



THE ASLO MULTICULTURAL PROGRAM: 34 YEARS OF LEADING THE WAY FOR DEI SUCCESS

Benjamin Cuker, Hampton University, cukerbenjamin@gmail.com
Deidre Gibson, Hampton University, deidre.gibson@hamptonu.edu
Jeanette Davis, Dr. Ocean, info@drjeannedavis.com

Hampton University is on the land taken from the Powhatan, part of the Algonquin Nation



Systemic Racism

The lack of diversity, equity and inclusion is a consequence of racism.

Racism developed to support and justify colonialism and chattel slavery.

Racism is a determinant of the distribution of privilege.

The asymmetry of privilege means that those who possess it can use their power to fight racism and its consequences.

People of color remain underrepresented in aquatic sciences

Table 2. Current and projected demography of the US, the distribution of degrees in science, and in the ocean sciences. Data from the US Census and NSF 2019. The information on degrees is from 2016.

	White	Asian/Pacific Islander	African American	Hispanic	Native American
% US Population 2020	63.9	4.9	12.3	16.3	0.7
% US Population projected 2050	47.0	9.0	13.0	29.0	1.0
% BS all Sciences	58.0	9.5	9.5	14.1	0.5
% BS Ocean Sciences	70.4	3.5	3.6	10.3	1.8
% MS Ocean Sciences	70.6	3.9	0	7.8	0
% PhD Ocean Sciences	59.0	5.8	2.9	2.2	1.2

American Association for the Sciences of Limnology and Oceanography Multicultural Program (ASLOMP) since 1990

BioScience 2016

Professional Biologist

How a Scientific Society Built Multicultural Diversity: A 25-Year-Long Journey

BENJAMIN E. CUKER, CLARISSE HAXTON, AND CARMEN MARTINEZ

In 1990, The Association for the Sciences of Limnology and Oceanography (ASLO) implemented the ASLO Multicultural Program (ASLOMP) to recruit and retain underrepresented students in the aquatic sciences. ASLOMP uses ASLO's annual meetings to support 65 to 80 students to participate in a multifaceted program that includes field trips, special student-symposium, and a system of meeting-mentors to help students navigate the conference and engage with ASLO's community. During the first 25 years, 890 students from 215 different colleges and universities participated. Participants were diverse: 70% undergraduates, 67% female, 50% African American, 35% Hispanic, 7% Native American, 6% Pacific Islanders, 1% white. Almost all participants earned a BS and 59% earned graduate degrees. About half (49%) held jobs that used at least some aquatic science and 24% found employment in other STEM fields. Two participants won election to ASLO leadership positions. The program provides a tested model for other scientific societies.

Keywords: diversity, multicultural, scientific society, underrepresented minorities, meeting-mentor

Valuing diversity in the scientific community

The success of science in the United States depends on increasing the diversity of individuals in the STEM fields (NAS et al. 2011). The US science and engineering labor market will grow faster than any other sector in the next years (NAS et al. 2011). Shifting US demography suggests that by 2050, underrepresented minorities (URMs) will represent more than 40% of the population (NACME 2013). The full participation of URMs in STEM education is required to ensure the competitiveness and preeminence of the nation in these fields (NACME 2013), bringing new perspectives and experiences to the scientific endeavor (American Institutes for Research 2012; Cuker 2006, 2007).

This article describes how one scientific society, The Association for the Sciences of Limnology and Oceanography (ASLO: né The American Society of Limnology and Oceanography) embraced the goal of building diversity in its ranks through the development of a novel program. Despite this effort beginning in 1990, it remains relevant

we detail the quarter-century-long journey to diversity. We also present the results of a post-hoc survey that assessed the perceptions held by program participants and documented their subsequent career steps and status. In 2011, the American Institutes for Research (AIR) began an evaluation of ASLOMP through a survey of all 602 former participants 1990–2008. The full survey design, results, and analysis are available elsewhere (Haxton et al. 2015). The response rate was 67%. For analysis, we divided the respondents into Cohort 1 (1990–1999) and Cohort 2 (2000–2008). Using the two cohorts allowed the sorting of the respondents based on time for career development since participating in ASLOMP and also some accounting for dimming memories over time. The design excluded participants from 2009 forward so as to focus on students who had finished undergraduate studies and were employed or in graduate studies. The results from this survey inform the discussion of the ASLO structure and outcomes below.

