

APS Council Meetings: A Perspective of Our Society

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The twice-yearly Council meetings reflect the robustness of our Society and profession. Each meeting differs, but many of the subjects discussed are the same. Council meetings are a mysterious rite, and new members must become familiar with a strange land of on-going business ranging from minutiae to international questions. All Council meetings are open, but Society members seldom attend. Hence, these comments.

Midyear Council meetings are somewhat less complex than those at the annual meetings, so I shall give some personal impressions of the last midyear meeting.

The general tenor of all meetings is the same: many items to consider, reports to be heard and digested, and decisions to be made. Some meetings generate more significant decisions with long-term effects than others. This past meeting was one of those.

Every president is apprehensive about Council meetings. Concerns range from the completeness, order, and timing of items to the sufficiency of data for making appropriate decisions. The president needs to be intimately familiar with all workings of the Society, from past and current policies and practices to those considered for the future. The pros and cons of important issues need to be anticipated and addressed. The president guides the sometimes meandering discussions of up to 100 separate items. Ray Tarleton, our executive vice-president, and his staff provide an institutional memory and data bases of all kinds—from number and types of inquiries received at headquarters to detailed financial information.

Preparations for a Council meeting can start several years in advance, although most occur within a few months or weeks of a meeting. Examples of forward planning include international congresses, some publications, and personnel changes, such as editors-in-chief.

The past midyear meeting started on a Friday evening (Council saved nearly \$3,000 in airfare by working over a weekend). Some of us had met with headquarters staff for the previous two days to prepare for the Council meeting. These meetings were for in-depth discussions of headquarter operations, such as building renovation, expansion potential, taxes, and personnel (all such decisions and costs are shared by the American Association of Cereal Chemists, with whom we share headquarters facilities). The Financial Advisory Committee's pre-Council meeting was to seek ways to raise revenue after a review of costs. Expenses are holding rather steady, but income is down; no clear pattern emerged. It was also determined that registration is not covering the expenditures associated with the annual meeting, so Council reluctantly approved an increase. Some cost savings were suggested, and efforts will be made to implement them. In addition, a survey questionnaire is being developed to assess each member's perception of how the Society is and should be functioning.

The Council meeting on Friday evening dealt with generally easy items; the difficult ones were left for Saturday and Sunday. Reports of various types were presented, including those by divisions and committees and on the status of biotechnology regulations. Some concerns and problems surfaced during these

reports. More than one councilor commented on the reduced size of *Phytopathology News*, and full-size issues will be reinstated for the next fiscal year. A question of abstract policy (numbers presented and interpretation thereof) for annual meetings was clarified, and a bylaw change will be presented to the members. I was very pleased by the positive reception and approval by Council of a revised nominating procedure for vice-president and councilor-at-large that will enable greater participation by members. Criteria for the new teaching and extension awards were approved, and these awards will be given for the first time in 1988. The Awards and Honors Committee suggested "livening up" the awards ceremony (immediate past president Luis Sequeira and I are in charge of the ceremony, and we welcome suggestions). To assist nominators and friends in planning their own recognition of awardees, Council decided to publicize names of awardees and is interested in hearing members' reaction to this policy change from confidentiality. Also, Council developed a procedure to deal with nominations of members for awards and honors not handled by the Awards and Honors Committee.

Council adjourned at 10:15 p.m. on Friday, and I reviewed material for the next day until midnight. Most of Saturday (8:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., with lunch brought in) was spent discussing publications. Council made one of the most significant decisions in recent years—to approve a new journal, *Molecular Plant-Microbe Interactions*. Such a journal had been widely discussed for over a year, particularly by a special committee chaired by George Bruening, who presented a synopsis of deliberations by the committee and other interested persons and agreed to be the first editor-in-chief. The hope is that both plant pathologists and allied professionals will see the journal as an appropriate outlet for their work, that it will attract some "lost sheep," and that it will bring a sense of belonging to a larger community to those new people in plant pathology who currently have no allegiance to the profession. The journal will be financed initially from part of the reserve funds and will be given a year to prove itself. A mock-up will be ready by annual meeting time, and the first issue is scheduled for fall. Saturday's discussions also dealt with appointment of new editors-in-chief for APS Press and *Phytopathology* and a new editor for *Phytopathology News*, as well as with the status of the APS Foundation, the Office of International Programs, promotional film, international congresses, and other issues.

Most of Sunday's meeting (8:00 a.m. to noon) was taken up by financial considerations, including those requiring decisions and philosophical issues. The latter often deal with whether the Society should support a particular activity. For example, Council approved a survey by the Women in Plant Pathology Committee (I had made a commitment for a survey, which Council honored despite a lapse of procedure on my part). Council also approved modest sums to be used, if needed, by the editors-in-chief of APS Press, PLANT DISEASE, and *Phytopathology* to defray operating expenses—a major policy change from no outright financial assistance. A start-up sum was also approved for the new Office of International Programs to enable the director, Charles Delp, to begin functioning in an ambitious program of assisting our interested members and colleagues. Part of the increased revenues needed to sustain these expenditures is expected to come from APS Press publications. And so it went until 11:57. Only time will tell if we made the right decisions. All major business was taken care of, and everyone was most cooperative and helpful.

Space does not permit a complete story of our discussions and activities, but I hope that readers catch some of the flavor of the meeting. Council members represent the heart and conscience of the Society and in my view are excellent stewards of this complex, wide-ranging, and dynamic society.