Association of American Geographers
Ronald F. Abler

Membership in the Association of American Geographers (AAG) peaked at 7,381 in 1995. The AAG finished calendar year 2000 with 6,524 members and the prior year with 6,527 (Table 1). At the moment, it’s not possible to say whether the similarity of the 1999 and 2000 numbers represents a turnaround in the decline since 1995 or a pause in a continued downward trajectory.

In response to the erosion of membership, the AAG Council established an ad hoc membership committee in October 1999 to assess the causes of the membership decline and to recommend actions and policies to the council that would help the Association recruit more new members and retain existing members. Committee chair Donald Vermeer consulted with a number of other ACLS constituent societies and several science societies in order to obtain a broader perspective on the experience of comparable organizations in recent years. The committee addressed the dimensions and causes of the membership decline in the AAG and other societies, and proposed some possible steps to halt and reverse the downturn.

Table 1
AAG Membership 1990-2000

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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Members</th>
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<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>6,721</td>
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<td>1991</td>
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<td>1994</td>
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<td>1996</td>
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<td>6,527</td>
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<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>6,524</td>
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Dimensions of the Decline

In percentage terms, membership among college and university faculty has remained stable. The greatest decreases since 1989 have occurred among federal government employees (-26%), student members (-23%), state and local government employees (21%), and members employed in industry (16%). Correspondingly, the decrease in members with MA or MS degrees was 11% and 32% for those with BA or BS degrees. Clearly, the attractions that AAG membership once held for geographers practicing their trade in government and the private sector have diminished.

Causes of the Decline

After extensive investigation and discussion the membership committee concluded that “AAG membership loss seems not to be derived from policies and practices internal to the
Association, but rather from structural changes within society itself.” The committee recommended chapters 1 to 15 of Robert Putnam’s *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000) as background reading for the council’s further deliberations about membership. Noting that membership losses are widespread in traditional scholarly and professional societies, the committee raised a series of possible factors that might be catalyzing the more general social trends Putnam identified, including:

1. the AAG’s income-scaled dues structure;
2. the cost of AAG membership;
3. the AAG’s bundled membership, which includes a monthly newsletter and two quarterly journals;
4. the growing fragmentation of geography and related disciplines; and
5. new technologies and their applications.

**Remedies**

Finding itself hard pressed to offer specific recommendations in the absence clear and specific causes for the AAG’s membership decline, the committee offered a mix of suggestions and possible solutions about the Association’s mission and operations. From the more general to the specific they include:

1. adopt the laissez faire policy exemplified by American Economic Association, which makes no efforts to increase or sustain its membership;
2. form and support a permanent membership committee and direct it to act aggressively to recruit and retain members;
3. engage professional consultants to assist the Association in increasing membership;
4. use endowment funds to foster membership through initial subsidies for new members and similar mechanisms;
5. alter the governance structure to ensure representation from practitioners, who often report that they feel under represented in Association governance;
6. work more effectively through academic programs to recruit and retain members, especially student members;
7. consider mergers or partnerships with other organizations that might prove beneficial; and
8. address some of the reasons given for dropping their membership by lapsed members, including:
   A. Erratic follow up of non renewing members;
   B. Larger member vs. nonmember difference in annual meeting registration fees;
   C. Review or eliminate the income-based dues structure;
   D. Become a certification or standards-setting organization;
   E. Market the AAG directly to students (especially graduate students) more effectively, bypassing departments that may or may not promote AAG membership;
   F. Decouple the AAG’s journals from membership;
   G. Improve the quality of presentations at annual meetings;
   H. Upgrade the AAG’s web site;
   I. Act to reduce specialization and fragmentation;
   J. Publish data on AAG membership by academic department to embarrass those with low proportions;
   K. Revise the current calendar-year-based membership cycle; and
L. Set an annual meeting abstract submission deadline for students later than the current 1 September deadline for all submissions.

The committee concluded its report by suggesting that the 1995-2000 membership decline represented a challenge to the Association that required a fundamental examination of the basic premises upon which the AAG operated and a willingness to define a new mission and new objectives for the organization consistent with the needs of its existing members and those it hopes to recruit.

1Abstracted from the September 2000 report of the AAG AdHoc Membership Committee chaired by Donald Vermeer.
The American Anthropological Association (AAA) is fortunate to have experienced a gradually increasing membership over the past two and one-half years. Following on five consecutive years of flat membership numbers, this growth occurred as a result of a concerted and systematic effort to increase the numbers.

Among other things, our membership program involved:

I. reconsidering who we wanted as members,
II. developing an estimate of the pool of potential AAA members,
III. evaluating the existing effort to recruit new and retain current members,
IV. a review of materials and marketing "pitch" used to promote membership, and a subsequent redesign of both materials and pitch,
V. establishing goals for membership recruitment and retention, and developing strategies and a time-line for achieving those goals,
VI. testing various approaches to new member recruitment, and adopting those that were most productive,
VII. securing information on why individuals declined to join or retain their membership, coupled with an effort to address the issues identified,
VIII. establishing a membership program tracking and monitoring system to enable us to evaluate results obtained, and
IX. contracting with a membership development and marketing firm with experience in the area of professional association membership to assist us in this effort.

Our membership development program began in 1999 and over its course, we have added about 1,000 members. This was an increase of just over 10%. Over the past several months, our membership numbers have leveled out. Clearly, we have picked the "low hanging fruit", and we are toping out among the potential membership populations to which we have recently appealed. AAA is currently evaluating the costs and benefits of continuing our relationship with the marketing firm we employed.

AAA's membership program has not been accomplished without internal stress. Initially, it took the form of concern that the "traditional" membership of the organization would change. Some individuals and subgroups that had positions of power within the organization were threatened. Others were concerned that the financial resources of the association would be stretched to the point that essential services to current members would be reduced or eliminated. Still others did not believe that a membership acquisition and retention effort could be successful. A year into the program, most of these concerns had subsided.

AAA's experience with this membership program coupled with my almost thirty years in association management lead me to focus in the material which follows on a set of themes that I have come to regard as central to the subject of membership development.

Why is the Topic of Membership Important?

While the answer is obvious, it can't be recalled too many times. Members are truly the lifeblood of a voluntary association, and without them there is no association. In a sense, our members are the "owners" (dare I say "shareholders"?) of the enterprise we manage. They are the principal "beneficiaries" of the association's activity, the "clients" we serve. Looking at the association as a "business"--and not-for-profit associations ARE businesses--mission-based businesses, not charities--our members are the most likely to be the principal "purchasers" of our
products and services. Moreover, since scholarly societies such as ours are in the information brokerage business, our members are not only the consumers of the information we broker but the absolutely essential producers of much of this information as well.

Factors Affecting Association Membership

In all but the most narrowly specialized associations, members have a wide range of professional and personal interests and needs. Most obvious in our associations are the differences associated with career stage. But other factors can be as important, for example, income, employment setting, and family composition. The issue of differences in member needs becomes especially important when we consider delivering the same activity, product or service to all of our members versus creating a cafeteria approach by which individuals can select from among a range of products and/or services as the benefits of their membership in the association.

Virtually all of our members perceive that they have a limited number of dollars to spend on association goods and services. They seldom understand, and often underestimate, the actual costs of providing association goods and services, and as association “members”, they can be counted on to exhibit a strong sense of entitlement (at no additional cost) to whatever is produced or delivered by the association. Thus pricing, bundling and marketing individual products and services, as well as distinguishing “member” from “non-member” access to these products and services, are matters of great consequence to our organizations.

Voluntary association members also have a limited number of hours they are able and willing to commit to organizational activities. Since they are the “producers” of much of our organization’s products and services, their time has to be treated as a limited resource that has to be carefully allocated and constantly replenished.

Many association members—especially younger ones—have very limited “brand loyalty” to our organizations. Increasingly, they view our associations as organizations from which they “buy” goods and services. They evaluate what we do in terms of the tangible, practical, and measurable benefits that accrue to them as individuals, and increasingly they rate our products and services in terms of “utility”, “value-added”, “customer service”, “quality”, and “timeliness”.

This is not to say that members don’t also recognize and value the “intangibles”. For example, while developing standards of professional or ethical conduct would not seem to provide a direct and measurable benefit to the individual member, many members will so value such an activity that they will commit time, intellectual and financial support to their development.

However, as our organizations have evolved from being clubs of an intellectual elite to modern professional associations, our members have become much more critical and demanding in their assessment of our operational performance. And “results” are the measure by which association administrators are held accountable.

It is also useful to remember that, unless they are students of organizational development or behavior—and most aren’t—our members neither understand, nor care about, the conditions or trends that affect our organizations or the day to day administrative problems that beset us. Their tolerance for delay, errors and omissions, especially where accompanied by vague excuses or obscure explanations, is extremely limited. Failures, injuries and insults tend to be long remembered, while achievements, successes and benefits can be soon forgot.

Revenue Realities of Membership Growth

Absolute growth in association membership has two characteristics that are often forgotten. First, association members are consistently more likely than non-members to purchase the fee-based products and services (not provided as automatic benefits of membership) offered by our associations. Thus, every increase in the number of members has a multiplier effect on the
association’s revenues, above and beyond the value of that member’s dues.

Second, average member renewal rates run somewhere between 70 and 90 percent for most professional associations. Thus, while association dues are typically paid for one year of membership, each additional member acquired represents a membership “lifetime value” to the association of several times the amount of dues received in a single year. For AAA, the historic "multiple" is approximately 4.5 times our annual dues amount.

Finally, growing an association's membership numbers always involves the expenditure of organizational resources. A careful calculation needs to be made at the outset of any membership recruitment program to determine the long-term worth of the effort.

Who Are Our Members? vs. Who Should Be Our Members?

Mission determines members. No question. But periodically, every organization—including voluntary membership associations—can benefit by revisiting its mission statement and as part of that effort, reconsider who it wants to have as members. Why? Simple. The environment within which we operate is constantly changing. The needs and interests of members, potential members and others change. Competing organizations expand and contract, change their roles, come and go. Niches for useful activity open and close, creating opportunities for organizations—including ours—to develop and change. Nothing in our environment is fixed for all time; why should our associations and our conception of who we want as members be fixed?

Looking back, many of our associations have experienced substantial change in the composition of our membership. A truly open consideration of possibilities can be an invigorating exercise for an association. While having received an advanced degree in our field may have been the criteria for membership in the past, would including others provide additional strength and capacity in achieving the mission of our organization?

What about BA’s? Students at any level? Individuals with an “interest” in our field? As the boundaries of disciplines or fields of interest change, why not reconsider the boundaries describing potential association members?

Similarly, could our mission be enhanced by the inclusion of those in other work settings, for example, high schools, non-profit organizations, for-profit organizations, government, independent consultants, entrepreneurs? While we may have defined our geographic boundaries as the United States, have globalization and the internet created an environment that simply demands the expansion of these boundaries?

Monitoring Membership Conditions and Trends

Addressing membership issues and developing membership goals and strategies requires good information both on members, former members and potential members. What is the information we need?

On a continuing basis, we need to know the absolute numbers of current members. But we also need to know what those numbers were a year ago, five years ago, ten years ago to determine whether membership has been stable, increasing or decreasing, as well as the rate of such change. We also need to know the association's current member retention rate. Moreover, using available comparative data on other associations, we need to know how our retention rate compares with those of similar associations.