ASLO Bulletin 2020

GEORGE FLOYD AND AQUATIC SCIENCE

Benjamin Cuker 

Editor's Note: Ben Cuker is Professor of Marine and Environmental Science at Hampton University and Program Director of the ASLO Multicultural Program which he founded in 1990. He was the first recipient of both ASLO's Tommy and Yvette Edmonson Distinguished Service Award (1993) and Ramon Margalef Award for Excellence in Education (2009) for his work on diversity.

The viral video of the murder of George Floyd at the hands of the Minneapolis Police sparked an uprising in the U.S. and around the world. People of all colors and backgrounds continue to flood the streets to decry Floyd's murder, and demand both justice and deep social change.

What does this have to do with us as aquatic scientists? Everything.

We either practice or aspire to pursue a career in the aquatic sciences or some related field. Such

centuries. Previous murders and brutalities gave rise to protests, but nothing ever on this scale. Was it simply the final straw on the back of oppressed people, or are we experiencing a seismic shift in the social order? An attempt to reweave the social fabric? Historians and social scientists may be able to answer this question in the future. Clearly, the Covid-19 pandemic allowed the world to see and experience the vast disparity in wealth, access to health care, and opportunities afforded to the various sectors of our population. Perhaps the knee on the neck of George Floyd is for many a metaphor for all the spools of social injustice that entangle people of color and other disadvantaged groups.

RACISM

Most aquatic scientists focused their studies on various scientific courses and cognitive fields such as mathematics and statistics. Few of us are serious formal students of history. And even those who studied history to some degree may suffer from courses and professors who taught a view generated by those in power. As, such, I offer a quick explanation of the origins of institutional racism in the U.S.

The European colonization of the New World engendered an economic system based upon the

While the U.S. Civil war ended chattel slavery in the U.S., it left in tack the institution of racism built to justify enslavement. Racism went on to justify the continued oppression of African Americans and other people of color during the post-Reconstruction era of Jim Crow laws and social norms that extended well in to the 1970s. Racism continues to live. It informs everyday life, ranging from interactions with the criminal justice system, to health care, job opportunities, education, housing, and much more. It also enables a system of *white privilege* that both affords more opportunities to white folks and protects them from suffering many of the consequences of breaking laws and social norms. The degree of white privilege depends upon class; poor white folks have some, while wealthy white folks have lots more.

AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

The current uprising around the issue of racism is an amplified echo from the U.S. Civil Rights movement that took shape between the 1930s and the 1970s. The Kennedy administration is credited with introducing *Affirmative Action*, a set of policies designed to correct for the ills of past discrimination. The ASLO Multicultural Program originated in 1990 as an affirmative

