

SACNAS Brief History & Overview

This information was adapted from the Society for the Advancement of Chicanos & Native Americans in Science's (SACNAS') Strategic Planning Documents. The 2009-2013 Strategic Plan and the Vision 2020 action plan can be found at <http://sacnas.org/about>.



SACNAS—Society for Advancement of Chicanos & Native Americans in Science—is a society of scientists dedicated to fostering the success of Hispanic/Chicano & Native American scientists, from college students to professionals, to attain advanced degrees, careers, and positions of leadership.

SACNAS' goals are to increase the number of Hispanics/Chicanos and Native Americans with advanced degrees in science and the motivation to be leaders; to increase the number of Hispanics/Chicanos and Native Americans in science research, leadership and teaching careers at all levels; to increase governmental commitment to advancing Hispanics/Chicanos and Native Americans in science, resulting in increased resources, elimination of barriers, and greater equity.

Organizational Activities & Culture

SACNAS activities are informed by its Strategic Plan 2009-2013 and its Vision 2020; it achieves mission impact through outcome-based programming and initiatives. These include an annual national conference (attracting nearly 4,000 participants); regional meetings; a robust website with numerous web-based services including connections to research and job opportunities; student chapters at 88 colleges and universities in the US and Puerto Rico, along with one professional chapter, as of June 2013; a Summer Leadership Institute for early and mid-career scientists; Native American initiatives; access to student scholarships, internships and fellowships; evaluation and research; science policy and advocacy; member engagement; collaborations and partnerships.

SACNAS is inclusive of ethnicities, cultures, and scientific disciplines; is focused on achieving a real impact through its purpose and mission; is committed to standards of excellence in science and education; is devoted to full engagement of its members in the organization's work; and is fully mindful of the importance of students' K-12 experience and supportive of K-12 STEM education (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) from a policy perspective.

The Founding of SACNAS

The organization was founded in 1973 by a group of Chicano and Native American scientists who recognized the need to diversify this nation's scientific workforce, and who sought to increase the numbers of Chicanos and Native Americans in science. SACNAS' founders engaged in nationwide networking, obtained funding, and established a presence in the federal scientific agencies including, for example, the National Science Foundation (NSF) and the National

Institutes of Health (NIH). Today SACNAS has some 6900 paid members, and serves over 23,000 members and friends at more than 1,000 institutions, agencies, and programs. Its scientists are frequently called upon to provide high-level information, analysis, and advice on national science policy, and numerous SACNAS science professionals have received national awards and recognitions.

The name under which the organization was founded and incorporated was Society for Advancement of Chicanos & Native Americans in Science, which remains the legal name today. In 1973, the nomenclature for US born individuals of Mexican heritage was “Mexican American.” The term “Chicano” was adopted by various “Mexican Americans,” including many SACNAS founders, who self-identified as members of a social-political movement—the “Chicanismo” initiative of the early 1970s. Over the years, as times, demographics, and language have evolved, SACNAS has in practice inserted the word “Hispanic” into its name, in order to reflect a broader and more inclusive ethnic demographic within underrepresented minorities. “Hispanic” and “Latino” are sometimes used interchangeably in reference to the same populations. SACNAS chose the word “Hispanic” because that is the designation used by the United States Census Bureau.

Changing Demographics

SACNAS uniquely represents the fastest-growing demographic, Hispanics, and the most-underserved population, Native Americans, in the country: between 2000 and 2010 the Hispanic population in the US grew by 43%, increasing by 15.2 million during that decade, in 2011 constituting 16.7% of the total US population. As of 2011, Native Americans, (defined as American Indians, Alaska Natives, Native Hawaiians, and other Pacific Islanders) made up 1.4% of the total US population.

These populations, which are those targeted by SACNAS, are at the same time the most underrepresented in science according to a 2011 study by the National Science Foundation. 2010 data reflects of the 32,649 doctoral science and engineering degrees awarded, by race/ethnicity were: 43.7% White, 6.2% Asian or Pacific Islander, 3.5% Hispanic; 2.9% Black and less than 1% American Indian or Alaska Native; also in 2010, of the 525,374 science and engineering bachelor’s degrees awarded, by race/ethnicity, went: 62.1% to Whites, 9.5% Asians or Pacific Islanders, 8.8% Hispanics, 8.2% Blacks and less than 1% to American Indians or Alaska Natives.

STEM: A National Imperative

Progressively over the last several decades the United States has fallen further and further behind in educating its people in the STEM fields—science, technology, engineering and mathematics—and our nation has become increasingly dependent on foreign scientists. We have not kept pace with the rest of the world in STEM. At a time when the US populations of color are increasing, and this nation’s scientific workforce is lagging, SACNAS believes that the US must diversify its scientific workforce in order to increase it.

This view—that diversity in science is important—has become a national imperative over the last decade, under both Republican and Democratic administrations, through the leadership of major national scientific bodies, for example the National Science Foundation and the National Institutes of Health. Both entities, for example, reach out to underrepresented minorities and

have provided grant funding, including research and mentoring opportunities, to those populations. In early 2012, SACNAS President Dr. Ernest Márquez was invited to address, and did address, the Advisory Council to the Director of NIH on ways to diversify grant awards from NIH to underrepresented minorities. For further background information, see *Rising Above the Gathering Storm: Energizing and Employing America for a Brighter Economic Future*, 2005 report of the National Academy of Sciences, and *Expanding Underrepresented Minority Participation*, 2010 follow-up report of the National Academies Committee on Underrepresented Groups and the Expansion of the Science and Engineering Workforce Pipeline (chaired by Dr. Freeman Hrabowski).

STEM Education and the Relevance of SACNAS

Since early 2009, the Obama administration has been spearheading initiatives to increase STEM education in this country, beginning with the President's address to the National Academy of Sciences, leaders of the National Academy of Engineering and the Institute of Medicine, calling for increased investment in science and science education; his direction to the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy to lead efforts to increase the importance of science; and his appointment of the President's Council of Advisors on Science and Technology (PCAST) to advise him on strategies to nurture and sustain a culture of scientific innovation. In early 2012, PCAST presented a lengthy report to the President calling for producing one million additional college graduates with STEM degrees over the next decade. A long-time SACNISTA, former SACNAS board member and advisor to the SACNAS board, Dr. Davis Burgess (Boston College) was an expert advisor to PCAST on the report. In President Obama's budget proposal for fiscal year 2012-2013, he proposed to invest billions of dollars in STEM education.

Particularly in view of the foregoing, SACNAS' work is timely and critical: both (1) active participation in the STEM diversity public policy discussions and also (2) reaching out to underrepresented minority science students to involve them in events where they can meet minority scientists, network, make connections, meet mentors, get feedback on their research projects and presentations, find internships and fellowships, make connections for graduate school and jobs, and advance in the sciences.