We also need information on the pool of eligibles. Determining the pool of eligible people may be neither easy nor precise, but it can be estimated. Having secured such an estimate, we need to calculate what portion of all eligible people are currently members. And we need to make a judgement as to what portion of that total pool of non-member eligibles we could reasonably
expect to attract as association members.

Finally, it can useful to determine what changes might be occurring in the composition of both our members and our potential members. Are age changes occurring? Income changes? Work setting changes? This can give us a sense of the flow of actual and potential members over time.

How do we get the answers? On members, keep good records. Any records are better than no records. If existing records are out of your hands, get hold of them. If they don't exist, start keeping them today. We can never find our way to the future unless we know where we are starting.

On potential members, answers are more difficult to secure. Data collected and published by government agencies, studies done by other organizations, and data collected by marketing firms can all be useful. In our own analysis of potential members, AAA not only made use of our own and other organization's directories of academic department faculty and students, but such things as the mailing lists of academic publishers and the membership lists of other organizations.

**Understanding the Reasons Behind Conditions and Trends**

It's not enough to know conditions and trends in our membership; we need to know why they are present. What external trends and conditions are at work in our field? How are trends in the overall national economy affecting our membership? Is the number of people eligible for membership increasing or decreasing? Are the incomes of those eligible increasing or decreasing?

Why do our current members belong to the association and what are the reasons they leave? It's essential that we have membership satisfaction data on our activities, programs, services and products. We also need to know why people belong to our competitor organizations. Methods abound to secure this data. They include sample surveys, focus groups, member complaint tallies, telephone logs, evaluation mechanisms built into each product and service, and member exit interviews.

A caution. Everyone tends to believe that membership numbers go down when dues go up. A truly accurate analysis is that member numbers decline because the perceived value of benefits received by members and potential members are less than the amount of member dues. Such a statement leads us to ask the right follow-up question: how can we increase the value of member benefits to bring them in line with our price?

**Assessing the Competition for Members**

There are a limited number of dollars and a limited number of hours that individuals are willing to spend on voluntary membership society activities. Thus, even though it may be uncomfortable to recognize it--some of us may be in competition with each other.

Each of us needs to know what is happening in the immediate environment in which we operate--especially what our competitors are doing. What programs, products, activities and services are we both attempting to offer to the same people? What are each of our strengths and weaknesses? What are our respective niches?

**Developing Membership Goals and Strategies for Achieving Them**

Developing realistic and achievable membership goals, and developing and implementing strategies for achieving those goals is not easy. But they are essential.

The key is in finding good answers to five questions: Whom do we want as members? What should our membership numbers and composition be? What are the strategies and timetables that will get us there? What will it cost to implement those strategies? Does the
long-term benefit justify the cost?

Somewhere in this grand scheme of goal and strategy setting, we need to address a policy question: What do we want to maximize? The number of members? Organizational income? Satisfaction for some categories of members, even if it involves a cost to others or accepting a limit on future membership development?

**Sixteen Rules to Live By**

1. Constantly monitor your member (and potential member) numbers and trends.
2. Keep good membership records.
3. Carefully analyze the reasons accounting for these numbers and trends.
4. Constantly ask your members how you are doing. Ask them in multiple ways.
5. Constantly remind members what useful things you are doing for them.
6. Constantly ask your members what else or different you can do for them.
7. Constantly recognize, appreciate and reward you members for their contributions to the association.
8. Give your members information on not only "what" you are doing, but also "why" you are doing it.
9. Define your primary service niche and perform especially well in that area.
10. Constantly attend to "value", "quality" and "service".
11. Regularly revisit the question: Whom do we want as members?
12. Be on the constant lookout for potential members and move aggressively to capture them.
13. Distinguish indivisible from divisible goods and services, and try to provide a cafeteria of "divisible", fee-based products or services.
14. Constantly search for "incentives" for membership. For example, in pricing and marketing association goods and services, ALWAYS distinguish between a member price and non-member price, and show your members the difference very, very often.
15. Remember that a member's contract with the association is a transaction between a buyer and a seller. The seller dare not take the buyer for granted.
16. Watch out for the competition------lest they eat your lunch.

**A Brief for Vigilance and Pro-activity**

The moment we cease soliciting member feedback and acting on member communications, developing additional incentives for individuals to belong, the moment we put membership solicitation and retention on automatic pilot, and fail to tell members (AGAIN and AGAIN) what they get for their membership and why it is valuable, we expose our association to the risk of a decline in our ability to pursue our mission effectively.
American Comparative Literature Association
Elaine Martin

Membership issues--specifically those related to falling membership--would appear to be inextricably linked to factors in the areas of "leadership and governance" and "mission and role" of scholarly societies. I'll first look at some statistics, list some decisions in the Association's history that have affected membership, and then move to the more nebulous area of speculation on the future and how membership issues are tied to the other aspects of scholarly societies, as mentioned.

The ACLA's membership has declined somewhat since the 1989 and 1994 reports to the ACLS, which showed 700 and 820 members (including institutional) respectively. As of this writing (3-11-01), our 2001 membership database shows 663 individual memberships and 15 institutional memberships for a total of 678; of these 495 are faculty/regular and 168 students. 65 of the memberships are foreign as opposed to domestic. We are, of course, in the middle of the year so our total for 2001 will eventually be somewhat higher, especially since our annual conference is about a month away. Judging from the 2000 statistics, however, the final number won't be that much higher. In 2000 we had a total of 704 members (696 individual, 8 institutional). Of the individual memberships, 510 were faculty/regular and 186 students, so that ratio is holding steady. It appears that the foreign memberships are increasing slightly, as we already have 65 in 2001 compared with a total of 42 last year.

There are both clear, concrete reasons for this overall decline as well as less-clear, abstract, and speculative explanations. The concrete reasons are that in 1995 the ACLA adopted one of its four affiliated journals, Comparative Literature, as its official journal. At the same time, the Advisory Board voted to reinstate mandatory membership in the International Comparative Literature Association for those joining ACLA. As a result of these two measures/financial commitments, we had to double our dues form $25 to $50. Distressingly, although members were paying twice the amount, the Association's income from each membership was actually reduced from $25 per head to only $22, because, of the $50 membership fee, $18 went to the journal, and $10 to the International Association. Student dues were increased at the same time from $7 to $25 (in order to cover the $18 per capita journal cost). These radically increased dues had a negative impact on our membership, perhaps because the amount was raised so dramatically? Protests were received from some members about being obliged to join the ICLA when joining the ACLA (it had been optional for some time), but board members generally felt that the ACLA had an obligation to formally support the ICLA. Membership in the ICLA was, however, made optional for students and emeriti.

Other factors affecting our declining membership are less clear. In fact, some would seem to mitigate against it. For example, in 1995 ACLA began experimenting with a new format for our annual conference. Instead of traditional four-paper sessions, three-day seminars were organized in which the 9-12 participants remained together in their time slot throughout the conference, each day hearing/discussing 3-4 papers in their seminar. With some refining, this new format has enjoyed considerable success as it allows for longer presentations, greater coherence among the papers (all around a single topic), and discussions that are both more sustained and more profound. This type of intellectual exchange has apparently appealed to numerous scholars, because participation in our annual conference has increased steadily over the past several years. In fact, the annual conference is now our greatest source of membership recruitment since we require conference presenters to be current members. Of our approximately 650 members, we have had circa 400 present papers at our most recent conferences.
The ACLA has always had the reputation of welcoming graduate students as members and as conference participants. As a result c. 36% of our membership in 2000 was comprised of students and about 34% so far in 2001. We had had to limit student conference participation to c. 35% in order for the "regular" registration fees to cover the heavily subsidized student registration fees. The ACLA recently added a dissertation prize to its existing two student prizes, extending our attractiveness to students; we also give students travel grants to present papers at the annual conference, and two elected student representatives serve on the Advisory Board (travel costs paid for student reps by the Association), and, finally, the students have their own listserv. The ADPCL (Assoc. of Departments and Programs of Comparative Literature), an affiliated caucus of the ACLA, also sponsors two sessions at the annual meeting aimed at students' concerns and the practice of the profession. Despite these incentives, student membership has been largely static. One reason may be that we do not organize job interviews at our annual meeting, although some of this takes place informally. Most of our faculty and students are also in MLA which runs a large job market, so we have inclined toward avoiding duplication; we also meet too late in the year for the job market in our field. But perhaps in our job-driven world, it is now necessary to offer this service?

From the forgoing I conclude that our annual conference seems to be useful and relevant, and we seem to be including students adequately, both in the Association and the annual conference. We must seek the cause of declining enrollments elsewhere. As membership fees increase across the board perhaps scholars are choosing to belong only to the large, disciplinary associations with the resources to offer more services (computers at the annual conference, more, better-funded prizes, publications, etc.)? Or perhaps they are choosing the large disciplinary associations in conjunction with membership in the speciality or "boutique" societies, the ones that focus on a more narrow area of research and specialization (Jane Austen Society, Society for Utopian Studies, etc.)? If this is true, then ACLA, as a small, disciplinary society falls through the membership cracks. We are not large enough to function as a disciplinary association and we are not narrow enough to appeal to a homogeneous group of specialists. In fact the very diversity of members/identities has threatened in the past to rend the discipline and the Association asunder.

It is true that we do not seem to provide many services for members' dues: a quarterly journal, the annual conference, five prizes, the right to vote in elections, a password-accessed membership directory, email reminders of important deadlines, and an up-to-date website (membership obviously not required for the latter). Since we have never queried our members concerning the reason underlying their membership, we do not have reliable information on whether any of these "services" plays a role, or whether it is entirely a matter of participating in the annual conference. We certainly are not in a position to compete with larger organizations such as MLA in terms of providing services; a chronic problem is that the Secretary-Treasurer of the Association who runs the day to day business is a volunteer position, as are the other officers' positions. The amount of professional support staff available varies from institution to institution as the secretariat moves (approximately every 5 years). Because of the peripatetic nature of the secretariat, there are also continuity problems.

In terms of future development and recruitment (and retention!) of new members, several areas come immediately to mind: publications, technology, and outreach. The ACLA really has not done much in any of these areas. The members of the Advisory Board have recently begun discussing publication of a series under the Association's auspices. A starting point would be the constitutionally mandated "State of the Discipline" report that is prepared by a committee every 10 years. In the past, this has been published independently, but it clearly could/should be published by the Association. Despite our recent participation in the NINCH-organized Building
Blocks Project on humanities and technology, comparative literature seems to lag behind in this area. It is unclear if comparatist scholars are simply less involved in technology-oriented research by coincidence or if there is some disciplinary factor at work. Or, it may just be that those comparatists most involved in technological research are not members of ACLA so have not come to our attention. We formed a technology committee in the ACLA this past year, but so far it is simply a list of names, and nothing has been undertaken. The question of outreach looks similarly bleak; K-12 has been a wasteland for most of us in the past. Comparative literature is not generally a recognized subject in the schools, although camouflaged as "world literature" it might prove to be relevant and accessible. Other outreach efforts such as in the community have been attempted at the local or institutional level but never in an organized or formal fashion by the Association itself.

It is clear that the issues I began raising in the preceding paragraph relate directly to questions of how we view our mission and role, how we identify ourselves in relationship to academia and the larger society, and the Weltanschauung of our officers and members of our Advisory Board. As in most voluntary associations, it is the leadership that largely determines the course in which the organization develops. In writing this piece, I have become more aware of the lack of information we have from the ACLA members on why they are members, what services are most important to them, and what they want the future of the Association and the discipline to be. We probably should begin with some sort of survey and then use the information to generate a flexible plan of development.