viewpoint |

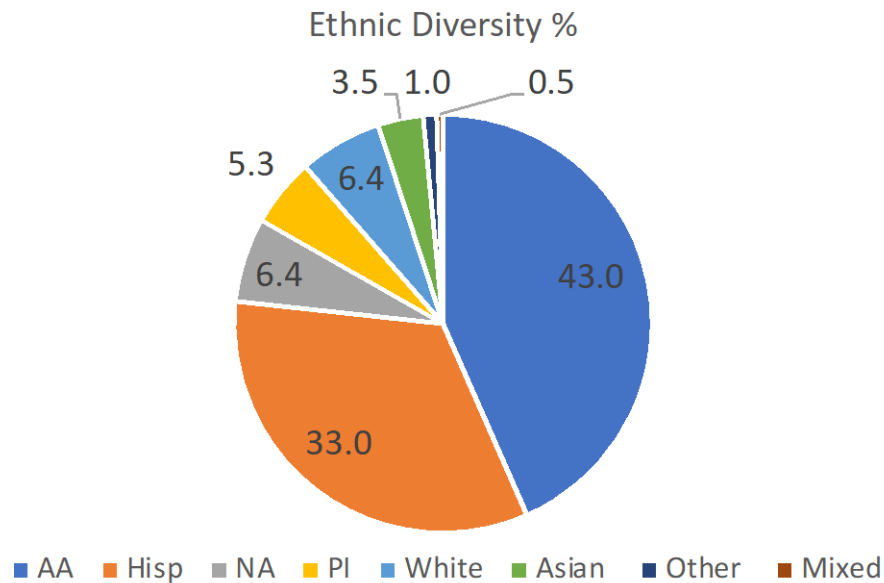
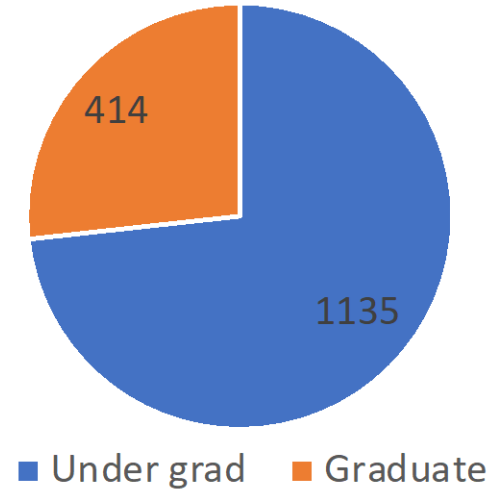
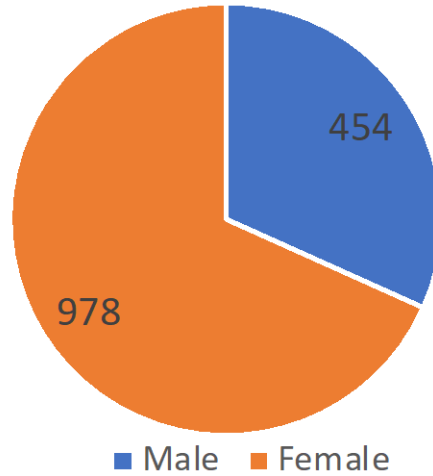
Takes place at annual ASLO meetings



