

Report of the Committee on Regions for the Year ending June 30, 2006

The Committee on Regions met during the Society's November 2005 Annual Meeting and Student Research Conference in Seattle, Washington. The Committee consisted of the six elected Board Directors who each represent a distinct Region by which Sigma Xi chapters are organized. Attending the meeting were Tim Ng (Chair; Mid-Atlantic), Zachary Jacobson (Northeast), John Kelley (Northwest), Linda Meadows (North Central), Alan Miller (Southwest), and Ann Williams (Southeast). Also in attendance were Jim Baur (President-elect), Patrick Sculley (Executive Director), Laura Nigro (Director, Membership and Chapter Programs), and Kathy McLane (Administrator, Chapter Services and Membership).

As the meeting took place after the first of two Regional Caucuses at the Annual Meeting, the main topics of discussion were the opinions and perspectives gleaned from the Regional delegates concerning proposed changes in the Society bylaws. A summary of the discussions on major topics are included below:

- Changes to Chapter "Good Standing" Requirements

One of the proposed new requirements for chapters to remain in good standing was that each chapter be required to initiate one new member each year, in recognition of the fact that membership decline is perhaps the biggest issue facing Sigma Xi today. The Regions were generally in favor of this, but reported that this requirement could be problematic for small chapters and for chapters not at educational institutions, since they do not have the potential base of new student and professional nominees that are present at colleges and universities. This was of particular concern for these chapters because it might impact their ability to receive local support funds even if they were quite active in their other activities. Several alternatives were proposed from the chapters, including requiring the initiation of an average of one new member a year over a three-year period, and/or changing the language to include re-enrolling a lapsed member as an alternative. All of the Regions are aware that membership decline is a significant concern, but hope that some flexibility can be built into the "new member" requirement to make it easier for the smaller and/or non-university chapters to comply.

- Direct Elections & Electronic Balloting

The proposal of direct elections of Sigma Xi officers and directors was discussed in the Regions. It was understood that this initiative would enable each Sigma Xi member to cast a ballot on an annual basis for Directors and for Society officers (i.e., President, Treasurer), and would replace the elections currently held among the chapter delegates at the Annual Meeting. The Regions expressed concern that this would fundamentally change the nature of Sigma Xi balloting, where each chapter has one voting delegate, and that large chapters might overwhelm the balloting because of the size of their memberships. There was additional concern over the direct election of Directors for the various Constituencies, since these elections are normally conducted by the chapter delegates who attended the Annual Meeting and are familiar with the candidates. If direct elections were to be implemented, there was a general consensus that each chapter should have a single vote for a given Directorship. Meanwhile, it was felt that the direct election of the President and Treasurer was relatively non-controversial, and would be similar in practice to those procedures used by many scientific societies.

- New Categories of Affiliation

The Regions were generally in favor of the new categories of affiliation proposed for the Society, both as a means of increasing membership and also recognizing activities and accomplishments in science and engineering not directly related to research. This would allow Sigma Xi to involve high school science teachers and other "Friends" in the Society without diminishing the honor of membership. This would also help address the dual nature of the honor of the Society (i.e., at first a researcher *receives individual honor* for his or her personal achievements via Sigma Xi induction; having crossed the induction threshold, a member then has the responsibility of facing back through that portal to *pay honor to the Society* - and the research enterprise in general - by serving Sigma Xi's mission). Great care would be needed in crafting the language describing these new categories of affiliation.

- Nine-Point Motion Relative to Dues for 2006-2007

With regard to the annual motion relative to dues, the Regions were very much in favor of increasing dues, particularly if it would help increase the support for the Grants-in-Aid of Research (GIAR) program. They were also in favor of using the HEPI index to determine the appropriate increase in dues. However, most of the Regions were generally opposed to the increase of the initiation fee to \$25, which represented a dramatic increase from the previous year and also a fee much higher than the \$19.50 administrative cost of the initiation. Since some chapters pay the initiation fee for their new members, this would also dramatically increase their costs of operation. Even though this is a "one-time" fee, it comes at an early stage of their career for most Sigma Xi members, and could prove daunting when combined with their first year dues.

- Agendas for Regional Caucuses

The Regions generally felt that visitations and statements by candidates running for Society offices (i.e., President, Treasurer), and in some cases for Associate Director, tended to disrupt the meetings and/or take up precious time. To maximize the limited time allotted for the Regional Caucuses, the Directors thought it would be

advantageous to give delegates some preview of issues to be discussed in advance of the Annual Meeting (e.g., topics that the Board would address during its meeting). This would be important since, for many delegates, it would be their first time attending a Caucus and participating in Regional/Constituency elections. Caution would be needed against providing too many specifics and raising false expectations, in case the Board eventually rejected or severely altered proposals that had been previously announced to delegates. Conversely though, advance notice about key issues for Board discussion - including both pros and cons - would enable the delegates to relay preliminary feedback to their Regional Directors for sharing during the Board meeting. In the end, this could render the Regional Caucuses more efficient and effective in their impact on Society matters. **Special Reports from Sigma Xi Officers and Staff**

In addition to the reports on Regional Caucuses, several presentations were made by Sigma Xi officers and staff:

President-elect **Jim Baur** gave a "Call to Leadership" for the Regional Directors, emphasizing the importance of a *job description* for the Directors. Among activities to be expected of Directors would be that they maintain a continuity document for their Region to assist their successors. Directors should also be aware of the chapter standings in their Region, and to visit chapters on a regular basis. Directors should also be aware that *recognizing* chapter achievements, by personal letter or other means, can have a positive impact on these chapters. In general, Sigma Xi staff have many resources available to assist the Regional Directors with these endeavors.

Kathy McLane, Administrator of Chapter Services and Membership, announced that staff were devising an action plan for membership retention, with participation by Regional Directors. A similar plan has already been put in place for chapter revitalization, and Ms. McLane noted that member retention was excellent in chapters following this revitalization plan; however, many upstanding host institutions still have inactive Sigma Xi chapters. The new retention plan would be informed by feedback from the 2005 Annual Meeting and Student Research Conference. Ideas were especially invited from all Regional Directors, and a draft will be circulated for group review and agreement before the plan is finalized. Staff will send out the final plan to Region Directors for dissemination to their chapters, and will also include suggestions on how to work with chapters in executing this plan.

Laura Nigro, Director of Membership and Chapter Programs, described the new Multi-Chapter Granting Program, a new funding opportunity for two or more chapters to collaborate on activities. The Committee on Qualifications and Membership approved the application criteria and evaluation procedure and will select the final proposals to be funded. Ms. Nigro asked that all Regional Directors promote this opportunity to their chapters and encourage their collaboration.

Follow-up reports on business from the Committee on Regions FY05 Meeting

Ms. Nigro noted that most of these items were lesser issues carried over from the 2004-2005 meeting of the Committee on Regions, and since resolved. There was insufficient time to address them in detail, except for the Transferable Skills Program. Executive Director Sculley explained that some of its modules (e.g., Grantsmanship Training) are already underway. Sigma Xi staff person Jenny Zilaro, formerly of the Membership and Chapter Programs Department and now Manager of the Education Program, is managing this initiative. A pilot workshop on Lab Management Skills is in development now, funded by a \$1,000 seed grant from the Burroughs-Wellcome Fund and the Howard Hughes Medical Institute. This training is seen as desirable by researchers to help them advance in their host institutions. Ethics is another such topic. Analysis of our membership survey data will help us hone in on which demographics of our membership are most interested in this.

Report submitted by Tim Ng, Chair
FY06 Committee on Regions
8 September 2006