7/01
Two membership issues have faced the American Dialect Society ever since its founding 112 years ago. The first is how to grow a stubbornly ungrowing membership. The second is how to cope with the ungrowth.

To attract members, we've tried everything we can think of. We've kept dues low--just a dollar during our first forty years, and even now just $35 including a quarterly journal and a monograph series. We have offered student memberships for half that. Recently we changed from a quiet, laid-back publisher to a prestigious, aggressive one. We changed the venue of our annual meeting from the Modern Language Association to the Linguistic Society of America for the sake of its more kindred spirits.

We've asked members to nominate candidates and to contact them personally. We've enclosed referral slips for such nominations in our newsletter. We've sent letters to hot prospects offering seemingly irresistible enticements. We've named three Presidential Honorary Members each year, students who get four-year complimentary memberships to encourage them to continue in our field.

Over the past two decades as executive secretary, I've tried to hold the line on dues increases (my rule of thumb is 100 times first-class postage) even as we increase the size and quality of our publications. I've cheerfully responded to every media inquiry, hoping we'd pick up potential members with the publicity. I invented an annual vote on Words of the Year for our annual meeting, and invited the media to that.

Nothing worked.

We didn't lose members, but we didn't gain appreciably either. Here's an overview: In 1889, our founding year, we signed up about 140 charter members. By 1902, we had about 250 individual members. More than fifty years later, in 1955, we had 277.

In all our history, there was just one boom in membership. That came in the early 1970s. In 1971, there were 304 individual members; in 1972, 467; in 1973, 599. At that point, you can imagine how we started dreaming of grand numbers. A committee formed in the wake of this increase set a goal of "a minimum of 1,000 members by November 1978."

But as it happened, the boom was already over. Membership held steady at the new larger level, but once again stubbornly resisted increase. In the quarter century since, the number of individuals who belong to the society has hovered between 500 and 600, holding at 527 in 1984, 526 in 1989, 533 in 1995, and about the same number at present.

The same small steady pattern holds for attendance at our annual meetings. Our founding meeting in January 1889 was attended by 28 people. For the 1916 meeting, 52 were present. In 1920, for the annual meeting at Vassar College, about 70 members were present. Nowadays we're back to around 50. Since we have more members, the percentage who attend the annual meeting has declined. Now it's just a mere ten percent.

Naturally, seeing fellow societies grow while we were standing still, we occasionally thought of it as a crisis. We considered remedies. Maybe our name is too ambiguous or pejorative? There were proposals to change the name in 1912, 1940, and 1976, but none was approved; the proposed alternatives didn't look immune from ambiguity either. There simply is no easy way to label the "Society for Studying the English Language in North America and Other Languages as they Relate to It."

In 1976, a concerned senior member of the society proposed a twelve-step program for revitalizing the society and growing its membership. A year later, a blue-ribbon committee proposed a twelve-step program of its own. Neither program went any further.
When I was named executive secretary in 1981, not longer after our membership had doubled, I was bursting with enthusiasm to grow it further. I had a dream. My dream was to collect about 2,000 members in one or two fell swoops. Then, instead of having to earn a living by teaching, I could get a full-time salary from the society and devote my full attention to promoting further growth. Soon I'd have a secretary or two. And then maybe I'd get the attention of a rich donor who would give us the money for a building in, say, Washington, D.C., where we could also have an interactive Museum of American Dialects.

Well, of course, none of that came about. Not even close. Gradually, instead, I began to face up to the question of how to maintain vitality in a state of ungrowth.

Were we like a scrawny bristlecone pine near the top of the treeline, barely clinging to life year after year amid occasional sunshine and frequent wintry blasts? Or would we be like early mammals in the age of dinosaurs, surviving and thriving underfoot among lumbering giants because of our hot blood and nimble reflexes?

The latter, naturally. So instead of casting aside the trappings of littleness, I began to cherish them. Bigness is great, I realized, but there were some good features of smallness too. First and foremost, our small size allowed us to remain personal. The impersonal, "professional" trends of the 1980s and 1990s passed us by almost without effect. So today, instead of being strictly businesslike and anonymous, we still knew about each other personally. We rejoice in our members' good times and commiserate with their difficulties. Just the other day a member posted on our e-mail discussion list her announcement of the "newest little ADS member":

Brian David Elliott Rogers was born on Monday, Sept. 10 at 1:59 pm after 45 hours of labor, and weighed 6 lb, 6 oz. Mom, ADS member Nancy Elliott, is recovering after a very long hospital stay and will somehow find time to resume her studies of rhoticity in American English 'public' speech.

Many were the ensuing messages of congratulation, intermingled with learned speculation about Brian David Elliott Rogers' future regional dialect.

The personal connections put us out of step with certain modern professional practices. We still know the names of those who submit articles and monographs for publication. Until this year, we also knew the names of those who proposed papers for our annual meeting. (This year we didn't, but the program chair recently phoned me to discuss how to be considerate to the two whose papers weren't accepted. He knows them personally, of course. He will invite them to chair sessions.)

We have only one session at a time during our annual meeting, and most of the proposals for presentations are accepted. So from some of our most active members we get almost annual updates on their research. Newcomers likewise find it easy to get on the program. And our modest budget still allows for a reception after our Words of the Year vote each year. It's called a Bring-Your-Own-Book reception because it's also our book exhibit: Any member is welcome to display her or his own books and order forms. No payment or advance notice needed.

With only about fifty members attending the annual meeting, the necessary records for registration, membership, and luncheon can be carried in the secretary's pocket. No need to hire students or set up a registration booth. Last-minute registrations and luncheon reservations can always be accommodated.

The nominating committee still proposes just one candidate for each office. Our democracy instead comes in an informal way. First, the nominating committee solicits suggestions and self-nominations from the whole membership. Second, and even more important, the Executive Council annual meeting is open to all. Any interested member can attend, and usually about fifteen do, in addition to the nine elected and appointed members of the council. Everyone sits around the same large table, and discussion is open to all. The secretary has to consult the list
of council members to remind everyone who can vote, but the official vote is almost always just a formality; most matters are discussed until everyone (or nearly everyone) agrees.

Operating by personal relations and consensus, we haven't bothered to change our constitution and bylaws since 1980. We've simply made informal adjustments in our practice as needed. For example, without official input, we added a website and an e-mail discussion list. Both were started by volunteers. When the original administrators of the website and the list wanted to relinquish their positions, they issued their own invitations and then chose their own successors. The Council has occasionally expressed its admiration for their accomplishments but otherwise left them to their own devices, including finding their own funding.

And our funding strategy is designed for survival. We're all, or almost all, volunteers. We batten on our respective institutions for our salaries and office space and computer connections and long-distance telephone. We don't spend much for administration, just office and travel expenses for the executive secretary. About four years ago I finally asked ADS to pay for a student assistant. During the school year, this student works four or five hours a week, which is enough to take care of routine administration.

Until just a few years ago, by myself I was able to keep all the membership records, collect all the money, pay all the bills, publish the newsletter, and prepare all the mailing labels for our publications. All this time I was teaching full time at a small college that expects a lot of teaching from its faculty. The records were more than would fit in my hip pocket, but the work really wasn't a strain. Everything I needed for membership records, financial records, and publishing the newsletter fit into a small computer, currently an iMac. (Now, to be sure, some of this is done by our new publisher, Duke University Press, but I still keep busy making arrangements for meetings and publishing our newsletter.)

Our headquarters have been peripatetic, located wherever the executive secretary is. Sometimes that's out of the way. In my 20 years as secretary, just two members of the society have visited me in Jacksonville, Illinois, and even they didn't bother coming to my office. It won't take much to pack up and move the office when the next secretary takes over. In fact, my active paper files now just take up a file drawer or two; most of the records can be put on a Zip disk.

Despite temptations to cronyism, I think we maintain high scholarly standards for our publications and our meetings. It could be hard to reject something by somebody you know, but we know them well enough to encourage them to dig a little deeper or explain a little more thoroughly so we can profit better from what they discover.

We fly under the radar in other ways. We're not incorporated, so we don't pay registration fees. We don't take out liability insurance for our board. We have a lawyer, a friend of mine, who twenty years ago volunteered to give us advice in time of need. This is how many times I've consulted him in these twenty years: zero.

The purpose of the American Dialect Society, I have come to believe, is not to aggrandize itself as an organization, or to distract anyone from their research any more than absolutely necessary to attend to formal matters like filing IRS Form 990 (which indeed we do). Our sole purpose is to encourage and stimulate interest in the study of North American English and to foster communication among those who study it. I am increasingly inspired by Henry David Thoreau. You will remember the beginning of his "Resistance to Civil Government":

I heartily accept the motto,—"That government is best which governs least;" and I should like to see it acted up to more rapidly and systematically. Carried out, it finally amounts to this, which also I believe,—"That government is best which governs not at all;" and when men are prepared for it, that will be the kind of government which they will have.

and from Walden:

If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different
drummer. Let him step to the music which he hears, however measured or far away.
American Musicological Society  
Robert Judd

Introduction

The AMS is a “general” music humanities society whose statement of purpose encompasses the whole range of musical research: “The object of the Society shall be the advancement of research in the various fields of music as a branch of learning and scholarship.” In practice, the AMS tends to attract as members those focusing on historical issues surrounding the classical western music tradition over the past two millennia. The majority of members are professionals (or retired / in training) working in academic institutions. We have about 3,400 members, as follows: regular: 2,087; student: 719; emeritus: 361; joint: 108; other (honorary, complimentary, etc.): 117. This situation has remained stable for the past twenty-five years. Membership issues facing the AMS may be delineated as follows:

I. membership attraction and retention;  
II. the relationship of the annual meeting to society membership;  
III. career-related issues;  
IV. The business side.

Membership Attraction and Retention

There is no doubt that our publications are perceived by the membership as the primary benefit of membership: we publish a journal three times a year, a semiannual newsletter, and a directory. The journal is well-established as an important venue for musical research, and is fortunate in receiving an abundance of highly qualified research from which to choose to publish. (A present concern that is affecting membership adversely is our current situation of having fallen behind in publishing the journal.) We believe that our high-quality journal, published on time, is the main reason we have been able to maintain a stable membership.

The growth of more narrowly based topical societies over the past fifty years has affected the AMS membership to some extent. Other ACLS societies such as the Society for American Music, the Society for Music Theory, and the Society for Ethnomusicology are examples: notably, the SMT “split off” from the AMS about twenty-five years ago. The growth of these and other societies has meant that we have de facto become less general in orientation, although the Society has not confronted the question of whether to acknowledge this in its statement of purpose. If we are to be a sort of “umbrella” society that nurtures other smaller societies, we have not arrived at a well-planned means for doing so: I hope we can discuss this in Boise. The potential is here (via an “affiliates” program, whether for individuals or societies) to increase membership significantly.

While more focused topical societies seem to have proliferated, the opposite seems to be true with regard to local and regional chapters of the AMS. One chapter, based in Philadelphia, recently voted to disband altogether; and our fifteen regional chapters have been stable/stagnant for the past forty years (although provision for new regional chapters is made in the by-laws). There’s cachet in presenting research at our annual meeting that is absent for most of the chapters. In terms of membership, this has meant that what was once a legitimate rationale for joining is now largely absent.

