We’re thrilled to announce this is SWIGS’ fifth annual newsletter! Read on to hear more about our great events and accomplishments this year.

This year, our leadership team consisted of Jessica Moreton (Cohen lab), Katia Charov (Burkart lab), Ellen Coddens (Grassian lab), Liora Mael (Grassian lab) and Joseph Palomba (Cohen lab).

We are proud to announce that thanks to years of events and advocacy by SWIGS leadership and members, SWIGS was awarded a campus-wide Diversity Award in March. We were honored to be selected: the award validated our efforts to make the Chemistry & Biochemistry Department a more inclusive place.

We continued our tradition of providing new opportunities for grad students to interact and hone skills by starting the Student Research Seminar series this year, the first department-wide opportunity for grad students to present their research to a general audience. We enjoyed the opportunity to work with the CGSC on this event and anticipate more joint events in the future!

SWIGS is a force within the department, reaching 214 mailing list subscribers, with 43 official members and holding over 45 events during the year. We worked hard to plan events that were of interest to current members, from coffee meetups to hikes to a great Alternative Careers Seminar co-hosted with SD-ACS, where we heard from Dr. Jyllian Kemsley, Senior Editor at C&EN magazine.

Read on for more highlights from our great year! Finally, our tremendous thanks to those who have helped make SWIGS so successful over the years; we hope to see you at future events!

~Jessie

MEETING TOPICS

July
Planning Ahead: Next Year in SWIGS
August
Advocating for women in STEM
September
Meet our new faculty!
October
Talking to your PI about gender bias
November
Introduction to the CGSC
December
Communicating science to your family
January
A postdoc’s perspective
February
Presentation by Dr. Coddens
March
Communicating science to the public
April
Mentorship insights
May
Embarking on the career search

SPECIAL THANKS

Stacey Brydges, Ed Dennis, Vicki Grassian, Seth Cohen, Erica Lennard, Jeanine Kolinko, Jeff Rances, Amy Tran, Asmaa Khatib, Rick Thomas, Bob Continetti, Cliff Kubiak, and especially the Department of Chemistry & Biochemistry and Chair’s Office for financial support!
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT
Networking Events, Speakers, and Career Guidance

This year, SWIGS continued to host networking and professional development events through a series of mixers and seminars.

First, the department-wide summer networking event was a big hit with record attendance of nearly 100 people, including 15 faculty members. Students and faculty mingled and chatted with those from other research groups and divisions of chemistry while enjoying refreshments. Attendees participated in a fun ice breaker activity where they learned and shared facts about successful women scientists.

Coddens shared the story of her journey from graduate school through her career to retirement while highlighting how she handled issues and obstacles she encountered as a woman in a predominately male field. SWIGS members also participated in a professional development seminar by Jeanelle Horcasitas, Graduate Career Peer Educator from Career Services, geared towards helping graduate students search for jobs in academia as well as industry.

-Ellen

THE STUDENT RESEARCH SEMINAR SERIES
Graduate Students Present Research to a General Department Audience

The SWIGS leadership worked with the CGSC to develop and execute the first ever opportunity for graduate students to present their research to a general department audience. Each quarter, graduate students are nominated by professors and graduate student peers. Five speakers are selected to represent a diversity of student voices, and over the course of one hour, each student gives a ten-minute talk to an audience of graduate students, postdocs, and faculty members. We successfully ran one seminar per quarter, featuring a total of 15 excellent speakers. Audiences of up to 70 department members at each seminar have provided positive feedback so far!

Next year, we will continue the Student Research Seminar and expand our events to include “Open Mic Night” events for less-practiced students to gain experience presenting.

~Jessie

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OUTREACH
Inspiring the Next Generation of Scientists

This year’s outreach calendar was packed – with the two big favorite reoccurring events – Chem Expo in the fall and Expanding Your Horizons (EYH) in the spring, as well as many smaller events, providing SWIGS members opportunities to connect with curious minds, of a variety of ages, across San Diego. This year at Chem Expo we had a stellar group of 10 dedicated volunteers who helped share the “Smells Table” and were told more than once that our activity was their favorite. Additionally, in the fall, three members participated in the Future STEMs from Us event where they explored polymer chemistry and made some very funky hand molds. This spring at Expanding Your Horizons (EYH), we successfully ran two events: the “Magic Show” which investigated the physical properties of different puzzling entities, like Ooblek, elephant’s toothpaste, and disappearing packing peanuts, and “Molecular Gastronomy” where we explored the science of food which wrapped up with a crowd pleaser: liquid nitrogen ice cream!

In addition to EYH, members also participated in the Science Discovery Day at Torrey Pines Elementary School, making slime with 4-6 years and were left covered in glitter. SWIGS members also participated in Comienza con un Sueño, an event that provides information and motivation to middle and high school students from historically underrepresented and first-generation backgrounds. Last but not least, several members sat on a Women’s Career Education Panel at Mira Costa Community College, sharing their experiences in STEM and how they made their way to graduate school. Overall SWIGS members participated in a wide array of successful outreach events and many requests to return next year!

-Liora

BUILDING COMMUNITY
Through Social Events and Collaborative Seminars

Every year, SWIGS community events take the shape of the membership of that year. This year, the group was interested in alternative careers in chemistry and work-life balance. We facilitated these themes by introducing “coordinator” positions, allowing individual members to lead smaller events traditional to SWIGS. Some coordinators organized regular coffee hours, brewery meet-ups, a book club, and hiking trips, each attracting 5-20 grad students from the department to connect outside the lab.

Other coordinators worked with groups like the undergraduate ACS section
SWIGS, this year’s premier event was Chemistry and Engineering News (C&EN) Executive Editor Jyllian Kemsley. This special seminar was presented in cooperation with SD-ACS as part of their monthly dinner-speaker series. Leading up to the talk, students were given the opportunity to get to know the remarkable woman behind some of the big cover stories for C&EN (including the fall’s “Confronting sexual harassment in chemistry”). At lunch and coffee hour, Dr. Kemsley talked with SWIGS members about her experience in grad school, preparing for her career in journalism, and her work-life balance. In the evening, attendees of her talk heard about what the day-to-day life of a chemistry editor looks like and the evolution of some noteworthy pieces in C&EN.

Looking forward to the 2018-2019 year, SWIGS is excited to continue to build on the strength of its community events. We are excited about fresh faces in coordinator roles and the addition of a coordinator for the Student Research Seminar started this past year. In the new year we are excited to bring an even wider breadth of career experiences to share with graduate students.

-Joey

PLANNING AHEAD
What to Look Forward To: SWIGS 2018-2019

This past spring marked the seventh anniversary of the founding of SWIGS and the years ahead look bright. This upcoming year we welcome back Co-Presidents Ellen Coddens and Katia Charov, previously Professional Development and Vice President, respectively, and Vice President Liora Mael, previously Outreach Officer. We’ve also added new faces to our leadership: welcome Outreach Officer Kathryn Mayer, Professional Development Officers Brianna Sierra and Rebecca Re, and Community Organizer Ariana Remmel. We’ll continue to partner with the Chemistry Graduate Student Council to present the Student Research Seminar Series, and, of course, our favorite outreach events like Expanding Your Horizons and the ACS Chem Expo. We’re also always looking to add new professional development and networking events, including talks and visits from non-traditional career paths. This year we’re also expanding our outreach activities to target not just middle and high school girls, but undergraduate and graduate students as well where the “pipeline” is leakiest. SWIGS is looking forward to a great new year!

-Katia