

## **Ad Hoc Committee on the Future of the AAHM**

Committee on the Future  
American Association for the History of Medicine  
Draft Report  
March 2009

The Ad Hoc Committee on the Future of the American Association for the History of Medicine, consisting of Kristen Ehrenberger, Janet Golden, Jeremy A. Greene, Richard J. Kahn, Jodi L. Koste, Susan E. Lederer, Arleen Tuchman, and John M. Eyster (Chair), submits the following report.

We recognize that the American Association for the History of Medicine faces several challenges, some of them short-term, due to the current economic recession, and others long-term, resulting from changes in patterns of scholarship and publication. The Committee has attempted to make recommendations for change that address both sets of issues. At the outset, however, we wish to state emphatically that there are many aspects of the AAHM that it values and wishes to see maintained and fostered. These include, but are not limited to: the relatively small size and informality of its annual meetings, the opportunities and conscious efforts it makes to bring together people from different disciplines and professions, the richness of its meeting programs, its welcoming attitude toward student participation, and the opportunities it provides for professional networking.

The strength and viability of the AAHM depend on the size, diversity, and participation of its membership. The rate at which we attract new members has slowed in recent years. Too many new members seem to “test drive” the Association and let their memberships lapse after a year or two so that new members do little more than replace those whose memberships have lapsed. Our membership is, in effect, no longer growing. To understand why this might be so, it is important to recognize that the incentives to join the Association are changing as increasingly potential members have access to the Bulletin of the History of Medicine through their academic institution’s electronic journals subscriptions. The result is that the annual meeting takes on additional importance as a reason for people to join. Every effort should be made to make these meetings as attractive as possible to as many people as possible.

Since the opportunity to present a paper is a strong incentive to attend the annual meeting and frequently is the only way a participant can receive financial support from her/his institution, the Committee recommends that the Program and Local Arrangements Committees consider adding an additional session in a few concurrent meeting times, provided, of course, that the added submissions are strong enough to include on the program. It also recommends that Program Committees agree to accept and judge as a unit proposals for sessions arranged by the participants, rather than to judge each proposal separately, accepting some and rejecting others, as is our current policy. We also

recommend that Program Committees experiment with different types of sessions. These might include sessions organized by the Program Committee around a particularly important book in which the author, critics, and commentators discuss the work and its implications and influence. They might also include poster sessions and sessions on special themes arranged by the Program Committee.

While the Committee believes that the Association ought to experiment with different forms of sessions at its annual meetings, it does not recommend the addition of new plenary sessions. A plenary session occupies the meeting time of multiple papers in ordinary concurrent session. If our goal is to expand opportunity to participate, we ought to rest content with the current plenaries: the Garrison Lecture, the President's lecture, and the occasional opening plenary session.

The Association ought to seek feedback from participants on the types of sessions it employs. This might be done by an e-mail survey conducted after the annual meeting or during the meeting by some survey device. This information ought to be made available to the Program Committees of both the current and the following annual meeting. We suggest that the responsibility for these surveys rest with the Committee on Annual Meetings.

Since professional networking is an important part of the annual meeting, the Committee recommends that the Program Committee schedule a caucus time at the annual meetings for interest groups to gather. This should be at a time that does not conflict with regular sessions. Such a regularly-scheduled time would probably encourage the formation of additional groups.

Current students are future members. The Committee recommends that special efforts be made to attract graduate and professional students to our meetings and to encourage them to join the Association. The Committee is pleased to observe the activities of the Ad Hoc Committee on Student Affairs which sponsors a list-serv, a luncheon at the annual meeting, a roommate matching service, and is launching a Conference Buddy program. We encourage the continuation of such work. We also note the recent recruitment effort of the Organization of American Historians among graduate students. The President of the OAH recently sent an e-mail message to graduate students of history via their advisers outlining the advantages of joining the OAH and inviting them to join. We believe that the AAHM might launch a similar recruiting effort through faculty advisers. We think that the target audience ought to be graduate faculty in programs in the history of science, technology, and medicine, in medical humanities, as well as select faculty advisers in history departments, medical schools, and residency programs. At the least this communication should direct students to the AAHM website and describe the Osler and Shryock Prize competitions.

The Association generously discounts its membership fee for students. This Committee believes that it also ought to discount the registration fee for students at the annual meeting. Other scholarly organizations of comparable size offer such registration discounts to students, and we believe that lower registration fees for students would

encourage student participation. We recognize that lowering registration costs for students will involve some cost shifting, but this is an effort worth making because the AAHM would ultimately benefit from a growth in its membership base. The Council and the Local Arrangement Committees might adopt one of several strategies of encouraging voluntary donations to avoid raising the registration fee for regular members. It might, for example, add a check box to the registration form and website inviting donations to a fund to subsidize student registration, or it might ask for volunteers to sponsor a student registration by paying the regular registration fee for a student and serving as a Conference Buddy for that student. While the Committee is aware that putting on an annual meeting is expensive and that many expenses are not easily controlled by the Local Arrangements Committee, we are concerned by the rising cost of meeting registration. Receptions, morning coffee breaks, and other courtesies have grown elaborate in recent years. Particularly in these economic hard times, we believe that the Local Arrangements should be particularly vigilant in controlling expenses.

For new members, particularly those giving a paper for the first time, receiving constructive criticism and suggestions and meeting others working in the same area is a major attraction of the meeting and a reason to join the AAHM. We believe that it might be well to experiment with a more formal mechanism to enable those first-time presenters who request it to be linked with a more established scholar working in the same. This might be initiated on an experimental basis by adding a check box to the abstract submission form. For those authors whose abstracts are accepted and who requested it, the Program Committee would contact a more senior member asking whether she/he would attend the session in which the paper is presented and to meet with the presenter sometime thereafter for a discussion.

