

A Vision of APS Council: Report of the APS Governance Structure Committee

In the Fall of 2000, APS President Steve Slack appointed an ad hoc committee to study the governance structure of APS and make recommendations for possible changes. Committee members are: Larry Madden (chair), OW Barnett, Joyce Loper, Jacque Fletcher, Luis Sequeira, Isaac Barash, Chris Becker, Danise Beadel, and Steve Nelson. The committee deliberated by email, conference call, and at a meeting in Atlanta.

The committee was first able to agree on several statements (tenets, conclusions) regarding the past, present and future of APS. Then, a visioning exercise was conducted to address the needed governance structure for APS in the future. Although governance of APS involves more than Council, we focused on the composition and workings of Council in our deliberations, and concluded that several changes were needed in terms of representation on Council. We then developed a 'roadmap' for making these changes. Based on our deliberations, we are making this report to Council.

Tenets

The committee accepted or endorsed several tenets that had been previously made.

1. APS is a U.S. professional society with a global membership, and all regular members have the same rights.
2. Current governance structure was created many years ago in a very different society and environment.
3. Membership demographics have changed dramatically since the creation of the APS governance structure.
4. International membership in APS has increased dramatically over recent decades; concurrent with this change, science in general, and plant pathology in particular, have become more global in scope.
5. Most APS members are not members of individual Divisions; the Divisions vary greatly in size and activity.
6. Divisions represent a very important part of APS, perhaps the most important part for some members, but many APS activities and functions do not involve Divisions.
7. Most members' first affinities are to their discipline or type of employment, not to geographic region.
8. There is a need for Council to spend increasing amounts of time on strategic issues, rather than on tactical issues.
9. There is an increasing need for Council to be looking outward rather than looking inward.
10. The complexity of issues dealt with by Council is increasing.
11. Governance is much more than Council; under the authority of Council, many APS boards, offices, and committees are involved in the running of our professional society.

12. Various groups now do many activities previously done by Council (e.g., approving book proposals); the trend towards increasing use of boards, offices, and committees will continue.
13. Current APS structure is such that there is continuing pressure for Council to expand as new activities are added (e.g., adding new Editors-in-Chief); at the same time, there is a tremendous need for Council to operate efficiently and economically in order to make, when needed, rapid, well-informed, and cost-effective decisions.
14. Because of the need for year-round decision making, Executive Committee of Council is taking an increasing role in the operation of the society.
15. Currently, Council is not representative of APS as a whole, either in terms of membership interests or activities of APS. Six of the elected Councilors represent Divisions, and five of the appointed Councilors represent publications.
16. Proper functioning of Council (and the various boards, offices, and committees) depends on volunteers who are committed to the vitality of APS; on the other hand, volunteers have less free time to volunteer, and there may be fewer APS members willing to volunteer for certain time-consuming positions.
17. In general, *Council works well*. Typically, elected and appointed Councilors are individuals who truly care about APS and its future, and work hard to maintain the vitality and relevance of APS for the discipline of plant pathology. Moreover, Council increasingly is taking a more strategic and outward-looking approach to governance.

The last point is especially relevant, since it is imperative that any proposed changes do not destroy a functioning governance structure.

Visioning exercise

With the above tenets in mind, the committee asked the following question: *if we were charged with creating APS from scratch today, what governance structure would it have?* Although governance is larger than Council, as noted above, our committee focused on Council. Our conclusion was that Council would look very different from the one we currently have. Although the officers would be the same (with one exception), our vision involves representatives from various disciplinary groups (e.g., plant-microbe interactions), fewer editors, and some new appointed members that represent the broad activities of APS. Geographic Divisions would have representation on Council, but the role of Divisions in governance would be smaller than in the current structure. Details are given below. In addition, we outline steps that can be taken to move in the direction of this vision.

