

Outreach for STEM, Continued

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For anyone who has ever been President of this august body, one of the more challenging things is to identify three speakers for the plenary sessions of the annual scientific meeting. They need to be relevant to our career field, interesting, good speakers, hopefully support the year's main theme, and available. Further, I am just enough of a quirky personality that I want the speakers for New Orleans to be a little different from the usual. On one evening in early May while watching the sunset over our grass strip, I had an a-ha moment. What if I invited some of the high school science fair winners to present their papers for one of the sessions? And a journey commenced....

My first step was to call the organization that ran the local regional Science and Engineering Fair out of Griffin, GA, for whom I had judged several times. That discussion quickly led to contact with the Society for Science, which coordinates the Annual International Science and Engineering Fair (ISEF). As luck would have it, the fair was the next week 40 miles up the road in Atlanta—and they still needed judges. I signed up and sent it to as many aviation groups as I could find in the local area. Several people responded and registered as well, including Dr. John Barson, a fellow member of AsMA.

ISEF itself was a hybrid event as many countries could not send participants due to COVID-19 restrictions, but the vast majority of the participants came from outside the United States. In all, there were over 1400 projects with 1,750 scientists from over 100 countries. Each of these students had been deemed among the best in their country or state. As on-site judges, John and I showed up at the venue at 7:00 AM on the 10th of May. After a training session, downloading the scoring app, and reviewing the abstracts, judging started. We were assigned to the Biomedical and Health Science section and each judged 17 projects in the course of the day. That evening we caucused to award 23 awards from fourth place to first, with prizes ranging from \$500 to \$5000. The first place winners went on to compete for scholarships up to \$75,000 and full academic scholarships at major universities. It was thrilling to be a part of the process!



In addition to topic prizes, there are special awards granted by organizations with unique interests for the best projects in their topic areas. For instance, the Test Pilots and Dentists grant awards, as do NOAA, the U.S. Air Force, and the Navy Research Lab. The actual awards can vary from cash to trips to backpacks.

Students know about them and many aim their research to win them. In the coming year, as the AsMA President, I will explore the possibility of AsMA offering an Aerospace Medicine award for the best aviation or aerospace medicine project. Exactly what that will look like remains to be determined and I am open to suggestions.

The goal of all this outreach remains to get young people involved and interested in a career in aviation – and aerospace medicine would be a plus. Both John and I had several researchers ask what we did. One of the young men whose project I judged asked me about opportunities for students. His project on ultra-long or persistent COVID-19 syndromes had already caught my eye as we are beginning to wrap our heads around the condition's impact on the aviation community. His project used an international internet survey on a social media platform. While his sample contained several biases, the thought process behind it showed innovation and a keen intellectual interest in a current problem. We discussed internship and co-op programs and he has applied! We need to create more opportunities for interested students to get involved. Further, we need to stimulate their research drive to tackle some of our issues and concerns. I hope each of you gets the chance to work with a student.

Stay safe!

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