The Committee recommends that the Association seek to strengthen its ties with its associated or affiliated societies. Such societies are a pool of new members and sources of diverse expertise and interest. The AAHM might, for example, encourage stronger ties through the use of its website. Currently the contact information for these societies is available through the AAHM website, but stronger mutual ties between constituent society websites and the AAHM website and through the reciprocal posting of program schedules and announcements would be beneficial. The AAHM might also offer to manage the membership lists of those societies, if it decides to take over the management of its own list, and it should encourage members of those societies to join the AAHM and to attend its meetings.

We believe that there are opportunities for the AAHM to do more to promote and to improve the teaching of the history of medicine. We recommend, for example, that a Teaching column be added to the Newsletter. The subject of that column ought to include teaching at all levels: primary and secondary school, college, graduate school, medical school and residency, and continuing professional and adult education. Bright ideas and successful strategies need to be shared. We also believe that the AAHM website should offer easily found links to other relevant sources on teaching including the National Library of Medicine's collection of syllabi and the summary of dissertations that Jonathan Erlen compiles. Finally, we recommend better coordination of announcements,

notices, obituaries, contents of forthcoming issues of the Bulletin, etc., among the editors of the Newsletter and the Bulletin of the History of Medicine and the webmaster of the AAHM website. This would include drawing attention to the formation of the Teaching column.

The next few years are likely to be harder times financially for the AAHM, as they probably will be for all scholarly societies. The Committee believes that the Association was wise to delay launching its new endowment fund drive until the nation's financial situation improves. Over the long term, however, it is essential for the Association to enlarge its endowment. We endorse the Report of the Ad Hoc Committee on Endowments chaired by John Parascandola that appeared in August 2008. That report endorsed the use of naming rights as a means of attracting large contributions and the formation of a donor group with named levels of contributors with provisions for the periodic publication of the donor lists. It also recommended that the size of any endowment be sufficiently large to support its purpose indefinitely. This Committee believes that the use of endowment funds should not be limited to lectures and prizes but that the Council should consider using endowment earning for other purposes such as endowed annual meeting sessions and travel awards to permit members in financial need to attend the meetings. We also have some misgivings about having corporate names associated with AAHM prizes and lectures. The Council should carefully consider the possibility of conflict of interest before accepting any endowment under these terms.

The offices of the Secretary and Treasurer are the vital organs of the AAHM. We believe that it is essential that these offices be held by active Association members, but we recognize that we cannot continue to rely on the unpaid, voluntary labor of dedicated members to fulfil these essential obligations. One of the most important goals of the Association should be to provide paid assistance to the Secretary and Treasurer. In the past year the Association has decided to separate the offices of Secretary and Treasurer as it is permitted to do under its bylaws. This change should lighten the load of both officers. The Association has also decided to provide in 2009 some limited financial support to both offices (\$10,000 for the Secretary's Office and \$3,000 for the Treasurer's Office). A top priority for the Council should be to find ways to provide more adequate paid assistance to these two officers.

In view of the current financial recession, we recommend that efforts be made to pare operating costs. We recommend that consideration be given to having the Secretary's Office handle the Association's membership list. We currently pay Johns Hopkins University Press in excess of \$15,000 each year to manage this list. Were the Association to make the investments of purchasing membership management software and entering the current membership data, thereafter it could use that annual \$15,000 for other purposes, such as supplementing the \$13,000 it is proposing to use to support the Secretary and Treasurer. We also draw attention to the large sums the Association spends to print and mail material that might be circulated electronically. The budget for 2009 proposes that the Directory be posted as a protected page on the AAHM website in a downloadable format and that a number of copies be printed for members who request them. This budget also proposes to circulate the Newsletter in the same fashion and to

permit members to choose the electronic over the printed copy. We recommend that eventually all Association publications, including the Directory, Newsletter, and Program for the annual meeting that is circulated with the registration materials, be distributed primarily in electronic form. We recognize that we need to continue to provide printed copies for members who cannot or who dislike downloading and printing off copies of these materials. Encouraging and retaining members is essential, so we must avoid creating disincentives for continued membership. However, we believe that when the issue is adequately explained, most members will be willing to receive these material in electronic form from the Association's website. The result would be a considerable savings. We believe that a time table should be established for this transition. We suggest the following:

2009 the Directory & Newsletter are made available electronically as a PDF on the AAHM website with the option of requesting a printed copy.

2011 the Directory and Newsletter are available in printed form only on payment of a fee that covers the cost of printing and mailing.

2013 the early copy of the annual meeting Program no longer circulates with the registration materials and is available before the meeting only in electronic form. A printed copy is available at the annual meeting.

We recommend that the Association consider other sources of income. One possibility is a Speakers' Bureau. Were the Association to poll its members, we believe that we could identify a number of members who would be willing to give lectures to conferences, local history societies, or in schools. We would expect that the speaker's expenses be paid by the organization requesting the lecture, and we would ask that the speaker donate a portion of the honorarium to the Association. We suggest that the Council establish a recommended division of the honoraria which would recognize the need for younger scholars with lower earnings and larger family financial obligations to keep a larger portion of the honorarium. We believe that members would be willing to act in this way for the benefit of the Association. An additional advantage of the Speakers' Bureau would be the added visibility it provides for the AAHM. Finally, if the AAHM decides to manage its own membership list, it might offer to use the same software to manage the membership lists of affiliated societies for a reasonable fee.

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