Officers and Executive Committee

Current and proposed organizational charts for Council are attached. In the new Council, Executive Committee would be comprised of the President Elect, President, Past President, Secretary, Treasurer, and one other elected councilor. This leads to the first major change: we envision that the office of Vice President will not exist. Many scientific

societies have a 3-year sequence for the presidential succession, rather than the 4-year sequence that we currently have. The year as Vice President has been excellent for training purposes, giving time to the future President to learn the intricacies of APS. This training time is needed if the President Elect is in charge of the annual meeting program, a very time consuming job. However, a Scientific Programs Board has been approved by Council to coordinate the program for our annual meetings. The director of this board might not necessarily be the President Elect. We feel that if the director of the Scientific Programs Board is a member of Council (and not the President Elect), it would be unnecessary to maintain the Vice Presidential office. If the office of Vice President is maintained, however, then alternative duties should be assigned to the President Elect (assuming someone else is coordinating the annual meetings).

Disciplines

Disciplinary interests are of primary importance in categorizing members of APS or any scientific society. Discipline determines the journals one reads, the paper sessions and specialty meetings one attends, and often the colleagues one talks to on a regular basis. Through the respective discipline, one is part of a global community of professionals. This disciplinary focus appears everywhere in the organization of APS except on Council. Although it is possible for many disciplines to be represented through the current system of electing councilors, in practice certain disciplines dominate. For instance, the major growth areas in plant pathology and related professions are in molecular biology and molecular plant-microbe interactions. Yet, these disciplines are not common on Council. On the other hand, general plant pathology and disease management (also very important subjects) are commonly represented on Council. Because molecular scientists (as one example) do not tend to be involved in the activities of Divisions, there is less opportunity for these members to be elected to Council with the current structure.

APS *is* moving towards Disciplinary Sections within the Annual Meeting Structure, as evidenced by the six sections used in programming. It is natural to use these Sections as a template for disciplinary representation on APS Council. We propose that there be five Disciplinary Divisions, which could be the same as, or similar to, the current meeting sections: Biology of pathogens (including molecular biology of the pathogens), Diseases of Plants (=general plant pathology), Epidemiology/Ecology/Environmental Biology, Molecular/Cellular Plant Microbe Interactions, and Plant Disease Management. (Other partitioning of disciplines is also possible). The group of Disciplinary Councilors could be organized within Council as a “Scientific Forum”. A sixth section used at the Annual Meeting, Professionalism/Service/Outreach, is probably not appropriate for a discipline-based division. However, this section could be converted into a Division on Teaching/Extension/Service, because many members view themselves first as teachers in the broadest sense, rather than in terms of their scientific interests. With the new Disciplinary Divisions, there will no longer be a need for Councilors-at-Large.

Editors

Although publications are key to the current and future health of the society, both financially and intellectually, there is no reason why all Editors-in-Chief should be on Council. There are active editorial boards for individual publications and a working Publications Board that deals with financial and technical issues facing all publications. Plus, the editors are very busy running journals, and cannot, in general, be expected to participate in the many deliberations of Council. However, it is very important that a member of the Publications Board be on Council, to ensure communication and to guarantee that there is always an advocate for all publications present as strategic issues are being discussed and decisions are being made. In our vision for Council, the Publications Board (including the editors of the electronic-media products) would elect one member to serve on Council, and this person could serve more than one year. Under this new approach, a new publication product (either in print or electronic form) could be added without having to decide about whether to call the product a journal or not, or whether to add an Editor in Chief to Council.

Divisions

Because geographic Divisions are important to some of our members, especially some of our most active members, and Divisions are important leadership-development training grounds, they should have a role in the governance of the society. However, as discussed above in relation to disciplines, discipline more fully defines the role of members in scientific and professional societies than does geography. Societies such as the American Society for Microbiology (ASM) have active geographic divisions, but their governing board is based on disciplinary representation.

We propose that the Divisional Representatives should comprise a (new) 'Member Services Board' as a replacement of the current Councilors' Forum. As currently constructed and operated, Councilors' Forum seldom has the time to fully address many issues of concern. Thus, we believe that forming a separate board is a significant step towards more fully dealing with multiple intra- and inter-societal issues. The new Member Services Board would be charged with general policies on committees, site selection, and relations with affiliates and sister societies. Additional responsibilities are also possible (such as the nomination of Councilors). Through this formal group, it should be possible to form alliances with other scientific societies and expand or improve relationships with currently allied societies. This would require that the Board meets for a sufficient period of time on an annual basis.