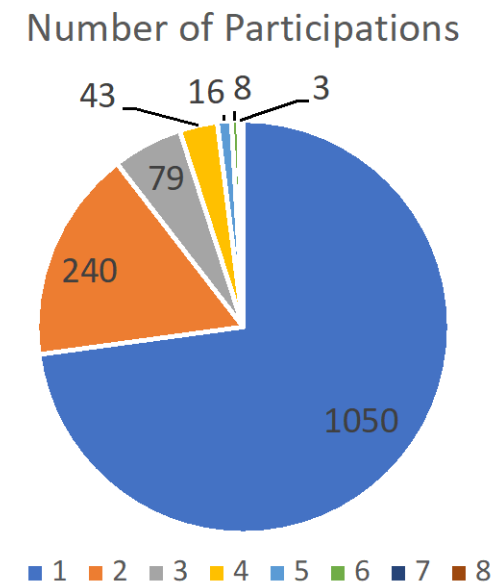
ASLOMP by the Numbers

1,443 Total Unique
Participants

From >300
different
institutions



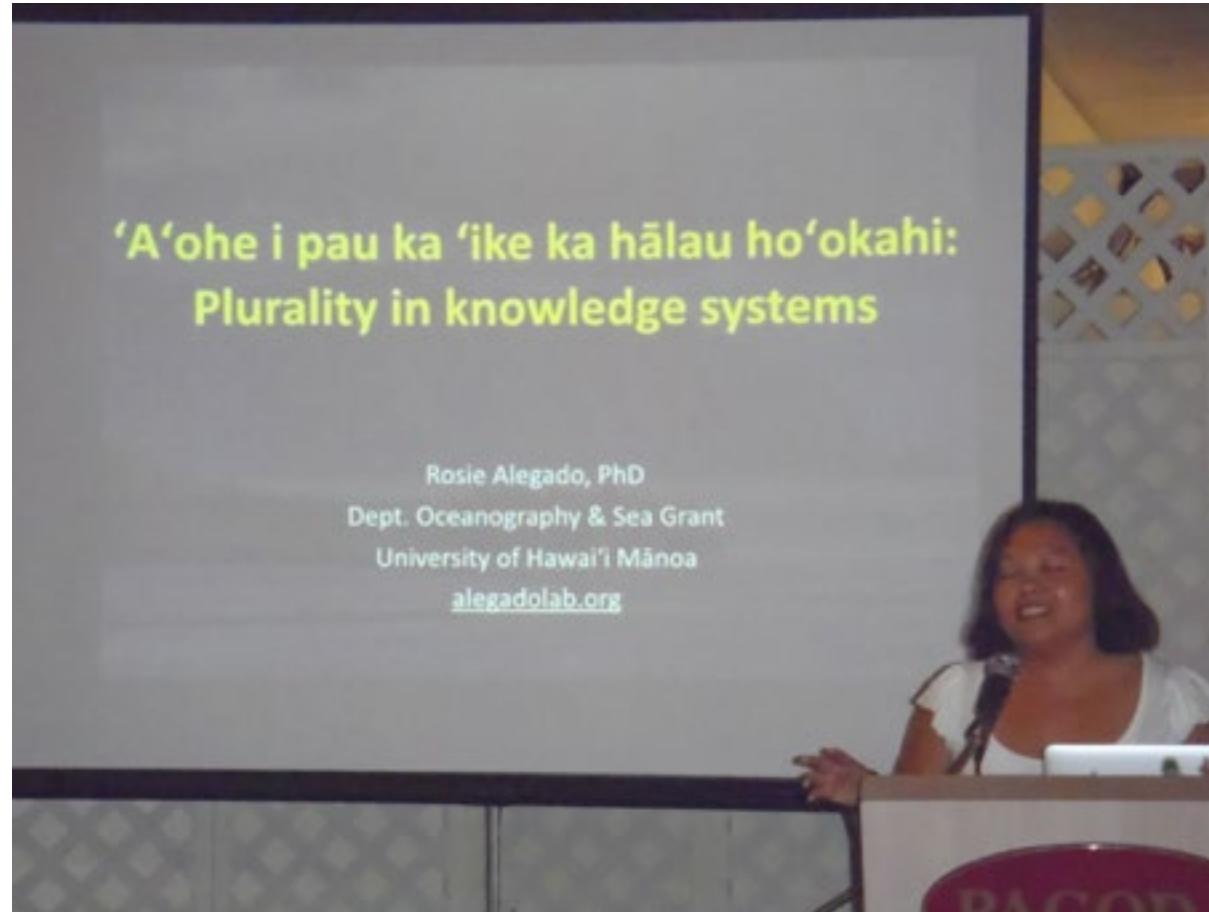
2,100 Total
Participations



ASLOMP Features

- Funded by NSF 1990 – 2024
- 80 participants each year, under graduate and graduate (94 is Palma!)
- All expenses paid (flights, hotel, food, registration and abstract fees, membership)
- Monthly MAS newsletter featuring opportunities (internships, jobs, etc.)

