



System Dynamics NEWSLETTER

Volume 17 – Number 1 Winter 2004

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FROM THE PRESIDENT *Bob Eberlein*

Greetings from New England. It is my honor to serve you, the members of the System Dynamics Society, as President for 2004. I would like to take this opportunity to bring you up to date on the activities and plans of the Society from my perspective and ask you about other news that might be of interest to share in future newsletters.

This short newsletter is being sent out by mail and is also available on the web. The longer spring newsletter will only be available electronically. The electronic publication format allows us to include more news, and decrease our production and postage costs. As always, there is a tradeoff between reaching out to our membership and keeping expenses down and we hope we are striking the right balance. If you have any comments on the frequency, size or format of the newsletter I would be delighted to hear them.

Membership

There are several important pieces of news and the one that is most likely to affect you is the change in the way that membership in the Society will be managed. At a meeting of the Policy Council held

at MIT on February 9th, we voted to have the central office take over all management of our membership from John Wiley & Sons, Ltd. starting with 2005 memberships.

Some background on this is helpful. From its inception in 1985 through 1990 the *System Dynamics Review* was published directly by the Society in great part due to the volunteer efforts of George Richardson. In 1991 the Society entered into an agreement with Wiley to take over publication. As part of the agreement Wiley would manage membership and collect Society dues, remitting \$10 per member to the Society.

At the time, this was exactly the right thing to do. The Society was being run on a completely volunteer basis, with Julie Pugh volunteering as the Executive Director. The Society did not have the infrastructure in place to effectively manage membership, and did not have any ongoing cash needs as everyone was a volunteer. Things started to change in 1997 when Roberta Spencer was hired part time as the Executive Director. In the ensuing years the amount of activity taken on by the

Policy Council Nominations for 2005

During the February 9th meeting of the Policy Council the following people were nominated as officers and members of the Policy Council, to take office in 2005.

President Elect:
Michael Radzicki
(2005)

VP Finance:
David Andersen
(2005 – 2007)

VP Members/Chapters:
Ginny Wiley
(2005 – 2007)

Secretary:
David Packer
(2005-2006)

Policy Council Members:
Henk Akkermans
Scott Johnson
Brad Morrison
Jim Thompson
(2005-2007)

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central office has grown significantly, and there are now two full-time employees working to support the Society.

Through all of this the agreement with Wiley has remained unchanged and the amount received through membership and journal subscriptions is not nearly enough to sustain us financially. Product sales and conference revenue are used to subsidize membership services, which we often call “core operations.”

The subsidization of membership services is a conscious policy, but the extent of the imbalance between cost and revenue is such that adjustments need to be made. To this end, we have considered various proposals around tiered dues structures, opened discussions on revenue sharing with Wiley and looked into the arrangements other societies have with their publishers.

One important thing that has come out of this work is the recognition that we really do need to manage our own membership both so that we have control over it, and so that we can more rationally revisit the financial relationship we have with our publisher. Since we now have a professional staff in place the burden of doing this is much less than it once was, and the benefits much greater.

What does this mean to the individual members? Hopefully the result will be a smoother process for becoming a member and renewing your membership. We have plans to support online renewal of membership and should no longer run into the problems that sometimes occurred when changes made with our office did not get transmitted promptly to Wiley and vice versa.

What does this mean for Society operations? We have just added another “core operations” task for the central office. While the size of this task is contained, it does mean there is more to do with the available resources.

Volunteerism

This brings me to my next point, one on which I hope to make some progress during my tenure as President. Even though we now have a professional central office the System Dynamics Society is, at its heart, a volunteer organization. In the past this has meant a relatively small number of people doing a relatively large amount of work. There are problems with this. Clearly it is hard to find people who are willing to commit the time required. More importantly though, it tends to concentrate activity in a small group which, for a variety of reasons is geographically concentrated.

With Internet access very widely available we are now in a position to do new things. One of my favorite examples, which I think is a fantastic success, is the participation of so many people in the review process for conference papers. The reviewing of conference papers used to be done by a handful of people getting together over several afternoons and reading through abstracts. We now have several hundred people from all over the world involved in the review process reading and commenting on full papers. The authors get many more comments and the reviewers get to see a wider variety of work. If you are interested in being a reviewer drop a note to isdc@albany.edu.

What other places could we use more volunteers? Conferences provide a number of opportunities: helping out with the modeling

assistance workshop, providing or helping out with a workshop, convening a session, being a session reporter, helping with registration and, of course, presenting a paper. The conference information on the website has contact information for several activities.

In terms of activities at the central office, there is a bit more of a challenge. There are some things, such as shipping, that do need to be done from one place. But there are others, for example editorial work on this newsletter, that could be done from elsewhere. There is, of course, a balance required since the coordination time for an effort could easily be as big as the time required to just do it. Over the next several months I hope to identify more activities where volunteer help could effectively be used.

There are also initiatives that have been, at least partially, enunciated in various meetings that are waiting for someone to do something. For example, establishing a repository of models and a review process to make comments on the usefulness of those models would be a wonderful thing. Reading through old Policy Council minutes will likely uncover a number of opportunities like this.

Finally, though, there is volunteering that isn't directly aimed at the Society, but rather at the field more generally. Just doing good work is clearly very good for the field and making that work available to others helps more. There is a variety of web and email sources of information and interaction that are very helpful and participating in those and expanding their use is important.

Sustainability

Volunteers can help provide services without a direct expense and this helps because holding

expenditures within the Society's revenue is clearly important to our long-term success. Ever since we established an office in Albany the Society has budgeted expenditures in excess of our expected income. Fortunately, the central office has managed to find enough new income sources to give us a surplus in most of those years.

