SPA Executive Committee Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, 28 May 2008
Fort Lauderdale Convention Center

Attendance: Jim Burch, Margaret Chen, Nancy Crooker (chair), Joe Mazur (recording secretary), Bob McPherron, Nikolai Ostgaard, Pete Riley, Deborah Scherrer, and Brenda Weaver (AGU headquarters representative)

1. Spring meeting statistics
Joe Mazur reviewed the meeting statistics, showing results from the published summary of John Bates and Urrutia Fucugauchi (EOS, 6 May 2008). Abstract count for JA08 was 1540, down ~43% from JA07. SPA abstract count was 339 (63 SA, 131 SM, 145 SH), down only 21% from JA07 but down 38% from the comparable JA05, when the Solar Physics Division of the AAS last met with AGU (which inflates SH attendance). Conflict with another symposium on Aeronomy probably accounted for low SA turnout. Discussion continued with individual anecdotes of reasons for relatively low JA attendance.

2. Chapman conferences
Nancy Crooker repeated Geoff Crowley’s call that all sections and focus groups should have at least one Chapman per year (see agenda supplement below).

3. Press conferences
Nancy Crooker noted that one SPA press event yesterday had only 2 press attendees. Discussion followed on ways to make conveners more aware of potential press topics. Brenda will look into ways to get press interested in topics immediately after special sessions are approved.

4. EOS status
Nancy reiterated David Sibeck’s satisfaction with improved status (see supplement below).

5. GRL status
Margaret Chen and Nikolai Ostgaard reviewed GRL Space Science publication statistics (50% and 40% editor acceptance rate, respectively). Processed 530 papers (of 4476 total submitted to GRL) from 3/07 to 4/08, showing decreasing acceptance rate and increasing timeliness! Bob M. questioned bookkeeping change that artificially decreases timeliness by rejecting papers that need revision and encouraging re-submittal as new paper. 13 Space Science articles have been highlighted by editors and 4 have been featured as cover pages. Discussed introduction of solicited review papers.

6. EPO
Deborah Scherrer reviewed successful Exploration Station event held at Ft. Lauderdale convention center prior to JA08. Average staying time was 2.5 hours. New chair of committee will be Mark Moldwin.

7. Scarf award
Nancy mentioned that the last round had 9 thesis submissions (more info in supplement below). Discussion about tremendous load that presents for judging committee. Margaret mentioned her
prior experience where committee did down-selects, read by a subset of the committee, as a way to prevent everyone from reading all 9 manuscripts. (Note added later: Yan Song has already been following such a procedure.) Jim suggested increasing number of awards if submission rate continues to be so high.

8. Student awards
Nancy reported for Merav Opher that there were 236 (51 SA, 116 SM, 69 SH) student papers at FM07, with 10 (1 SA, 6 SM, 3 SH) winners, compared to 211 (34 SA, 114 SM, 63 SH) at FM06, with 14 winners. There are 50 (7 SA, 28 SM, 15 SH) student papers at JA08 compared to 44 (13 SA, 18 SM, 13 SH) at JA07, an increasing trend that is counter to the trend in total abstracts submitted.

9. Bowie lecture
Committee members in attendance unanimously voted to allow executive committee members to be candidates for Bowie lecturers. (See discussion of issue in supplement below.)

10. Miscellaneous
Brenda will check on the apparently short amount of time that the fellows committee has to do its work (currently about 1 month). Deborah suggested adding an EPO fund to the list for those interested in donating to AGU.

Supplement to Agenda

Chapman Conferences

AGU Chapman Conference Chair Geoff Crowley is encouraging all sections and focus groups to hold at least one Chapman Conference per year in their respective areas. To comply, the SPA Executive Committee should identify potential topics and organizers. Geoff also sent a new call for Chapman Conferences in developing countries. The goal is to hold two of these per year.

Eos

David Sibeck is pleased with the changes that have taken place regarding Eos since the disastrous state of affairs when he first took office as a corresponding editor (see minutes from Fall 2006). He reports that the Eos team now in place at AGU headquarters is much more proactive and that roles and responsibilities of staff, editors, and newly created Advisory Board, of which he is now a member, are much better defined. Lines of communication are open, and quarterly telecoms will be held. Advisory Board Members will be asked to review proposals for feature articles in their respective areas as well as review the articles themselves or suggest other reviewers. They also can identify topics and suggest authors for feature articles, where the emphasis will be on cross-disciplinary topics.

Scarf Award

Yan Song has successfully instituted the new timetable that minimizes the time between PhD and award. Nominations were due on 15 February for PhDs received prior to 1 January, and award selection will be in time for presentation at Fall Meeting. Nine theses were submitted this year compared to only two last year, in part because the timetable change allowed submissions from the past year and a half. For the first time, at Yan’s urging, AGU sent electronic versions of the theses
to committee members. A special thanks goes to the committee members for their time-intensive efforts in evaluating the nine theses.

**Bowie Lecture elections (left over from Fall Meeting)**

Amitava Bhattacharjee wrote:

I write this e-note with some trepidation. Both Art and Michael are outstanding colleagues, and very deserving of the honor of a Nicolet Lecturership. But they are also part of the Committee that downselects. In the event one of them is selected, would there not be a problem of perception in the community at large that the Committee conferred this honor to one of its own voting members? I do not know if there are any bylaws to guide us in this respect, but I would have thought it appropriate that Committee members should not be eligible for the nomination. If one of them win, wouldn't this have the appearance that a member of the prize committee wins the prize? Isn't this a clear case of conflict of interest?

Doesn't this also place the members of the Committee in an awkward place of having to rank order two outstanding colleagues both of whom are serving on the Committee?

Nancy Crooker wrote:

My understanding is that only the president and president-elect are barred from being nominated. I agree with you about the awkwardness of what we are doing and will bring up the subject at our next Executive Committee meeting.

Michael Mendillo wrote:

I had brought this up when I was President-elect and Dan Baker decided the policy you stated, namely, that only the SPA president-elect and president should be non-eligible to give a Bowie Lecture. This came up at that time because Jack Gosling had been nominated (and selected) to give a Parker Lecture while he was still past-president. Also, Lou Lanzerotti gave a Van Allen lecture while serving on the SPA Executive Committee (on my watch, and so he was excluded from voting as you did in this case). Amitava's concerns are thus valid, though as Dan pointed out to my objection, the rotation is fast enough with 2-meetings per year that the vast majority of Bowie lecturers in SPA are not members of the SPA executive committee. This was Amitava's concern about perceptions, namely, that to be a Bowie lecturer you have to be on our committee first---a perception that is not statistically true. The last two Nicolet Lecturers were, for example, Jeff Forbes and Rod Heelis, not SPA Exec Comm members, though some had been nominated. Also, my predecessor as SPA president was Tim Killeen, obviously an aeronomer not yet selected for a Nicolet Lecture.

So statistics and perception can be strange bedfellows!

Jim Burch wrote:

My view is that if one of the committee is nominated by more than one person, and if he/she agrees to be considered, then he/she should just not participate in the voting nor receive any information about it. The Bowie lecture is our highest honor, and I don't believe that by volunteering one should give up that opportunity for what could be several years during the prime part of his/her scientific career. If someone is clearly deserving, which has always been the case, then I don't believe anyone would criticize the process. Most people don't know what it is anyway. Bottom line, I always think integrity outweighs appearances. But I can see the other side as well.