Saturday night opening dinner and keynote address, greetings from ASLO President



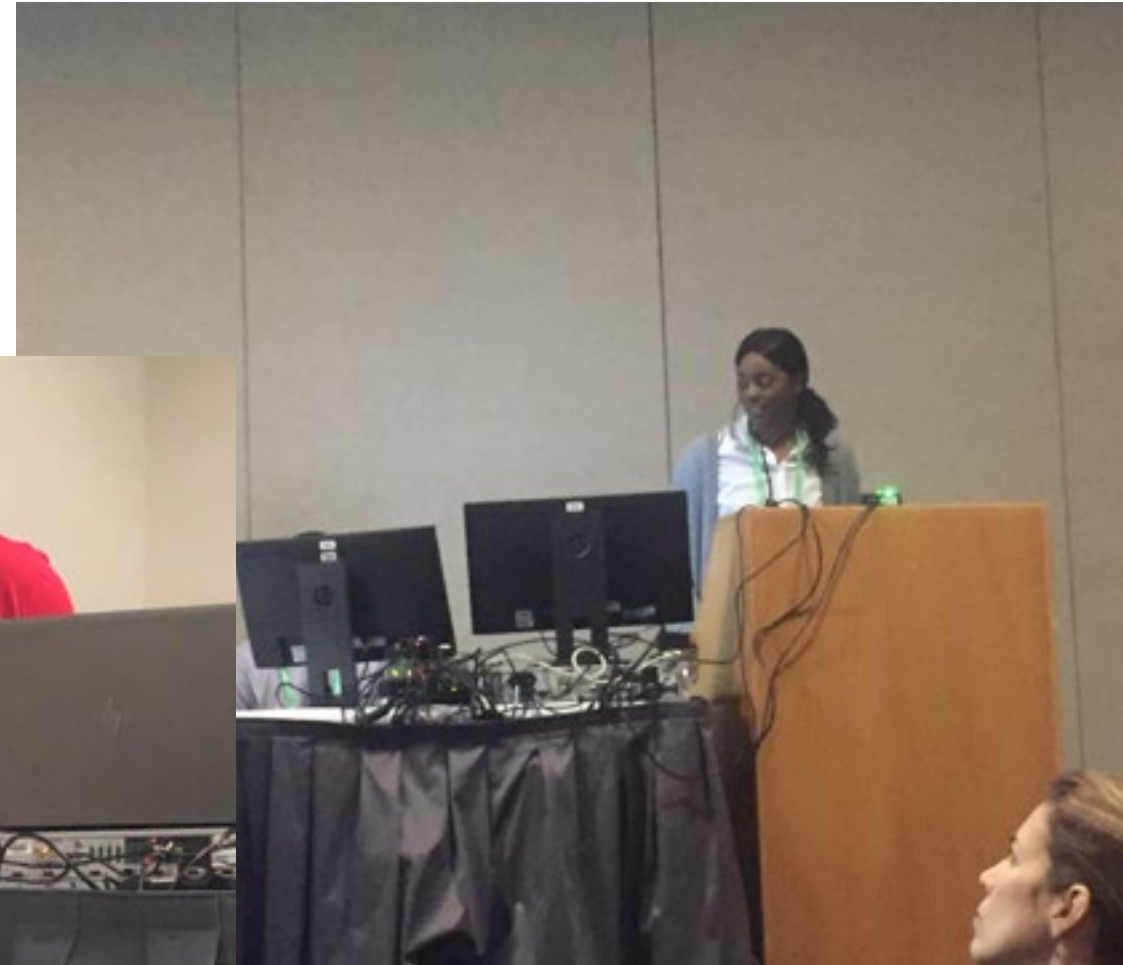
Sunday field trips



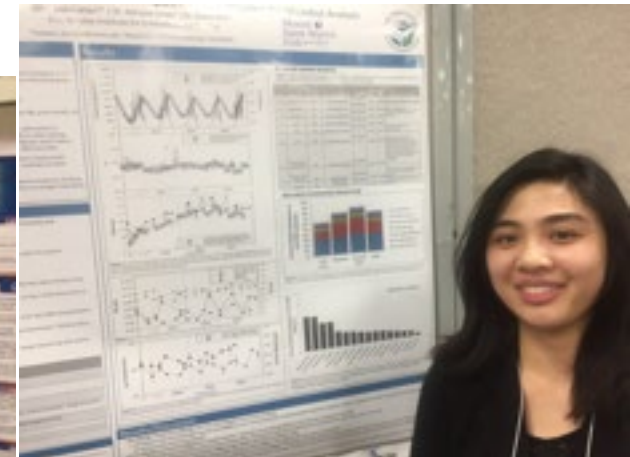
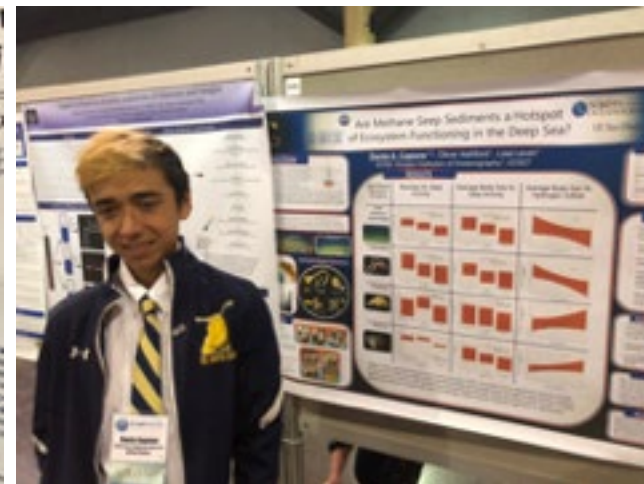
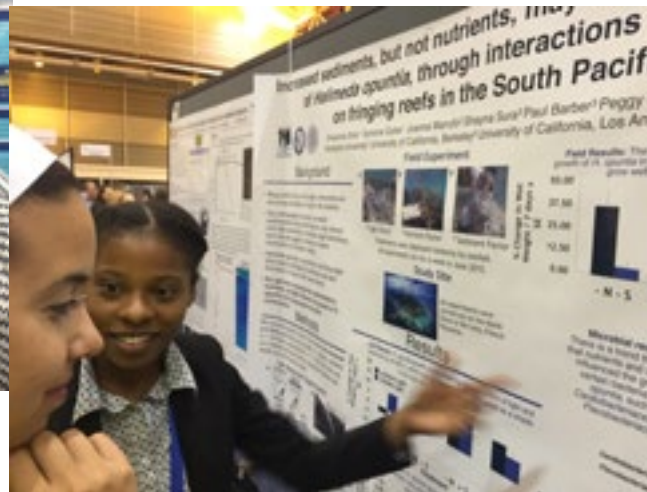
