American College of Neuropsychopharmacology
bulletin



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Perspective as an Associate Member on ACNP Council

I admit it. I wanted to know the juicy details; the secret rituals. ACNP has a certain mystique and nothing says *inner sanctum* more than Council.

But the first Council meeting Millie Rincón-Cortés and I attended as Associate Council members gave no indication of anything unusual. We were warmly welcomed, had a lovely dinner, and listened as ACNP President Bill Carlezon outlined his agenda.

I am sad to report that during my year on Council I never spotted a hidden Council handshake or learned the message encoded in the pre-afternoon session chimes. I did learn essential Annual Meeting logistics, for example, that conference coffee costs more than Starbucks. More importantly, I was privileged to have a front-row view of scientific leadership tackling the current challenges facing science.

For members who haven't seen Council up close, it is a member-elected governing body charged with stewardship of ACNP business and activities. The heavy lifting of this work is done by a senior subset of Council, known as the Executive Committee, that meets every two weeks (!)

with ACNP Executive Director Sarah Timm, and Deputy Director Erin Shearon to manage the College's routine business. The remaining six Councilors and the two Associate Council members meet at the annual meeting and quarterly throughout the year.

Even though ACNP Council doesn't have fun secret rituals, I did need to learn how to appropriately navigate its cultural norms. At first, I diligently attended the biweekly Executive Committee meetings, and was relieved, if slightly embarrassed, to discover that my role was to participate in full Council meetings and stay informed about Executive Committee activities by reading the minutes circulated to Council.

Even in full Council meetings, Associate Council members have "a voice but not a vote". Nobody has ever accused me of being too quiet, but between the presence of Council's scientific luminaries and learning to navigate Council decorum, it took me time to find my voice. In the interim, there was a lot to observe. The new year ushered in a dizzying array of crises: upheaval at federal scientific funding agencies; potential legal threats to ACNP missions; powerful voices questioning the legitimacy of psychiatric medications; and challenges to conducting preclinical research. At the same time, ACNP had to confront inflationary economic pressures and the practical challenge of attendance numbers that can change the character of the Annual Meeting.

It was inspiring to see how Council and ACNP leadership and staff met these challenges with resolve, thoughtfulness, and the genuine desire for the long-term wellbeing of the College and its members. The issues at hand did not lend themselves to simple solutions. Yet Council members strove for consensus while making space for diverse perspectives and voices, including those of Associate Members (eventually).

When external events seemed particularly chaotic, I took comfort watching Council commit with renewed purpose to the College's core research and education missions: issuing an unprecedented number of statements and joint letters, launching grassroots efforts to advance science, and changing internal policy to safeguard the College as a bastion of cross-disciplinary excellence in neuropsychiatric translational science.

I want to thank my fellow Associate Members for providing me with this opportunity. Your trust in me is the real story of how I found the voice to speak in Council. I am particularly appreciative that throughout the experience I had a fantastic partner-in-crime, Millie Rincón-Cortés. And I am most grateful to ACNP's leadership for the warmth with which we were included and for providing a masterclass in values-driven governance.

If you are a member interested in staying up-to-date on ACNP Council's work, I hope you will attend the annual business meeting and read the ACNP bulletins and minutes. I know I certainly will. Maybe one day they will finally explain the deepest ACNP secret of all: why the acronym for *neuropsychopharmacology* is both NP and NPP.