

Committee on Meetings

Annual Report -- 1998

The members of the Committee on Meetings for 1998 include: Robert Austin, Judy Franz (APS Executive Officer), Alan Kleinsasser, Thomas McIlrath (APS Treasurer), Anthony Nero, Paul Peercy, Susan Seestrom, Joe Thompson (Chair), and John Wilkerson. The Committee also has benefited from active participation by Donna Baudrau (Manager, APS Meetings Department).

The APS bylaws charge the Committee on Meetings with proposing guidelines and rules for the organization and operation of all meetings of the Society and its subunits as well as with recommending procedures for the Society sponsorship of other meetings. During 1998, the Committee met twice, once on February 11 by conference call and again on May 29 at the ACP, to consider three principal issues: What is the appropriate registration fee for the APS Centennial? What should be the primary goal of APS general meetings? and What is the appropriate timing of these meetings?

Registration fees for the March and April Meetings have been fixed since 1996. In view of this, the greatly expanded and more costly program of the Centennial, and a very favorable comparison of APS registration fees relative to those of other major scientific organizations, the Committee recommended to the Executive Board that it was reasonable and appropriate to set the Centennial early-registration fee for APS members at \$225. This fee is \$30 higher than the corresponding 1998 March Meeting fee and equal to the recently approved April Meeting fee. In addition, the Committee recommended that a registration fee of \$50 be established for high school teachers with the aim of encouraging their participation in special Centennial events and public talks.

The Committee considered whether it should be a guiding policy that APS general meetings generate significant revenue for the Society. For the period 1988-1997, the March and April Meetings realized a cumulated net revenue of \$504,000 or approximately 7% of their expense. To place this in a different perspective, during this ten-year period, general meetings generated a total net revenue of less than 2% of the annual operating budget of the Society. If general meetings were to be a significant source of income, registration fees would have to increase substantially. The Committee recommended that the primary purpose of general meetings should not be to produce significant revenue; rather, the guiding philosophy for general meetings should be to provide beneficial services and outreach to members, with the goal of not being a net expense to the Society.

Although the Meetings Department continues to orchestrate two large back-to-back general meetings (March and April), this is a very difficult and demanding task. The Committee believes it is reasonable to consider having one general meeting in the Spring and one in the Fall. Specifically, the Committee considered the possibility of moving the April Meeting to the Fall. Such a move would be controversial but potentially beneficial. The Committee thinks that a recommendation to establish a general Fall meeting is premature at this time and that any action must await input from affected units. In this regard, the Committee has recommended that a

proposal outlining the benefits of a general Fall meeting be distributed to units for review and discussion. This topic will remain a priority for the Committee in 1999.

The Committee is pleased with initiatives of the Meetings Department to enhance the effectiveness of APS meetings. These enhancements have included increasing participation of commercial exhibitors at the March Meeting by approximately 15% over the past few years and instituting on-line abstract submission and on-line registration as well as developing a "shopping-cart" feature in the electronic meeting program. The Committee also favors implementation of a proposal by the Meetings Department that responsibility for identifying and confirming session chairs be transferred from APS staff to session organizers and unit program chairs. The absence of session chairs has become an increasingly disruptive factor in the effectiveness of, particularly, general meetings. New procedures proposed by the Meetings Department should provide a welcome change from trends in past years.