The revolution in electronic dissemination of research has affected membership, but perhaps less than one might expect. We have not moved to the “members only” web site as yet, although that is clearly an option for encouraging (coercing?!) people to join. It would be interesting to discuss the pros and cons of the “open web/closed web” debate.

Annual Meeting and Society Membership
The second most important activity of the AMS is its annual meeting: we regularly receive two or three times more proposals than we are able to accept for presentation. In 1997 we adjusted our annual meeting registration fees to encourage membership, although we do not at present require membership to submit a proposal, nor even to present a paper at the meeting. It is now clear to our community that “it’s a better deal” to be a member if one presents a paper at the meeting. The AMS has not talked strategically about the shift toward the annual meeting as foundation for membership, and it’s clear we ought to; I hope this can be part of our Boise conversation. Areas of discussion include whether to professionalize the meeting even more than currently, with upscale hotel venues and conference planners; and whether to plan on making a significant surplus at the annual meeting in order to fund other expenses of the society.

Career-related Issues

The field has changed over the years: the days when it was relatively easy to get a musicology job if one had a PhD, but those days are gone. Typically, those who get tenure-track jobs nowadays have had one-year replacement positions for a number of years prior. Various departmental strategems have been adopted to help support musicology, but there remains a certain tension and market forces play an important role (uncomfortably so, to some) in maintaining musicology positions. For example, large sections of introductory classes designed for meeting general requirements now may be found at most institutions; but teaching them is sometimes dissonant with the love of learning that we wish to encourage. We are aware of the performative aspect of teaching, and the marketing aspect of “producing” courses that are popular to the general student body; thus courses in popular musics have proliferated over the past twenty years.

This is healthy, in some ways. Music research into various aspects of popular music is on the rise (although there is a topical society dedicated to those matters, and polarization between “us and them” is a danger). But the tradition of musicology for centuries has been that of the amateur pursuing his or her interests, and the rise of pop music study is nothing if not a manifestation of that trend today. In terms of membership, the main tension comes from the elitism/populism opposition: it’s good, in a sense, to be “exclusive,” but inherently contradictory to our goal of broadening membership. The additional ubiquitous opposition of our times, “training” vs. “liberal education,” is part of this puzzle as well (particularly so for those working in music departments). We are thus challenged toward encouraging liberal education in an area where training dominates, and is often (over-)supported by the administration.

The Business Side

The AMS recently crossed over the border between professional and volunteer management: in 1993 we hired a full time administrator to manage the society. Currently, the administrator is .75 FTE, and has an assistant at .5 FTE. With the rise of web and e-mail has come an increasing workload; the demand for member services seems to increase. In a word, members are asking for more services, and fewer members volunteer for tasks. This means that we need to pay for services formerly provided by volunteers or not provided at all, thus our resources are diminished. These issues drive dues upwards, but are overhead categories not easily “sold” to the membership. Since nearly half our individual members pay less than the minimum “regular” dues (they fall into student, retired, or unemployed categories), numerically they resist dues increases. Balancing services and expenses with a view to encouraging members to remain and participate is delicate, to say the least.

Conclusion
Overall, the AMS views “stable membership” akin to “stagnant” membership, and is worried about retaining its current membership and devising means to attract more new members. We do, however, find plenty of opportunity in the current cultural climate, where music in various forms and styles is regularly identified as one of the most important parts of peoples’ lives. Just how we can better connect with these people remains to be seen.

Obviously, many topics for discussion are (too-cursorily) raised here; nevertheless, I hope this incites sufficient reaction to provide stimulus for a fruitful conversation in Boise.
American Philological Association
Adam D. Blistein

Challenges

Individual membership in the APA has been stagnant or has dropped slightly in each of the last 20 years. In general, over that period, the number joining was equal to the number leaving the Society. A particularly disturbing trend in recent years has been the tendency of some noteworthy senior scholars who are still active in the field to drop their memberships. (This group includes the director of my own undergraduate senior thesis.)

These trends were aggravated in recent years by a disruption in billing and member services caused by the closure of the consortium (Scholars Press) that had handled this function for over 20 years. While our new provider (Johns Hopkins University Press) did a good job of taking on this function very swiftly, there was a six-month period, early in my tenure, when it was difficult (and sometimes impossible) to join the society, renew dues, or change address information.

We have some members who teach at the secondary level even though there is a major society (American Classical League) serving those Classicists. The bulk of our potential members teach at the college/university level or are graduate students there, and there is no other national society serving that audience. Ancient historians might belong to the AHA, and ancient philosophers might belong to that APA, but people at the college/university level interested in Classical languages and literature have no other national society to join. While our basic situation is thus favorable, we face the following obstacles:

1. Independent regional societies are sometimes very strong. Many Classicists join these societies instead of the APA or at a minimum show greater loyalty to these societies. This trend was exacerbated in the past by APA's perceived indifference (hostility?) to academics outside of elite institutions. Regional society meetings are attended by both high school and college teachers and are seen as more intimate and collegial. In some cases, the scholarship presented is considered to be on the level of our annual meeting.
2. The APA publishes an important journal (one of the oldest in the field) but it's an annual. The important quarterlies in field are published either by university presses or by regional societies. Members in the regional societies regularly receive discounted rates to these quarterlies, thus further strengthening those ties at the expense of the APA.
3. The field relies on the APA placement service, and this service is therefore a major member benefit. However, many consider the annual meeting to be little more than a hiring hall, and when members don't need the placement service, they can lose interest in the society.
4. The society has operated at a deficit for the last few years so that every new expenditure needs to be examined carefully. This sometimes limits what we might do to increase visibility, publicity, etc.

Opportunities

The field of Classics "bottomed out" at the college/university level in the early '90's, but now seems to be enjoying a modest renaissance. In less than 2 years on the job I have learned of several new programs starting at institutions where none existed before, but only one department threatened with closure (and that department now stands a decent chance of surviving).

There is a substantial surge of interest in Classics, for the most part Latin, at the high school level. There is a significant shortage of Latin teachers at that level.

We believe that the arrangements we made to replace Scholars Press will, in the long run serve to recruit and retain members. Having Johns Hopkins University Press handle member...
services and our journal means that the latter will appear in Project Muse. Our books will now be produced by Oxford University Press, and the Press is already handling our back list. Oxford is the most important academic publisher in the Classics.

There has always been some public interest in classical civilization (e.g., Gladiator and even Tom Stoppard's new play, Invention of Love). The APA is starting to tap into that interest by developing programs of "outreach." In some cases this "outreach" is simply to high school Latin teachers and to academics in related fields. (We're in the process of reviving our affiliate status at the MLA, for example). But we also want to find ways of reaching interested laypeople through a speaker's bureau and a newsletter. I believe that these efforts are a membership recruitment/retention tool in two ways: Academics appreciate the fact that we are actually starting to do something about the broader interest in the field that they always felt existed. Lay people may be induced to join.

The APA is shedding its "elitist" image.

1. In the society's 130-year history I am only the second full-time executive director, and am (almost certainly) the first chief administrative officer who came to the job from a purely administrative rather than a faculty position. While some of my predecessors had significant administrative as well as faculty appointments at their institutions before becoming Secretary-Treasurer, the field regarded them as academics first. I therefore represent an obvious break with a past that was perceived to be elitist and exclusionary.

2. I regularly attend regional meetings where I mount a small display of APA materials, including membership forms, and occasionally give talks about trends in the field.

3. One of the two staff people I hired has a recent Masters degree in Classics. She handles the display at other regional meetings and occasionally still gives scholarly talks at them.

4. Recently, our Presidents have been willing to attend regional meetings as well. This is particularly effective because it sends the message that a top-rank scholar from a first-class institution considers these meetings important.

5. Even before I was hired, the society started implementing "outreach" programs designed to make the Classics interesting to people other than scholars. I have been able to move some of these programs forward.

The APA has recently taken on responsibility - vis-à-vis the NEH - for major projects in the field (including the field's essential bibliographical annual). We would have benefited from doing so a long time ago, but this was impossible logistically. These projects are an administrative drain and sometimes a financial one as well, but they contribute to the stature of the society and give scholars a reason to belong.

Several of my far-sighted predecessors built up a considerable endowment which has allowed the Association to incur expenditures well beyond its regular income and move gradually to a full-time chief administrative officer. Despite the deficits described above, we can consider implementing new programs provided that they offer promise of restoring balanced (or surplus) budgets in a few years. These new programs also give Classicists reasons to join the society and remain members.

The substantial number of established Classicists who are not currently members of the society is an easily identified pool of potential members. Many were members at one time. In another society I managed a recruitment campaign that successfully targeted a similar audience through a fairly simple letter-writing campaign. The key to the success of the campaign seemed to be to have the recruitment letter signed by the Association President (a well known scholar) rather than the chief administrator.
The Society for Cinema Studies membership figures reflect stability or growth since its 1959 inception. Membership totals for the past few years are:

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While the number of members has increased so has the variety of professional profiles they represent. These changes can be linked to a number of factors, most of which can be subsumed under three: the cross-disciplinary nature of cinema studies; their dependence on technology; and social movements of the past quarter century.

**Cross-disciplinary Studies**

Many of the most recently recognized disciplines in the academy—African American Studies, Women’s Studies, Ethnic Studies, Environmental Studies, for example—have been inter- or cross-disciplinary. This is true of cinema studies. Embracing or being embraced by multiple disciplines has resulted in a wide range of academics from different fields becoming interested in film studies; these include scholars from traditional areas such as history, sociology, and English, as well as those from newer disciplines like American, ethnic, cultural, and women’s studies. The interests of these scholars often intersect, with, in most cases, everyone involved benefiting, including SCS.

SCS members, on the other hand, working in various departments—theater, English, art, communication, foreign language, and media departments among them—have, in the process of interacting with colleagues, brought some of them to SCS. Thus, the cross-disciplinary nature of cinema studies has a built-in entrée to a larger number of academics than those identified with film or cinema departments. Obviously, this situation is not unique to SCS or film studies, but given the short history of the discipline and the relatively small number of departments whose primary focus is film study, SCS depends on the field’s cross-disciplinary connections to thrive.

**Technology**

Film studies’ roots in technology have generated much of the SCS’s growth. Initially open to bona fide film or cinema scholars, with the ascent of television to the status of a major means of delivering films to its audiences and of a recognized form of popular culture worthy of academic study, SCS decided, after fiery debate, to embrace television scholars. Since then, SCS has continued to widen its focus to encompass other media, most recently including CDs, DVDs, and other electronic innovations. These latter changes are evolving far more quickly than those prompted by the arrival of television, VCRs and video, but the Society seems more adept at making room for them, perhaps because many scholars who began with film study as their primary interest have moved into these other modes. This research has moved them in these new directions, but so have job opportunities and other market contingencies.

**Social Movements**

SCS was not particularly quick in its response to all of the civil rights movements and activities of the past several decades, but it did support feminism in important ways from the early 1970s. In fact, feminist film theory had a significant impact on the field as a whole, an impact that was reflected in SCS membership and in the tenor of its conferences for over a decade. A bit later,
gay, lesbian, and bisexual scholars were also openly welcomed into the organization in significant numbers and had a similar presence at SCS conferences. It wasn’t until the late 1980s and the 1990s that the Society made a concerted effort to become more open to African, Asian and Latino scholars working in film. Through the implementation of a caucus system, individuals in all of these traditionally underrepresented groups have been encouraged to help shape SCS. A danger exists, however, if SCS encourages these culturally diverse members to enhance the Society’s own image without responding in very meaningful ways to the members’ potential contributions to the Society. SCS’s ability to accommodate members who are branching into new forms of audio-visual media suggests it can also respond effectively to a broader base of ethnically diverse members, though its success in this area has not been as impressive as in others.