However, relying on unknown income sources to keep going is not good planning and this was brought home very graphically in 2002 where we budgeted a shortfall, and had a significantly bigger shortfall. One consequence of this is that there has been a decrease in the budget for the central office, which is down to two people from about two and a third.

Doing more with less seems to have been the theme over the last several years, and the Society is no exception. Now, having given the central office more work to do with the management of membership, I am vigorously looking for opportunities to decrease the workload through automation. This has turned into a very personal endeavor on my part, as I am trying to make adjustments to things such as the conference paper submission and review system to increase efficiency.

I am confident that we will be successful in uncovering new efficiencies, but we also need to look to new income sources. One implication of this is that there may be a change in the dues structure. Since we will be readjusting our publication contract, how this will play out is not yet clear. I will keep you informed through our newsletters as we make progress on this front.

Notes from the Policy Council

The System Dynamics Society is governed by a Policy Council which meets twice a year, during the conference and again in the winter. A meeting of this Policy Council was held on February 9th, at MIT in Cambridge Massachusetts. A number of things were discussed at that meeting including the management of membership and the nomination slate for 2005, which are reported elsewhere. There were, of course, other topics covered.

First, a warm welcome to Deborah Andersen who was appointed as acting Vice President Publications. Deborah stands in place of John Morecroft who has stepped aside to focus his efforts on Awards. Deborah's understanding of information sources and the perceptions people have of their value will undoubtedly help us gain perspective on the evolution of publishing and its implications for our field. There was also a slate of officers nominated to take office in 2005 – see "Policy Council Nominations."

The decision to take over the membership, which is discussed in "From the President," stems, in part, from the desire to change our publishing contract. By managing our own membership we look much more like a typical society and that is important in renegotiating the terms of our agreement for publication of the *System Dynamics Review*. From your perspective as a member, having the central office take over managing membership will be the most significant change. This is only part of the agreement we have with the publisher, however, and we hope to move forward with something that will significantly strengthen the financial position of the Society.

As most of you probably know, we will have a conference in July in Oxford, England, and the 2005 conference will be held in Boston. We have not yet selected a site for 2006 and one ingredient in making that selection is a clearer definition of the criteria for selecting conference sites. Jim Lyneis, working with others, has put together a draft of this that will be used to work with people interested in hosting the 2006 conference. In keeping with our traditional rotation the 2006 conference should be held in Europe and I hope that we will pick the site during the conference this summer.

Other highlights from the meeting include the discussion of budgets. In a nutshell we had a modest shortfall for 2003, which was significantly better than budgeted. For 2004 a small shortfall has also been budgeted. While the Society has sufficient cash reserves to accommodate these small shortfalls, it is clear that longer term we need to at least break even.

We are happy to welcome two new Chapters. The Swiss Chapter and Economic Dynamics Chapter were both approved during the meeting. There are also two new Special Interest Groups, Health Policy and Security, both approved electronically last fall. Overall the level of interest and activity in Chapters and Special Interest Groups seems very healthy. Special thanks to Nan Lux for her many initiatives that helped get things going and to Ginny Wiley for continuing the good work.

More detailed notes on the discussion at this meeting, and at previous meetings, are available from the Society website. Just click on "Governance" on the left.

Nominations *continued from page 1*

As we have traditionally done, rather than holding elections, these nominations are made uncontested.

However, members may submit other nominations for these offices and positions, provided that:

- 1) each such nomination is accompanied by a petition signed by twenty-five members in good standing;
- 2) each nominee is a member in good standing;
- 3) written evidence is submitted to the effect that each nominee has agreed to stand for election; and
- 4) such nominations reach the Secretary within five weeks after publication of nominations received from the Nominating Committee.

If no nominations are received by the Policy Council from the membership at large, the slate of candidates submitted by the Nominating Committee, and recognized and accepted by the Council, will be deemed elected. For more information on Nominations and Elections, please see the Policies of the System Dynamics Society under "Governance."

D-Memos on DVD

I have fond memories of browsing through the filing cabinets at MIT looking for the nuggets of wisdom accumulated over the years by Jay Forrester and his students. After more than a year of hard work by Jay, Nan Lux and a number of others the content of those filing cabinets will be available on DVD.

More details will be sent to you by email in the near future, or check the website periodically. In addition to the D-Memos, most of the PhD and Masters theses done at MIT in system dynamics are also included. This is truly a treasure trove of interesting stuff. *Bob Eberlein*

Request for News

Our plan is to publish four issues of the *System Dynamics Newsletter* this year. In the next issue, we will include "News and Notes" (about new books by members, promotions, awards, completed degrees, new products, notable projects, etc.), and "News from our Sponsors."

Please send us your news! Additionally, if you would like to contribute an article of interest to our community, please send your suggestion to the Society office. All past newsletters, back to 1998, are available on the Society website.

**The 2004 System Dynamics Conference
Oxford, England**

A fantastic variety of papers are streaming in for the Oxford Conference! Some quick reminders:

- April 2nd is the deadline for paper and workshop submissions.
- This year the early conference registration deadline is much earlier than past conferences, and there will be no on-site registration. **Please register early. Space is limited.**
- Although we will happily accept credit card payments, folks in the UK are encouraged to pay the registration fee by check in GBP. Simply post the check and form to the Society office.
- For the first time this year, the CD-Proceedings will be distributed by mail after the conference. This will allow insightful comments obtained at the conference to be incorporated into the final version of the paper for publication on the CD. It's an experiment; let us know what you think of this change.
- Please visit the conference website for updated details:
www.systemdynamics.org

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