

# Linnaean Games Task Force: Draft Findings and Recommendations

## BACKGROUND

In 2018, the Entomological Society of America received member feedback concerning the name of the Society's student quiz competition, the Linnaean Games.

The competition is named for Carl Linnaeus, the Swedish naturalist known as the father of modern taxonomy. His standardization of binomial nomenclature was a pivotal point in the history of biological science, and his name lives on as the credited authority in the names of many species. However, in the description of *Homo sapiens* as a species, Linnaeus named four "varieties" of human and ascribed to them anthropological and cultural stereotypes considered inappropriate and offensive today.

Presented with the concern that this aspect of Linnaeus' legacy might make the Linnaean Games less welcoming to minority participants, and given the Games' importance to the student experience in ESA, the ESA Governing Board formed a member task force to engage the membership and explore the question of whether an alternative name and/or logo for the competition is warranted.

## TASK FORCE DEVELOPMENT AND DATA GATHERING

The ESA president appointed a five-member task force led by Dr. Rob Wiedenmann, an ESA past president with a long history of Society leadership. The task force convened in September 2018.

The task force began by developing a plan to gather member input. An open member comment form was made available from October–December 2018, and more than 200 members provided comments through the form. At the same time, a survey of all ESA student members was sent out to ensure that student input in particular would be gathered. The survey was sent to 2,055 student members, and 224 completed the survey, a 10.9% response rate.

Task force members carefully considered every piece of member input. Given the heightened emotions surrounding the issue, the task force felt it was important to use a solid process to develop its recommendations. The group used a decision-making process detailed in the book *Creating Great Choices* by Jennifer Riel and Roger Martin of the University of Toronto's Rotman School of Management.

## FINDINGS

Several key themes and values were expressed in member comments and student survey results:

- Many members expressed a strong interest in maintaining traditions within the Society and in continuing to value and learn from history.
- At the same time, several members expressed concern over the possibility that even one person might feel excluded from the Games because of its name, and they expressed strong alignment with inclusion of all entomologists as a value important to ESA.
- The majority of respondents indicated preference for retaining the name "Linnaean Games." In the open member comment form, 68% of respondents preferred keeping the name unchanged, compared to 26% who preferred changing the name and 6% who did not indicate a preference. In

the student survey, 65.9% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the name “Linnaean Games” is appropriate.

- In general, responses were polarized, with most respondents either adamantly for or against a name change. However, student member comments and student survey results did not show a significant sentiment among students that the Games are unwelcoming because of its name.
- The primary reasons cited by students for not participating in the Games were lack of time or the lack of a team at their university; 81% of student respondents indicated that they felt the Games have a welcoming atmosphere. (Respondents were not asked to provide information about their ethnicity as part of this survey, so the task force cannot quantify whether there was a difference in responses among students from historically underrepresented groups.)
- Some members noted that the games are not taxonomic in focus, but the name “Linnaean Games” implies that they are: as one commenter wrote, “the games are bigger than just taxonomy.”
- Multiple members and respondents to the student survey suggested that the Games could use a facelift of some kind, particularly with regard to the logo, which some respondents found old-fashioned or not up-to-date with modern illustration and logo styles.
- Multiple members and respondents to the student survey suggested that this conversation should be used as a learning opportunity, to help members of the Society better understand the history of the discipline and the effects historical racism has had on the development of the science.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Input from the membership pointed out two key considerations: honoring the traditions of the Games and ensuring the Games are inclusive. Although some members were concerned that students might feel unwelcome because of the name of the Games, the task force did not find comments in the student survey indicating that the name made them feel unwelcome. It is possible that students who already felt unwelcome chose not to participate in the dialogue about the Games but, based on the information available, the task force saw no evidence that students are not participating in the Linnaean Games due to the name.

The significant member passion and engagement identified through this process made it clear that ESA members care a great deal about the Linnaean Games. This importance indicated to the task force that ESA has an opportunity to build on the history and traditions of the Games and an obligation to use that supportive energy to promote learning, inclusion, and engagement among members.

After discussions as well as studying the members' input, the Linnaean Games Task Force recommends keeping the name “Linnaean Games.” The task force does not ignore the concerns about Linnaeus’s mistaken naming of human varieties. Science advances by replacing outdated interpretations with better explanations, and contemporary science reflects the rejection of Linnaeus's human classification. Many of his contributions to science are still valid today, but his interpretation of humans is forgotten because he was wrong. The Games do not celebrate Linnaeus’s views, but acknowledge his role in science. Rather than dropping the name and risk forgetting the issue, this is an opportunity to teach about racism in science and how it inhibits progress. The task force suggests that emphasizing the Games’ traditions and history should be accompanied by highlighting the contributions of historically underrepresented scientists and bringing attention to the effects of historical racism in science. As the Games move forward, the task force also recommends using the Games to heighten community-building and inclusion among all students, particularly students from historically underrepresented groups.

The recommendations include: learning from history, renewing the Games, and community building.

**Learning from history.** Many member comments emphasized the importance of learning from history and from the entomologists whose work contributed to our modern understanding of the discipline. The task force recommends that ESA undertake **an active effort to raise awareness of the history of entomology and encourage discussion of historical racism and its effects in the sciences.** Some ideas that could be part of this effort include:

- Develop Games questions with a focus on historical entomologists from underrepresented groups.
- Solicit proposals from potential Founders' Memorial speakers who could honor entomologists from underrepresented groups.
- Develop Linnaean Games questions with an added focus on Founders' Memorial Award honorees.
- Develop a feature article to be published in *American Entomologist* on historical racism and entomologists from underrepresented groups.
- Develop and highlight in the Annual Meeting program a Lunch and Learn session exploring historical racism relative to current ESA initiatives to increase diversity and enhance early-career membership.
- Develop posters celebrating ideas and figures from entomological history, including entomologists from underrepresented groups, for display at national ESA meetings and other venues.

**Renewing the Games.** The task force recommends using the opportunity created by discussions around the name of the Linnaean Games to **update and renew the Games while honoring their traditions and past winners.** Ideas that could be considered include:

- Develop a new, modern logo that can be widely used to promote the Games.
- Create a web-based "Hall of Fame" honoring past winning teams.
- Develop team banners to be used at Branch and national level and passed on to future teams.
- Have teams introduced at competitions by past winners, to emphasize the history.
- Promote a social gathering at the Annual Meeting to connect past and current players.

To help implement such changes, the task force recommends that the ESA Governing Board begin a conversation with the Branches regarding formalizing the ESA Linnaean Games Committee to encourage collaboration and put additional support and energy behind the Games. The task force envisions a committee with one representative from each Branch's Linnaean Games Committee as well as an International Branch representative, but details should be worked out in cooperation with the Branches.

**Building community through the Linnaean Games.** The amount of member input and passion around the Linnaean Games clearly demonstrated that the Games have had a great impact on Society members and have the power to make an even greater impact moving forward. As inclusion is a key value of the Society, the task force recommends that ESA actively work to **make the Linnaean Games into an opportunity for inclusion for all students.** Some ideas that could be pursued include:

- Present to the Council of Entomology Department Administrators (CEDA) on the importance of diversity within Games teams and CEDA's role in ensuring a welcoming approach to recruitment.
- Collaborate with CEDA as well as professional societies focused on underrepresented groups, such as SACNAS, to develop strategies to identify and recruit student participants.
- Collaborate with ESA Branches to identify small schools or non-Land-Grant schools that might have interest in participation in the Games.
- Create opportunities for volunteerism and participation in the Games beyond membership in a team, for students who are unable to commit to joining a team or whose university team is full.