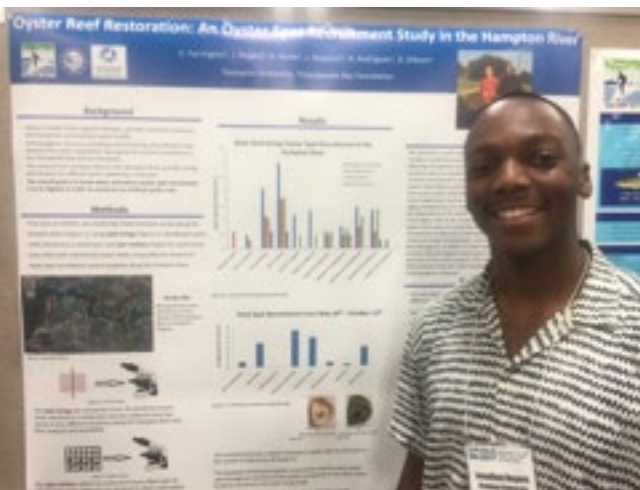
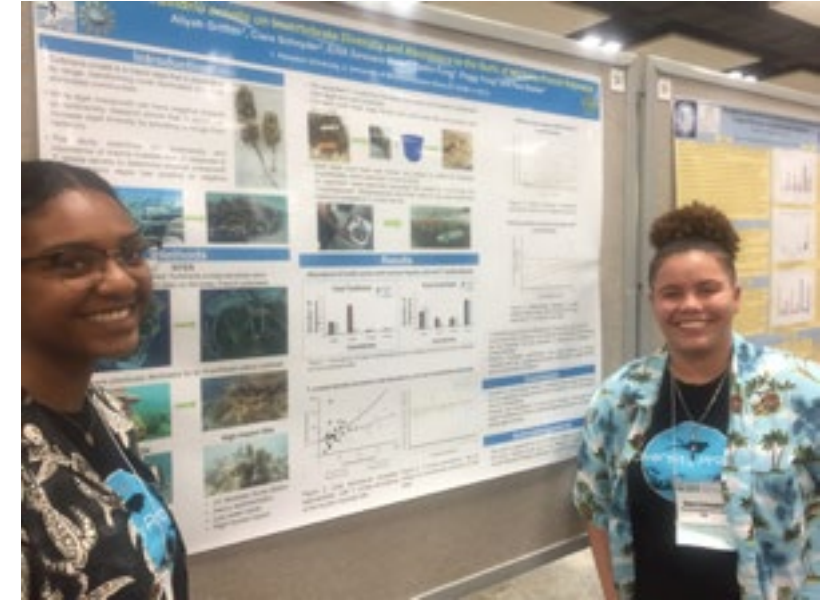
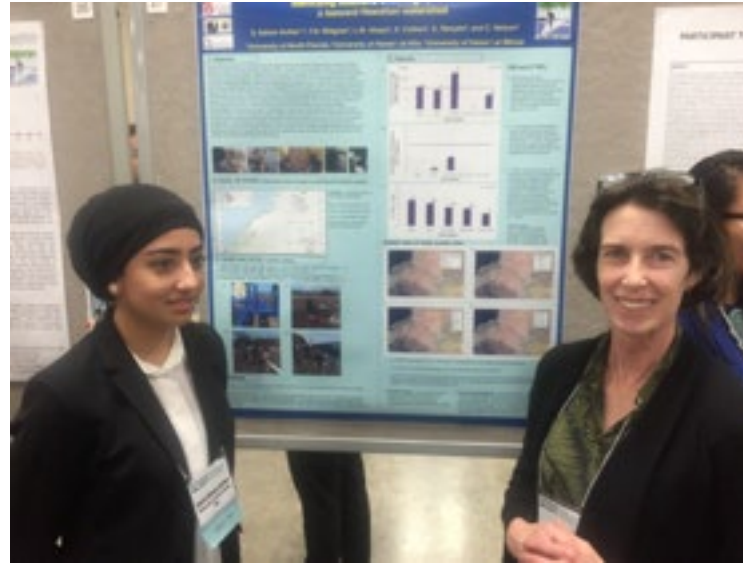
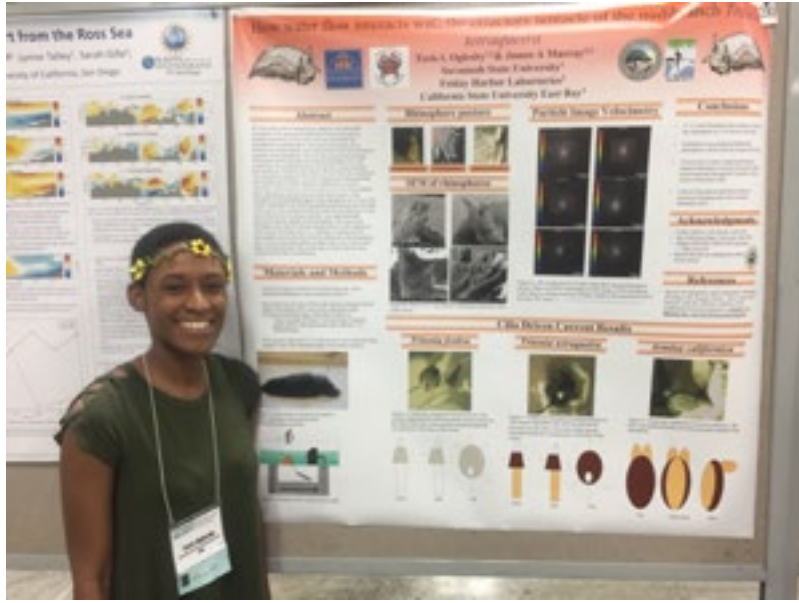
Meeting Mentors to help students navigate meetings and to develop networks