Our vision calls for the current Divisional Councilors to become Representatives on the new Member Services Board. Two of the Divisional Representatives then would be elected by the members of this Board to serve on Council. These individuals could serve for multiple years. Operating procedures would have to be written for the new Board and for the election of Council members from the Board.

It should be pointed out that some members of the ad hoc committee felt that the Disciplinary Councilors should have some responsibility for relationships with sister societies. One approach is to have a subset of Disciplinary Councilors also serve on this new Member Services Board. Other arrangements are also possible.

Additional Council members

Although APS is involved in an increasing number of activities, of ever increasing complexity, expertise in the relevant areas is not necessarily represented on the current Council. In the broad sense, these activities include public affairs and education, industry relations, and international programs. Thus, we envision a Council in which there are members representing OPAE, OIP, and the new Industries Relations Board. We also envision that the Director of the recently created Scientific Programs Board (not necessarily the President Elect) and the Director of APS Foundation will serve as regular members of Council.

We realize that our vision includes a fairly large number of appointed positions. However, the makeup of Council will be different from the current situation, in which most of the appointed members represent publications. Moreover, some of these Council members could be ‘elected’ from within the respected groups, just as the Director of the Foundation (a current ex officio member of Council) is elected by members of the Foundation Board.

How to achieve the vision of a new Council?

We believe that the proposed Council will be more representative of our membership and provide a greater diversity of skills and interests than does the current Council. However, the many changes proposed should only be adopted in stages. Although it would be relatively easy to add Council members representing OIP, public affairs, and other groups, adding these positions now would mean increasing the size of current Council, a violation of our goal of making Council more efficient. We propose here some of the steps that can be taken to change the composition of Council.

1. Create a system to elect Councilors for Disciplinary Divisions. This will take some time, since there is no structure for doing this now. First, a decision will need to be made regarding the exact composition of the divisions; the current annual meeting sections is a good starting point. Then, a process for soliciting nominations from each disciplinary division will need to be developed, as well as a process for electing the Councilors.

2. Change the current system regarding Editors in Chief. Set up the system so that a single Editor is elected by the Publications Board to serve on Council. This change can be made immediately, and implemented as the system for #1 is developed.

3. Create the new Member Services Board, to be comprised of (geographic) Divisional Representatives, and develop the specific duties of the Board. One important

item is to develop the process for electing two of the Divisional Representatives to serve on Council.

4. Drop the offices of Councilor at Large and Vice President. The latter assumes that there will be a Director of the Scientific Programs Board on Council (different from the President Elect).

5. When the new Member Services Board becomes active, and the Disciplinary Representatives are being elected, add the representatives from the designated groups (e.g., Industry Relations) to Council.

The above-listed steps assume that the current Council approves of the vision of APS Council outlined here and that the Constitution is modified to allow the proposed changes to be made. Successful modification of the Constitution will require considerable efforts in communicating the new vision of APS governance to the membership as a whole. This will mandate articles in the newsletter, *APSnet*, and in special sessions at the annual meeting. If this plan is adopted, a schedule should be adopted so that the changes can be made in a reasonable period of time. Otherwise, the momentum for change could be lost.

Conclusions

APS needs a governance structure appropriate for a global society of plant pathologists that meets the needs of members with a wide range of scientific and professional interests. The current structure has served the membership well in the past, and Council is working hard at improving efficiency and changing to become more strategic in scope. However, to be fully representative of the membership as a whole and efficiently address an increasing number of complex issues, a change in governance structure is needed for APS. To optimize our governance for the future, the ad hoc governance committee recommends changes in the elected and appointed members of Council, as well as the creation of a new Board. This report has described a proposed revision in the composition of Council, and has outlined the steps needed to implement the changes.