

Report of the Committee on Qualifications and Membership for the Year Ending June 30, 1999

This was the third year of operation for this new committee which was formed through the merger of the Committee on Qualifications and the Committee on Membership in 1996.

Business of the Committee

The Committee met on January 30-31, 1999 in Research Triangle Park, NC. The charge for the committee that was developed at the 1996 meeting: to develop policy issues and make recommendations to the Executive Director and/or Board, with the objectives of strengthening the Chapters and increasing the Society's membership while maintaining the tradition of honor in science and engineering.

The agenda for the meeting focused on several major issues:

1. orienting the largely new committee members about the current status of Sigma Xi initiatives, programs and administrative procedures,
2. discussing issues relating to membership retention and making a short-term plan for improving retention,
3. considering various approaches to revitalizing chapters and identifying chapter in need of assistance, and
4. reviewing the procedures for selecting chapter of excellence.

Recommendations

Through the course of these discussions, the committee established the following action items that were forwarded, as appropriate, to the Executive Director and staff, the Long Range Planning Committee and/or the Board of Directors:

- **Collect better data on members.** To allow the committee to monitor trends in membership and to make more informed decisions about future strategies, the committee requested that staff collect more comprehensive data on membership trends including segments by age, institution-type and areas of interest.
- **Investigate ways to engage "inactive" members.** Because Sigma Xi membership is lifelong, there is a large population of individuals who are members but who do not pay dues to remain "active" by receiving mailings and benefits. The committee expressed support for identifying ways to communicate with inactive members to inform them about activities at Sigma Xi.
- **Revisit the format and content of Intercom.** The three-times-a-year publication for Sigma Xi leadership was unfamiliar to many of the committee members, though they are on the mailing list. The committee urged staff to consider alternative formats, particularly electronic formats, for distributing information to chapter officers and other society leaders.
- **Continue to build electronic services for members.** The committee felt strongly that electronic communication with members will enhance the value of membership while keeping members informed about the society's activities. The committee specifically recommended mailing a bi-monthly membership newsletter by e-mail, pursuing establishment of an online bulletin board for members, expanding the Sigma Xi web site to include electronic benefits, and completing plans for an e-mail forwarding service.
- **Refine procedures for awarding Certificates of Excellence to Chapters.** Last year, the committee revised the procedures for awarding certificates of excellence so that the regional directors nominated up to five chapters from each region based on chapter annual reports and the Committee on Qualifications and Membership selected the final list of chapters. At this meeting, the committee developed clearer criteria for these two steps, including consideration of the impact of chapter programs, the level of innovation or initiative, the breadth of programs and goals, and the overall quality of the chapter's activities.
- **Develop member services and programs that target younger members.** Specifically, the committee identified two pools of younger members: (1) students and (2) postdocs and young faculty. The committee recommended that staff work with committee members in the coming year to identify the priorities for these members and to develop services and benefits that address their needs. The committee also explored the theme "Do You Measure Up?" and suggested that staff develop a brochure, poster and electronic communication for wide distribution through chapters with the goal of increasing name recognition for Sigma Xi and to attract younger members to chapter-level activity. Finally, the committee recommended that staff develop a communication plan for the first year of membership that includes regular emails and a survey.
- **Remind members why they joined Sigma Xi.** The committee developed a comprehensive list of "reasons for joining" the society and encouraged staff to use the list in developing publications and brochures about membership. The committee also encouraged staff to develop a brochure that details all benefits of membership, including the intangible benefits. Subsequent to the meeting, such a brochure was developed under the guidance of the committee and distributed to members in their membership kits.
- **Convert the Nomination Form to an Electronic Process.** The committee recommended developing both an interactive form and a word version of the nomination form. Subsequent to the meeting, such forms (plus a PDF version) were developed and added to the web site.
- **Consider other categories of membership.** The committee added to its agenda for next year consideration of categories of membership for young, non-student members and for corporations and institutions.
- **Establish a program for revitalizing chapters through the chapter membership.** After extensive

discussion about approaches to revitalizing moribund chapters, the committee recommended an approach that would work first through the individual chapter members. Staff were instructed to poll the members of about a dozen chapters that have been having difficulty with a survey requesting information about their priorities for chapter activity and about whether they would be willing to participate in revitalizing the chapter. Surveys were distributed during the winter and spring of 1999.

- **Investigate members' interest in various mentoring programs.** This committee and the Committee on Diversity are considering a variety of mentoring programs as benefits to Sigma Xi members. The committee developed a brief survey for distribution to members who have expressed interest in mentoring programs, with the goal of identifying members' level and areas of interest.
- **Develop online resources for chapters and chapter officers.** To facilitate information exchange and inter-chapter support, the committee recommended that staff focus on developing materials for the web site including: resource lists for programs of various types, listservs, links to contact officers, and "how-to" manuals for running chapters.

Certificates of Excellence

Chapters that received Certificates of Excellence at the November 1998 Annual Meeting in Vancouver were:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for their outstanding lecture/seminar series and an innovative Women in Science program.

Clemson University for their innovative high school research grants program.

Ford Motor Company for their innovative science and technology program with high schools and their strong seminar series.

Howard University for their extensive array of activities, including a Congressional visit and symposium.

Mississippi State University for their high level of activity and their undergraduate education panel.

South Dakota State University for a strong, balanced program, including involvement in a regional Science Fair and other notable student programs.

Southern Illinois at Carbondale for a research day and other strong programs that promote science.

Texas A&M University for support of high school science fairs, good promotion of science and a strong research symposium.

Tifton for an innovative and impressive weekly seminar series.

Vermont for their efforts in combining several small chapters into a strong state-wide program.

Certificates of Recognition were awarded in Vancouver to the following 15 chapters which initiated the most new members last year.

Massachusetts Institute of Technology (226 initiates)
Brown University (216)
Smith College (83)
Carleton College (75)
Swarthmore College (73)
Union College (66)
University of Missouri at Columbia (57)
Mount Holyoke College (57)
Claremont Colleges (47)
McGill University (47)
Oberlin College (47)
Columbia University (46)
Princeton University (46)
Southern Maine (45)
Williams College (38)

Approved New Chapters and Name Changes

Between July 1, 1998 and June 30, 1999, the following chapters were installed:

Emporia State University
Grove City College
South Texas
St Mary's College of California

Between July 1, 1998 and June 30, 1999, the following name changes were approved by the committee:

Mankato State to Minnesota State University, Mankato
Hollins College to Hollins University
Quinnipiac College to Quinnipiac

Membership of the Committee

For the year ending June 30, 1999, the Committee on Qualifications and Membership consisted of the following members:

Chair: Penelope Padgett, Shippensburg University
Howard Ceri, University of Calgary
Meredith Mason Garcia, Tulane University
Lynn O. Lewis, Mary Washington College
Virginia Lyons, Trinity College of Vermont
Jeanne Trinko Mechler, IBM Microelectronics
Graham Peaslee, Hope College
Daniel Rubenstein, Princeton University
Ronald Weinberg, Lawrence Livermore National Lab