An additional consideration and recurring topic of discussion, usually in conjunction with conference planning and representation is the number of senior members vis a vis student members. Though some council members have expressed concern that the number of senior scholars participating in the conference has dropped, other council members invariably counter this with the value of student members to SCS’s overall health and to its future. There have been no studies determining an ideal ratio of professors to students either as members or as conference presenters.

Another matter of SCS interest and outreach is international membership. International members have been encouraged through participation in the annual conference as well as recent initiatives to sponsor or co-sponsor conferences overseas. Canadian cities have been the site of several of the Society’s annual conferences, with one result being, as expected, an increase in participation by Canadian scholars.

I assume the membership issues that continue to be raised by the Society for Cinema Studies are similar to those raised in other learned societies. SCS’s focus on the moving image, however, places it in a somewhat unusual position as it is challenged by and benefits from its cross-disciplinary identity and its ties to technology.
The Economic History Association, like any number of other organizations, has been losing membership. This is a concern, but the decline has not yet been so large or rapid as to cause the Board of Trustees to take any major action. Whether the situation will continue in this same way remains to be seen. Will membership continue to dwindle so slowly that no major action will need to be taken for the foreseeable future? Or will the decrease accelerate and precipitate a financial crisis?

The changes in EHA’s individual membership can be seen in Figure 1, where it can be compared to trends in membership in, and subscriptions to, several related organizations and journals -- the Economic History Society (EHS), the Cliometrics Society, and the journal Explorations in Economic History (EEH).

Membership In Selected Economic History Associations (Figure 1)

The slowness of the decline in EHA’s membership is apparent, especially in comparison to that for the Economic History Society, the European counterpart to the EHA and an organization with which we offer joint memberships. Although the decline in EHA’s membership has been gradual the cumulative effect is substantial; membership is down about 20 percent from its peak in 1981 Nevertheless, it would appear that the gradual nature of the decline has influenced the Board’s lack of enthusiasm for taking up the matter in a serious and forceful way. That attitude has been reinforced by the fact that our revenues have increased so there is no sense of financial urgency yet. This has changed a bit recently, as individual membership revenues declined for the first time last year and as we are starting to bear an increasing portion of the costs of operating the journal’s editorial offices. And, of course when an electronic version of the journal becomes available through university libraries, the membership declines are likely to become greater and revenues could be threatened more seriously.

I am not sure that ‘challenge and opportunity’ are the right words to describe the situation and how one deals with it, but keeping in that spirit let me say the following.

One challenge is to determine why people join scholarly organizations in general and ours in particular. If we knew why they joined in the first place, we might be in a better position
to retain some current members. Retention is of some importance; in each year during this period of decline we have gotten new members, but just not in sufficient number to offset those who do not renew. So if we had a higher retention rate, our membership rolls would probably have increased. Of course some of these non-renewals are a consequence of aging, and it might be worth investigating the extent to which the age distribution of our membership is changing in ways that make decline likely to continue or not. Some part of the explanation for an aging membership is that economic history as a field may not be expanding as rapidly as it did in the 1960s and 1970s when the “new economic history” was in vogue. It may be worth investigating the historical pattern of new members versus lapsing members.

If we knew why people joined, a subsequent challenge would be to convey pertinent information about our association to potential members. As an example we may want to target members of the International Society for the New Institutional Economics. The “New Institutional Economics” like the New Economic History in decades gone by is a growing interdisciplinary field with intellectual ties to economic history. More generally, the evidence in Figure 1, as well as trends in our own membership, reveal where those potential members might be -- abroad! Although the trend in membership in our British counterpart shown in Figure 1 is gloomier than ours, an equally compelling point is that the EHS’s membership is 50 percent larger than ours, so perhaps we have not yet tapped into that market as much as possible. A somewhat similar situation is likely to exist elsewhere as well. Our counterpart organizations in other European countries or in Australasia may be smaller than EHA, but we still have not attracted as many of those members as we might. I say this even though we have been a highly international organization for a long time. In 1988 (and earlier as well although the data are not as clear and complete), 19 percent of our membership was from outside North America. In 2000 that share was 27 percent. Foreign scholars have been a source of growth since 1988 (and perhaps before as well); an increase of 80 in their number just about offset the decline of 90 American members. So clearly we have been doing something right that appeals to foreign scholars, and we need to figure out how to capitalize on that.

Alternatively, it is conceivable that there are no additional members out there! That may not be such a bad thing; being larger would not seem to be a goal in itself. So we also need to ask ourselves why we want to get larger. In our case, we have a high-quality, flourishing journal whose editors can be quite selective in what they choose to publish. A larger membership is not likely to change the quality of that publication much, but of course might provide the opportunity to publish other journals with a different focus. Our annual meeting is a size that may seem small to some, but others seem to like the size for ease of networking. And, the Board of Trustees has made explicit decisions to limit the number of papers and sessions, which in effect is a decision to retain the small meeting size. We are, it should be noted, fortunate in that our members also participate in the much larger meetings of some related organizations (viz. the American Economic Association, the American Historical Association, the Social Science History Association, and so on). So the gradual decline may simply force us to confront perhaps a more fundamental question, namely what is the appropriate size for our society.
Lee Formwalt:

Good morning. I am Lee Formwalt with the Organization of American Historians (OAH). Having just completed two years as Executive Director of OAH last month, there are times when I look back and think, “My God, has it only been two years?” It seems like it has been a lot longer, and yet, as I look around this group, I realize that I am still, by comparison, a new kid on the block.

When I was hired, one of the concerns of the search committee and the Executive Board was the OAH’s stubbornly, unchanging membership—and I am using Alan Metcalf’s phrase there. We were at 8500 members, we would lose one thousand members a year, we would gain one thousand members a year, and we had been doing this for a decade or so. One of the tasks that have preoccupied me for the last two years is how do we retain more members—or, bring in more new members, or preferably, both.

Actually, this is not a new problem for me. Two years before that (1997), I was appointed graduate dean at Albany State University (GA), where the president had charged me with the task of improving student retention rates and increasing recruitment efforts for new students. I wish I could report to you how successful I was in raising the number of students at Albany State, and the number of members of OAH. However, in neither case was there an increase or a decrease, just that stubborn stability.

So I was eager to deal with this issue of membership when it arose, and I am also anxious to see how the rest of you are dealing with these issues, especially those who are experiencing an increase in numbers. This has been a real learning experience for me, and I come away from this feeling less frustrated at failing to increase the size of OAH. Tom Weiss and I agreed that in making some general observations here at the beginning, on the challenges and opportunities statements, I would concentrate on the challenges, or the things that seem to be what we faced in the past, and he would focus on the opportunity, or more looking towards the future.

One of the things that struck me as I looked at the three groups—declining membership, increasing membership, and stable membership—was that each group had in it associations of all sizes. So bigger organizations like the Association of American Geographers (AAG) with 6500 members, and little ones like the American Comparative Literature Association (ACLA) with one-tenth that number of members, were declining in membership numbers. The American Anthropological Association with its 11,000 was increasing in size, as was the Society for Cinema Studies (SCS).
with its 1650 members. Those of us with stable members range in size from OAH with 8500 members to the 530 members of the American Dialect Society (ADS).

Another thing that struck me—if you allow me a little postmodernist observation here—is that how we characterize ourselves may be different from how others may characterize us from looking at the data. Most—if not all of the associations that describe themselves as having declining numbers of members—had numbers in 1999 very comparable to 1989. Each had experienced growth in the early 1990’s, a trend that stopped after 1995. Shrinking numbers in the late 1990’s, however, were returning to where the numbers had been ten years earlier. OAH numbers followed a similar pattern, and yet I described my organization as stable. I am not sure what this means, other than that the organizations with decreasing numbers and the organizations with stable numbers may have more in common than their separate categorizations imply.

A number of organizations see their membership numbers affected by the relationship of large umbrella organizations in the field to the more specialized groups, or regional organizations. The ACLA, the Comparative Literature folks, see themselves falling through the cracks between the large, disciplinary organization, MLA, and the narrow, specialty—or boutique—societies. The ACLA is too small to operate as a large, disciplinary group, but not narrow enough for a homogenous group of specialists.

The American Philological Association (APA) faces competition from stronger, regional societies that can provide a more intimate and collegial environment, and whose members frown on the perceived “elitism” of the APA. Even the APA’s job placement service, which draws members looking for a job, is perceived by some of those who already have jobs as a reason not to go to the annual meeting. What should the relationship be between the large umbrella organizations and the smaller, specialized groups? As specialized groups broke off from the American Musicological Society (AMS), they left the AMS—largely the group devoted to classical, Western music—something quite different from its mission. In other fields, the umbrella group has managed to maintain its breadth and professionals maintain memberships in both the broad-based group, as well as the more specialized organizations. However, an association like the OAH is continually concerned about members dropping their OAH membership while retaining their membership in organizations like the Southern Historical Association, the Western Historical Association, or any number of other specialized groups.

The relationship of mission to membership is another thing that I noticed. Bill Davis certainly stressed this in his discussion of the American Anthropological Association’s (AAA) recent success in increasing their numbers. A mission statement of an organization needs to be revisited regularly. Bob Judd points out how the AMS’s mission and membership do not match, and raises the question of whether its mission statement should be adjusted to match the current state of the membership and why people join the AMS. Or, should the AMS change so it can fulfill its current mission? This kind of soul searching—what is our purpose and who should be our members?—is something that all of us need to do on a regular basis.
Related to this is the need to survey our members to find out why they joined and what they want from our organization. Many of us simply do not know why our members join. That makes it very difficult, then, to address their needs or wants. Anecdotally, we hear from our members, often when they are unhappy, but many of us have not systematically surveyed the membership—an important first step if we are trying to maintain a stable membership or, in fact, increase it.

A number of organizations recognize the relationship of dues to membership, both in terms of size of dues and the dues structure. While some organizations pride themselves on keeping their dues low—and I love the rule of thumb of one executive director of keeping dues to a hundred times the first class postage rate. While many of us try to keep dues low, Bill Davis challenges the common belief that membership numbers go down when dues go up. He argues that membership numbers go down “because the perceived value of benefits received by members and potential members are less than the amount of member dues.” Another issue is dues structure. Should there be a uniform dues amount, aside from say, discounted student rates? Or should members pay according to their ability to pay? That is a sliding scale based on salary, and does this scale increase revenue by charging higher paid members larger dues, or does it increase membership by allowing larger numbers of lower paid members to join at lower, affordable rates? Or does it do both? Recent figures for the OAH, which has an income based dues structure, indicate that we are experiencing an increase in the number of members at the higher salary rates and a decrease in the number of members at the lower salary rates. Some may argue that equity alone would support a sliding scale dues structure. Organizations usually start out with a uniform rate and eventually debate whether to move to a sliding scale rate. Some members of the Association of American Geographers, who have not renewed, say that they want to get rid of the income based dues structure. Have other groups with a sliding scale dues structure experienced that criticism? Is that a contributing factor to declining membership? That is something we can discuss this morning.

Other options designed to retain members and attract new members is giving the members the option of what services or products they wish to have included in their membership. This “cafeteria style” or “bundling” comes highly recommended by the American Anthropological Association. Like a lot of change, however, this is resisted in some quarters by those who fear one of our important products may not get chosen by our members, should we give them the option. If that is the case, my question would be, why don’t our members want it, and should the product or service be changed or improved, heaven forbid, discarded?

