survey indicated that students were concerned about housing, stipend levels, health insurance and childcare, retirement planning, and internship opportunities, among other issues. Building off of the SoM town halls, OGE and SBSA, with help from [SoMCC](#), co-hosted a Biosciences Town Hall where we discussed ideas on boosting awareness of career and wellness resources by linking them to the IDP process and improving the culture around career-related activities (e.g. internships) within the community. A health insurance workshop, lead by [Jasmine Dickinson](#) and Vaden, help start increasing student knowledge in this area and we will have a retirement planning workshop soon with the help of SFCU, [Nicole Davis](#), and [Rachel Matt](#). These are just a sample of events that will educate students on key areas, improving wellness and future success. While the Proposal Program system and HPRs will allow SBSA to better serve the community going forward, community activism is an area where SBSA can greatly improve; more feedback and involvement from the community is crucial to making this happen.

Lastly, I would like to thank [Will Talbot](#), [Terrance Mayes](#), [Monica Devlin](#), [Guadalupe Makasyuk](#), [Tiana Moore](#), and all the rest at the Office of Graduate Education who provided resources, time, and assistance in making many of our programs a success and run smoothly.

Concluding thoughts This year we were able to build off of the first-rate leadership and initiatives of previous SBSA Presidents, such as [Dylan Hale](#) and [Blair Benham-Pyle](#), to better position SBSA to thrive in the future. Over the next year SBSA will have a great group of students (see goo.gl/UEw8B2) running programming and interacting with the community. Having worked with the incoming SBSA President [Zintis Inde](#), and hearing some of his plans for the coming year, I am very confident that he will be able to improve SBSA even further, making it more responsive to community needs and—when appropriate—advocating for student issues both in and out of lab. To do this he and the rest of SBSA need your help! So whenever possible attend general meetings, write to the leadership with comments and concerns, and come participate in our events so SBSA can continue making the life and work experience as a Stanford Biosciences graduate student greater than it has ever been.

Sincerely,
Biafra Ahanonu
SBSA President