Student Symposium for first-time presenters



Poster Sessions



ASLOMPers elected to ASLO Board of Directors

At Large BOD



Dr. Deidre Gibson 2009-12
first African American



Dr. Amina Pollard 2018-24



Dr. Cristina Takacs-Vesbach 1997-2000



Dr. Camille Gaynus 2018-21

Student Reps to BOD



Dr. Letise Houser LaFeir 2003-06



Amy Burgess 2012-15



Dr. Tiara Moore 2015-18

A few Notable ASLOMP'ers



Dr. Jeanette Davis,
scientist & author



Dr. Noelani Puniwai,
U. Hawaii



Dr. Deidre Gibson,
Hampton U.



Dr. Eloy Martinez,
Eastern Illinois U.



Dr. Tiara Moore,
Black in Marine Science



Dr. Shawn Arellano,
W. Wash. U.



Dr. Brandon Jones,
NSF Program Director &
AGU President Elect



Dr. Kersey Sturdivant,
Duke U., INSPIRE



Dr. Letise LaFeir
NOAA White House advisor



ASLOMP invented the Meeting Mentor in 1991

Now emulated by many other societies

Societies using meeting mentor system

- ASLO for general membership
- Ecological Society of America
- Society of Wetland Scientists
- Coastal and Estuarine Research Federation
- American Geophysical Union
- Sigma Xi