As we look at increasing the number of members, we often consider targeting groups outside of our traditional base—the academy, as we found out yesterday with Cathy Rudder’s remarks. In the last ten or twenty years, there has been a growing effort to reach out to practitioners and frequently, to teachers. What impact does this have on a learned society where the focus has traditionally been on research and scholarship? Does this have a negative impact, by minimizing, in some ways, the importance of scholarship, or does it have a positive impact? I would argue for the latter and suggest that it has a positive impact in a couple of ways. For one thing, it makes it easier for the scholarship to be more widely disseminated through pre-collegiate teachers. And, scholars can benefit and learn something, especially as far as pedagogy is concerned, from pre-collegiate teachers.
The OAH has been proactive in increasing the involvement of pre-collegiate teachers and public historians in the organization. We have had to put our money where our mouth is for colleagues outside academe are quick to point out where we speak but do not take action. So, pre-collegiate teachers, community college, and four-year professors and public historians are part of our governing structure. They sit on our executive board with the leading scholars in the field and together they address much better the problems facing the entire profession. It is one thing to bring practitioners and others into our organization, but how do we keep them there? This is of concern to groups like the Geographers, which had a very diverse membership and is now losing members who are outside of the university.

Two other groups that American learned societies include among their members are graduate students and scholars living outside the United States. There seems to be a universal concern to include graduate students in our learned societies, and to in fact, subsidize their memberships. Graduate students in OAH, for example, receive the publications that cost us $32 a year to print and deliver by mail, and yet we charge them only $25. Many other organizations do a similar thing. I was quite impressed with the success of the American Comparative Literature Association in attracting so many graduate students to their annual meeting that they have to limit the number of graduate students attending in order to have enough full-paying members to cover the cost of the meeting. That is success, I guess. The Medieval Academy of America gives its graduate students a free first year of membership, and it seems to work, since 70% of those renew the next year. They also provide dissertation scholarships, as do a number of other learned societies.

In addition to graduate students, learned societies are also increasing the number of international members. Some, like the Economic History Association (EHA) with 27% of its members outside of North America, are not sure what it is that has made them so successful in attracting overseas scholars. The Society for Cinema Studies realized that when they held meetings in Canadian cities, they increased the number of Canadian members, but when the OAH held its 1999 annual meeting in Toronto, it had one of its lowest turnouts in memory. It may be that there are more Canadians proportionately that pursue cinema studies than practice American history.

For many of us, our annual meeting is the second most important thing that we do after publishing our scholarly journals, but how do we use the annual meeting in terms of membership. Some, like the OAH, require presenters to be members, and use the annual meeting to generate revenue for the organization’s budget. Others, like the AMS, do not. Some place great value on the spirit of the scholarly community. The American Dialect Society, for example, changed its meeting venue to a setting with more kindred spirits. Is the meeting a benefit of membership? Should it be used to increase membership? Valid questions that we have answered in a variety of ways.

A challenge that many of us are facing now is how to we deal with the new technology? Will the electronic publication of our journals undermine our membership figures when scholars at universities can gain free access to our published scholarship, something they used to have to pay for? It is probably too early to tell for sure, but the experience so far of the American Historical Association (AHA) and the Organization of American Historians does not indicate serious hemorrhaging, but this
will require careful monitoring. We also need to examine carefully the issue of open or closed websites. The AMS site is open, while the OAH and the AHA have gated their journal websites.

Another theme that came up again and again in these membership essays was the role of volunteers. Some of us, particularly the smaller associations, rely heavily on volunteer support. In some cases, the day to day operations are supervised by a volunteer. Yet many have noticed over the last decade or so a decline in volunteer spirit. Our members demand more of the organization, and volunteer less time. That helps account, I think, for more and more organizations securing the services of paid Executive Directors. Do we need professional help in building our membership? The very successful example of the American Anthropological Association would seem to indicate that. The Association of American Geographers is considering that, but the dilemma for many of us is can we afford it? Others might respond can we afford not to do it?

As we focus on membership issues, we see a range of opinions on how important this is for the life of our associations. At one end, we have the AAA report, which at times sounds like a motivational talk, giving us sixteen rules to live by, concluding with “watch out for the competition, lest they eat your lunch.” At the other end, we have the American Dialect Society report, quoting Thoreau about walking to the beat of a different drummer, and somewhere in between, we have the Society for Ethnomusicology (SEM), recognizing the importance of membership growth, but expressing concern about building the discipline and community of scholars. As long as our efforts to increase membership contribute to building the discipline and community of scholars and does not become the ultimate goal itself, we should be able to strengthen our learned societies, both in terms of member numbers and the new word we carry away from this retreat, “solidary” [benefits].

**Thomas Weiss:**

I never thought that on an occasion of talks of this sort, that I would say that Lee stole all my good lines, since he was writing about the past and I am writing about the future. The fact of the matter is some of this is going to sound quite similar to what Lee just said. The title of my talk is obviously “Membership Issues: Opportunities,” but I thought of subtitling it “More Members at Any Cost,” which was one suggestion I got from some of the readings. Or, something I would like to suggest that you think about is “More Members or Better Members?” Maybe that should actually be “More Members or Better Membership?” In any case, what I liked was the optimism of the planning committee when they came up with this idea to take all these issues and then say, “Go look at the challenges and opportunities.” Perhaps if we were all coached well enough, that might be what we did.

On the issue of membership, it looks to me as though the discussion of opportunities lapsed into a problem-solving mode. If our membership has been declining, how can we stop the decline? If it has been steady, how can we turn it around? If it has been growing, how can we keep it going? The ones that have been successful, as Lee just pointed out, especially the American Anthropological Association, obviously devised some strategies that seemed to work. That would be one paper we could focus on and talk about in the breakout section, and I will suggest that again at the end of my talk.
In some cases, some of the successful ones just happened to be lucky. That was the sense I got from the Cinema Studies program. They just happened to have a product that turns out to be of great interest to new, emerging, multi-disciplinary studies, so they just suddenly got members coming out of the woodwork that they didn’t even know were there. Nevertheless, in the process of talking about how to deal with what we see as our membership “problem,” I think people stumbled upon things that I am going to call opportunities rather than solutions. You may think of them as heresies after you hear them.

I thought that to try to make this a bit more lighthearted, I would come up with a David Letterman list of ten things we should do in regards to membership issues. For those of you who no longer watch television, David Letterman is a late night talk show host, and every night he has the “top ten things” (that are written by his staff in Omaha, Nebraska, or somewhere like that). He starts out with the tenth as the least important or the least funny, and then moves up the list. I couldn’t come up with ten that I could make humorous, but the list would have included things like, “Do you really want a more diverse membership? Do you really want more practitioners? More publicity? More outreach? Lower prices?” That was about when I ran out of steam, except that had I filled it all the way into number one, that item would have been, “Do you really want to have more members?” This would relate closely to number two, which is “Wouldn’t you rather have more revenue?” The two are related, as you will see.

I also thought since I am an economist, I ought to talk about revenue and dues a little bit, and the consequences of changing the latter. Luckily, there were some pretty useful items in some of these essays, covering quite a range of opinion. The Association of American Geographers made an extensive investigation of the decline in its membership. Among the possible factors was “the cost of AAG membership.” I presume that meant dues were too high, or went up. The American Comparative Literature Association seems certain that the doubling of their dues in 1995 explains to a large extent the decrease in membership from 820 in 1994 to around 700 today. The American Anthropological Association—and Lee has, as I said, already stolen my lines—suggests that we question the common wisdom that membership numbers go down when dues go up. They point out that “numbers decline when the perceived value of benefits received by members and potential members are less than the amount of members’ dues.” This is like someone has intuitively figured out what the Demand Curves are all about in economics. Way to go! That does not mean, however, that when prices go up, you are not going to lose some members.

Dues of the Economic History Association—I did not put this in the essay I submitted—have been unchanged since 1995, and at that point, they had just been increased by $5. In fact, our dues have not really changed much since 1987. Our real dues, adjusted for inflation, are lower today than they were in 1987. The common wisdom, or as we all think it should be, our membership should be up, or at least not have declined, but the fact is that our membership has slowly eroded over those years.

In the wrap-up session yesterday, someone brought up in a very blatant way, will we price ourselves out of the market? Lee and I were talking earlier, and he said,
“The OAH dues are as high as they can possibly go.” I think they might want to rethink that.

Just listening to those quotations, clearly the relationship is not as simple as one might think. We all know that there are any number of things that influence decisions to join or not join the associations. Price alone is not the only one. The fact is it is probably much less of an influence than many of you think. The AAG report, for example—and maybe I missed it because Lee quoted something in there about the dues structure—listed twelve reasons cited by those people who dropped their membership. The cost of membership was not among them. In spite of the speculation in the beginning of that essay about what might have brought this about, cost of membership was not one of the reasons cited by the members.

Now I could, at this point, try to explain to you about the Demand Curves—why they look the way they do and why they shift around. We talk about them in economics as movements along the Demand Curve versus shifts of the Demand Curve. Some of you may dimly recall that stuff from some Intro Econ class you took five or ten years ago. I will spare you that, though, and try to make a useful point involving Demand Curves in a different way. I want to do it by considering the Comparative Literature case. In fact, if I actually tell you everything I have written down here, you will see that I am going to pick on Elaine Martin’s essay quite a bit. I am doing that in order to make Maggie Reynolds an honest woman. Maggie has been telling many of you that I am a mean, rotten scoundrel, and I guess I might as well prove it to you here.

In any case, in Elaine’s essay, the Comparative Literature Society raised their dues, and sure enough, membership went down: 820 to 700 were the figures. If you look more carefully, however, you’ll also notice that total revenue actually went up from about $20,000 in 1994 to $35,000 today. A different problem that Elaine complains about is the net revenue for them actually went down because—well, I’ll come back to that in a moment.

The fact that the membership went down but revenues went up reflects something in economics about Demand Curves that we call the elasticity of Demand. It is not as simple as I make it out to be. Those changes happened over five or six years, so it is not entirely a question of elasticity, but I think it will still make the point that you might want to keep in mind and think about in the future. In plainer English, elasticity means responsiveness, so in the American Comparative Literature case—and I suspect that this is the case for almost all of our memberships—the pertinent portion of our Demand Curve is relatively inelastic. There is not a lot of response. If you lowered your rates, you might get few more members, but probably not very many, and maybe none. If you think about the long term decline and the real price of the EHA dues and we are not getting any more members, it could be that there is a lot of inelasticity to our Demand Curve. On the other hand, if you raise your rates—which we are all afraid to do—you may think you will lose members, but an inelastic demand curve will cause the decline to be less, perhaps much less, than you might think. That is the nice thing about inelasticity. As I said, it is more complicated than that, but the key part of it is—and again, economists, if you remember back to your “intro” classes, talk about all these things in percentage terms most of the time—but the practical side of it has to do with total revenue. If your demand is inelastic, then
when you raise your dues, you will lose some members. It is very unlikely that it is what we call “perfectly inelastic” -- which would mean no change. Inelastic means that there is some change, but not a lot. You will lose some members, but your total revenue will go up because all those remaining members now each pay more in dues.

If your demand were elastic, that is more responsive, then if you raised your rates, membership would also go down, and by quite a bit. In that case, your total revenues will also go down. Raising dues will cost you membership no matter what, but in one case you might get more revenue, in the other case you will lose revenue.

You do need to figure out whether your Demand Curve is elastic or inelastic before you go ahead and try some of these things. The point of it, though, is that this is not just a guessing game. These are the definitions of what we mean by elasticity, inelastic, and inelastic Demand Curve. We can also think of them as the rules of the game, and if you can figure out whether your Demand Curve is elastic or inelastic, than you have some options.

There are many other things that influence your Demand Curve, or your demand for membership in your association. What they do, is influence whether this Demand Curve is shifting around. Maybe a way to think about it in plainer language is to ask if the market for your particular niche in the intellectual world is growing or contracting? The odds are that these are much more powerful forces affecting membership than changes in price. Because they do influence the outcome a great deal, it is easy to miss the consequences of raising dues. This is why the American Anthropological Association may think, “Well, we can raise our dues and we have such a great product, we are not losing any members.” As they raised their dues, if nothing else were going on, they would have lost members; but something else was going on. I don’t know what it was, but apparently people were becoming more interested in anthropology and were buying into it, even though the price was going up.

The thing about inelasticity is that even though all these other important things are going on, at any point in time, you still have something to think about. You cannot control a lot of those other factors. What you can control are your dues. What are the consequences of that? One possibility is that you could raise your dues and actually increase your revenue.

Let me go back to the Comparative Literature case. They doubled their dues because they joined some international organization, and that required that they pay some money into that organization. They also adopted a journal, so they had to pay for that as well. These costs went up by $28, but they raised their dues by only $25, not quite covering all the increased costs. Perhaps they thought carefully about this and said, “We cannot raise our dues anymore,” or “Only up to this point will we maximize our revenues.” Not to belittle the economic consultant they might have hired, but I do not think that is what they actually did. I thought they probably figured out, “Well, $50 looks like a nice, round number, versus $25, so let’s go with that.” And they lost some members. Suppose they had raised their dues to $53 instead of $50, or even more generously to $55. They would have covered all the increased costs and probably had a little extra revenue beyond that. Yeah, they may have lost another ten members, but the remaining ones again would be paying in more revenue.
Lindy Biggs is here and I can imagine she’s going to say, “Oh God, that is just like an economist.” Those are just numbers to economists, to us, these are people. These are ten people who are dropping out of our organization. The odds are those are those indolent benchwarmers that Cathy was telling us about. They are not just numbers, they are indolent benchwarmers.

Why is this an opportunity? Why have I gone on a great length about this? You have a choice to make. You could, conceivably, raise your revenues, lose a few of those indolent people, have more revenue and be able to do more things for the members that are really actively engaged and interested in the community of scholars that your society is set up for. Cathy Rudder asked—when she was talking about the big increase in the net worth of our associations—what is the money being used for? I presume it is being used for good things, and if so, then maybe you want more of it to build even more community.

One of the other issues Lee and I talked about was, in his case, they use revenues from the meetings to subsidize other aspects of the organization. That is not a luxury that all of us have, but I know a number of other organizations do that. In some cases—like OAH’s—it is because they raise revenues from advertising. In other cases, however, if you are making money from your meeting because you are charging a higher registration fee, then what you are doing is taxing those really engaged, community-minded members, to subsidize the activities of the indolent members. Is that really what you want to do? Why not raise your dues, tax some of the indolent members, and subsidize the meetings of those people who are really interested in the field? Again, in the breakout session yesterday, the question came up; can your association survive if it loses university support? The answer, I suspect, is yes, you will survive, but maybe not at the same size or quite the same structure. However, again, the possibility is that you can raise your rates, have a smaller membership but more revenue and be able to cover the cost of those people who really want to remain in the organization.

Let me go back to number one on the Letterman list, which I think is an important question that has been largely ignored by our concerns about maintaining or increasing membership. I think it can be phrased in any number of ways. Why do we want more members? Is bigger always better? What is the proper or ideal size of our particular association?

To make us feel good about ourselves, the fact that we have not really thought much about this does not make us any different from so-called “very successful” business executives. I have actually asked that once at a meeting. As I am in the Economic History Association, I sometimes go to the Business History conference. Often we have a top executive come to give an after dinner talk, and he is always touting what a wonderful business he has, and then we ask him questions. In one case, John Deere was the company, and at the time, very successful, but not as successful as a very, very small company making a particular kind of farm product in Kansas that I happened to know about. I asked him, “Why do you want to keep getting bigger?” These guys are very smooth and they know their material, and when they don’t, they have a way of rephrasing the question. For many of them, this is how they probably got through college. If you rephrase the question enough in an essay exam you will get a C. In this particular case, however, apparently he had never thought about it. So
he said, “I want to make sure that I understand this. You want to know why we want to keep getting bigger?” He literally was completely stumped by this. As, I suspect, we are.

Consider some of the comments made in these essays. The Medieval Academy says, “It is not enough to encourage membership, we need to serve those members better.” I am guessing that might take more money. I would also guess it means a more diverse membership. A more diverse membership could be harder to serve, accommodate and make comfortable, as Cathy Rudder pointed out yesterday.

The American Comparative Literature Association again. They tried outreach activities and discovered that K12 has been a wasteland to them. But suppose they had attracted hoards of new members, all of whom were K12 teachers. On the one hand that sounds attractive—a big boost in your membership—but it would seem to me that it would a great change in the nature and focus of the organization, its publication, and its annual meeting. Is that worth having some additional members?

The Society for Cinema Studies, which has been very successful and seems to understand why they have had some increases in membership, but even they note that their ability to respond effectively to a broader base of ethnically diverse members, has not been as impressive as its response in other areas.

Cathy Rudder asked how can we attract younger scholars? This was especially pertinent for smaller organizations that seemed to have a “serious age problem.” That was her term. How can we make younger scholars more comfortable in our organizations? Maybe we can’t. Some of our organizations are here, as Lee pointed out, because we broke away from other organizations and developed new organizations as the subject matter and methodologies changed. That continues to happen. Perhaps the scholarly and methodological interests of the younger people are just simply too different. What are we willing to sacrifice in order to make them comfortable in our associations?

I know you all think that all economists are extremely mathematical; but some are more mathematical than others. Even in economic history, that is the case. There is a specialized group of economic historians called cliometricians. There are plenty of people in the Economic History association who are not comfortable being around cliometricians. Even though we are a relatively small group, there are a lot more heterogeneity problems setting up the annual meetings than you might think.

Bigger may not always be better, so why do we all pursue it? Again, luckily, some people had other things to say that suggest why it might be better and Lee Formwalt is one of the ones who spelled it out most clearly, because that is what happened to his society. It went from becoming a learned society to a professional organization, and he argues that for OAH—and I suspect he would say this holds for others as well—adding pre-collegiate teachers did not diminish the organization, but rather enhanced it. It facilitated the dissemination of scholarship and helped to improve the pedagogical aspects of university scholars, most of whom never had any teaching training. I believe he also mentioned that bigger association had more influence. It was not clear influence where over what, but it sounds desirable.
Alan Metcalf, on the other hand, now trumpets smallness. After decades of trying to break the thousand-member barrier, he treasures the trappings of littleness. Why would he do that? Well, size allows them to remain personal. He goes on to cite the various ways in which such a small organization functions, not including sending out announcements about births to everybody. That may be one extreme as regards to the desired size of an organization. The same attitude, however, resonates in other organizations. Alan Burdette from the Society for Ethnomusicology points out that even though the success of his position depends on increasing numbers, this can come at the expense of members having opportunities for leadership and a sense of community among members. This seems to be exactly the sorts of things that Cathy Rudder was highlighting as important to members of all associations.

My own organization just held a lengthy debate at our board meeting on whether to alter the nature of our annual meeting in ways that we think would increase attendance, but would reduce the collegiality and community of the meetings that we now have. We compromised, of course, but there is no doubt that we would prefer a smaller meeting, rather than one the size of the OAH or Social Science History or ASSA. It is worth mentioning that all these things differ from small to large organizations. You all know that, so we can come back to that in the wrap-up session if we have to.

That is basically what I have to say. There are many opportunities and issues out there to think about. These two intrigued me. You may feel—and properly so—that the issues I have picked are not really going to help you deal with your immediate problem of what to do about increasing your membership. But if that’s really your concern, then I suggest that you read both the essay by Bill Davis from the American Anthropological Association, or section five of the College Art Association’s Strategic Plan. My immediate reaction to Bill Davis’ piece was that it would be a great starting point and I actually thought about going from there and picking out the key items that seemed to work and we could all talk about our different views on it. So I suggest that might be the thing to do in the breakout sessions. What I want to do is prod you a little bit to think about a bigger issue, which is whether you really want to keep increasing your membership, even though that is sort of what we have been trying to do.

*Challenges and Opportunities Statements: CAO members were assigned topics in a way designed to ensure representation across the range and recent experience of the constituent societies. Discussion groups were based on membership trends: increasing, decreasing, steady. Paperwriters participated according to their assignment. Other participants selected an appropriate discussion group.

**Decreasing:** American Comparative Literature Association, American Philological Association, Association of American Geographers, Economic History Association

**Increasing:** American Anthropological Association, Society for Cinema Studies, Society for Ethnomusicology

**Stable:** American Dialect Society, American Musicological Society, Medieval Academy of America, Organization of American Historians
For this exercise the Medieval Academy of America is classified as having stable membership, because over the past twenty-five years membership has not fluctuated by more than ten percent. But this classification masks real changes during this period and, more seriously, a steady decline beginning in 1995, following a few years of increases. When I became the Executive Director in September 1999, I knew one of my chief challenges would be to reverse this decline. To do so, over the past eighteen months we’ve undertaken several initiatives, and I’m pleased that, by the end of 2000, the decline had been reversed. Our membership, now about 4,250, is the highest in our seventy-six-year history. My thinking about the “challenges and opportunities” of membership issues has thus been shaped by this recent—if quite short—experience.

When I took on my present duties, I was dismayed to discover how many medievalists, including many friends, were not members of the Medieval Academy. For whatever reasons—and I’ve heard too many—many scholars had either not joined the Academy or let their memberships lapse over the past few years. As someone who joined as a graduate student in 1975, I assumed membership in one’s professional organization was a sine qua non of being a professional, but as I thought this through, I realized that the Medieval Academy—and this is surely true of other interdisciplinary organizations—had certain hurdles to overcome to appeal to medievalists in a competitive world of increasing scholarly specialization. We do not, for example, provide the “union card” that is required to learn about jobs, be interviewed, land a position, and then, in subsequent years, interview others for positions—i.e., we provide no job placement service, a major reason why I joined MLA and remained a member long after becoming an English department chair. Nor does one need to be a member of the Academy to present scholarship—or receive hotel discounts—at our annual meetings. There are, furthermore, many annual conferences for medievalists, including two huge international congresses in the United States (Kalamazoo) and England (Leeds) where graduate students often read their first papers. When I asked what the Medieval Academy offered its members, the answer often was, “not much besides Speculum.” But the journal is always available in the library (and, some day, on-line), and, in any case, should a journal be the main reason to belong to a learned society?

As I thought through the challenges of building membership, it seemed to me that we needed to do two things: increase the value of membership and address particular groups that, for whatever reasons, had not joined or were poorly represented in the Academy. To accomplish the first of these goals required a change of thinking in our office. We needed to think of ourselves not primarily as a publisher of a highly respected, if stodgy, journal but as a membership organization that offers member services and publishes a newsletter and books as well as a journal. This shift in thinking required substantive, if sometimes minor, changes. It meant greater care in the office in responding to members, from the way we handled changes in address to the way we responded to more serious concerns. It also meant greater prominence for the Medieval Academy at the many meetings of medievalists both in North America and overseas, an expanded and more interesting newsletter, and a new website to keep our members up-to-date about activities and opportunities in medieval studies worldwide. This has led us to make new arrangements to provide our members with access to on-line bibliographic tools such as Iter and the International Medieval Bibliography. And it has also led to new programs for our members, particularly to serve those in greatest need of assistance. We have expanded travel grants for adjunct faculty and independent scholars, for example, and started two new programs: dissertation grants to assist advanced graduate students, and subventions to help untenured members publish their first books.
We have also tried to recruit particular groups of medievalists. Recognizing the obvious—that graduate students represent the future of the organization—to celebrate our seventy-fifth anniversary in 2000, we offered free first-year membership to graduate students. As a result, 327 graduate students joined within two months, and of these, almost 70% remain members, paying 2001 dues, which we subsidize at $25 a year, the cost, as I remind graduate students, of a large pizza and pitcher of beer. It’s important, of course, to do more than waive fees for one year. Graduate students need to see value in being a member, which is why we linked this offer to our new dissertation grant program and why we will establish a graduate student committee to serve our student members, who now account for about 20% of our membership.

We have also benefited from discounted offers that we have made to others. Earlier this year we offered a 20% discount to non-North American attendees of the Leeds International Congress, and we gained almost 80 new members living in Asia, Australia, and eastern Europe, as well as in western Europe. To serve our overseas members better, we now sponsor an annual plenary lecture and reception at the Leeds Congress. Overseas members, furthermore, can now stand for election to our Council, and one has been appointed a book review editor for Speculum. When in Europe, I have been told by many medievalists that they had assumed one needed to be an American to join the Medieval Academy. I’m working to correct this misunderstanding by stressing that we are an international organization. Already about 15% of our members live outside Canada and the United States, and I’m convinced that international membership is the area of greatest potential growth, since there are no comparable organizations in other countries.

As I write this we are engaged in reciprocal arrangements with two other groups of medievalists. We have offered members of the International Center for Medieval Art a discounted membership in the Academy, and the ICMA has made a similar offer to our members. This offer seeks to encourage more art historians to join the Academy, while I have underscored our interest in visual culture by publishing more art historical articles in Speculum and images of medieval art on its covers. Similarly, we are coordinating an offer with La corónica, a journal focusing on medieval Spain. This is an area of medieval studies we have not served well in the past, so we have taken steps to improve by naming a book review editor to assign books on Iberian languages and literatures, a duty that in the past was handled by the editor for French.

The lesson, for me at least, is that it isn’t enough to encourage members in areas that have been underrepresented in the past by offering discounted membership; we need to serve those members better than we have in the past, whether they are students, overseas medievalists, art historians, or scholars of medieval Spain. It is true that new programs and free membership offers have budgetary implications, but these initiatives are not expensive. They are a relatively small part of our total budget, and, if successful, will provide support for the society into the future. And they are just a small way in which we can be a membership organization for all medievalists, not just the publisher of a journal, no matter how respected.
The Organization of American Historians has about 8,500 individual members and 2,200 institutional subscribers. Despite several different efforts in the past decade the number of individual members has remained frustratingly static. In my short tenure here, two developments—putting the *Journal of American History* online and the Adam’s Mark crisis over the 2000 annual meeting in St. Louis—should have, according to some observers, affected our membership numbers. Many feared we would lose members who disagreed with the organization’s decision to move the meeting out of the Adam’s Mark Hotel while others were sure we would lose members once they found out they could access the *Journal* for free at their university libraries. Yet, our membership numbers did not change—no significant loss, no significant gain.

Numbers are important to us for a couple of reasons. Increase in size should lead to increase in significance and influence of the organization. As we gain more members, our revenue grows and we are able to provide more services to American historians both in and outside the organization. But what does membership and our concerns about increasing its size say about the nature of OAH as a learned society. Does a focus on membership growth affect us as a learned society—and, if so, for better or worse?

For much of its history, OAH has considered itself a learned society for American history. In the last twenty years, however, OAH has also viewed itself as a professional society as well, concerned not only with scholarly matters, but also with the professional issues faced by all historians. In its new mission statement adopted in 1998, OAH committed itself to encouraging excellence in scholarship and to “advancing the teaching and practice of American history at all levels and in all settings.” OAH also encourages “respectful and equitable treatment for all practitioners of history.” With this in mind, some of our more recent recruitment efforts have targeted precollegiate teachers and community college professors.

What happens to a learned society when it becomes a professional organization as well. Can an organization truly be both? Can it be true to the ideals of both a learned society and a professional organization? I think OAH has demonstrated that it can without shortchanging either dimension of its identity.

The fear of some may be that a learned society diminishes its character when it admits members who are not scholars in the discipline, e.g., precollegiate teachers. First, it should be pointed out that there are high school teachers who easily qualify as scholars—they have Ph.D.s and they publish their research. But admittedly, most precollegiate teachers are not scholars. Does their presence vitiate the nature or integrity of the learned society?

I would argue that the presence of nonscholars, in fact, enhances the learned society and assists it in one of its important goals—the dissemination of scholarship. Many precollegiate teachers are thirsting for the latest developments in history so they in turn can convey them to their students. We may have been shortsighted in the past in limiting the dissemination of our scholarship to scholarly journals. The broader the spread of our ideas, the greater the influence we can have on our society and the world. And who better to assist us in spreading the latest ideas than classroom teachers. They convey the latest understanding of the past to their students, some of whom may become intrigued enough to pursue a career in scholarship themselves. But all those who chose other routes will be better citizens simply because they have a better understanding of history and how it shaped our society today.

Attracting teachers to the learned society also elevates the prestige of their vocation. If there ever was an underrated profession it is teaching, and yet most scholars are also in the
teaching business. We share this very important craft with our precollegiate colleagues. The fact that some university professors resist thinking of themselves as colleagues of high school teachers demonstrates how much work still needs to be done in this area. We are all in the business of teaching our students, no matter what level, to have a deeper and better understanding of the past. And we do so, at the high school, undergraduate, and graduate level through critical thinking and research. Instead of seeing what we have in common, however, we more often observe how different we are.

Emphasizing our differences also makes it difficult for scholars to learn from their precollegiate colleagues, who often are much better at the pedagogical aspects of the craft than the scholars themselves. University professors have much to offer high school teachers and those teachers in turn can assist scholars in teaching. Many scholars, in fact, never had pedagogical training. They were expected to just pick it up along the way by observing their professors when they were in college and graduate school. Many scholars, however, could do much better in this regard. They can learn something from their precollegiate colleagues in their learned/professional society.

Membership in learned societies should not be limited to scholars and those who teach outside the university. In my discipline, we have another set of colleagues who practice history but do not teach in a traditional classroom. Public historians can be found in a variety of institutions and businesses. While teachers may teach the past to thousands of students in their careers, public historians in the National Park Service, for example, share the past with millions of visitors. These historians need the access to the latest scholarship that membership in a learned society gives them. And public historians can help scholars disseminate this latest scholarship as broadly as possible.

Should learned societies grow by admitting those who do not engage in research and publishing? I would argue they should. Not only does it help spread the latest scholarship to a broader audience, it will also help insure the financial stability of the organization—and not by sacrificing the integrity of the learned society.

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While searching for some comparative membership numbers in our mid 1950s newsletters, I was struck by the immense challenges faced by the founders of our society. In these typed and mimeographed pages they are preoccupied with the basic task of identifying and locating scholars sympathetic to the nascent discipline of ethnomusicology. At that time most of these scholars pursued their interests in ethnomusicology largely disconnected from others with similar research goals. By methodically fashioning connections between scholars, they created not only a discipline but also a community of engagement where none existed before. While some certainly disagreed on important matters, these disputes did not detract them from their alliance to create the new discipline of ethnomusicology. For many years the society was small enough that nearly everyone knew each other, but within 15 years it had grown to 1,200 members. During this time, scholars worked to establish this newly named field in the curriculums of higher education. The society’s journal and newsletter created a space in which to define the discipline through scholarly debate.

Though the society retained a close-knit feel during its first twenty-five years, it also began to develop an increasingly institutionalized structure. Now over fifty years old, SEM continues to grow, but at an incremental rate, having added only 300 individual members since 1970. This slow growth has allowed the society to retain much of its qualities of community, and conferences remain a medium-sized affair for under 600 people. Until last year, we managed to run the business of the society—journal editing, newsletter editing, website maintenance, conference organization, a publication series, investment management, and office administration—on a purely volunteer basis. These volunteer efforts “from the bottom up” have contributed to this continued sense of community within the institutional structure. Members have typically been more likely to give of their time in support of the society rather than giving their money. We did not start an endowment fund until a few years ago. Recently, however, we crossed a threshold where the management of the society and its activities has become too big to handle by volunteers alone. I do not know if these changes were brought about by the membership increase, by increases in the workloads of scholars, or the decrease in university support for society activity by their employees. In any case, in July of 2000, I was hired as the society’s first Executive Director. Whether or not the need for administrative overhead was brought on by a membership increase, the success of my position depends upon increasing our membership numbers.

Since my hiring I have become involved at some level in most of the society’s endeavors. We need an executive director to help manage its affairs, but paying this person without dipping into our investments will mean increasing membership. My position is currently only half time which is all the society can financially sustain at the moment. Bringing my position to full time would require doubling our current membership of 2400. Thus the success of our society has brought us to a potentially dangerous proposition: Increased membership has in part dictated the need for an Executive Director who must focus on membership growth to help sustain the security of the position. Thus, the work of the business office could potentially serve pure membership growth rather than the building of the discipline and the community of scholars. In the new millennium we are faced with how to retain the intimate scholarly engagement that has characterized our society within an increasingly institutional organization.

For me the solution seems to require carefully charting a course between growth and administrative guidance. One of the joys of my position has been to provide support to the projects
of members, using the centralized and focused nature of my office to nudge things along to completion. I have learned that I will have to say no to some requests that I assume certain committee duties. I have also learned that membership growth in my society will be most successful on an individual level rather than an orchestrated marketing plan. Most people in the field of ethnomusicology are members of SEM already. Increasing membership means developing the field and this will occur as the business office supports the everyday work of scholars to make the field better known, to make it attractive to students, and to support the growth of teaching positions in our discipline. We have remained a discipline with an underdog status. Ethnomusicologists still commonly work in settings where they are they only representative of their field. There is an edge to this marginal status that helps hold us together and unite us in a sense of mission and evangelical zeal.

My discussions with senior members of the society about the role of the Executive Director have often led to this question of community. They recognize that membership numbers and the society’s institutional structures must and will grow, but they also stress that the society must keep members engaged in various leadership and volunteer positions. The quality of membership life does not depend on the services we provide so much as it involves members in the service of our society. That is, members who serve on the council, as committee chairs, or on local arrangements committees not only gain valuable experience but they also create important social and emotional bonds between them, their colleagues and the society. Community is not a passive place but rather an engagement process. The challenge for SEM is to grow our membership and the institution without taking away members’ opportunities for leadership, and thus retain opportunities for institutional, individual and community growth simultaneously. Today, the network is the easy part. The challenge is to keep membership growth and the institutional structures of communication from overwhelming the sense of ownership, cooperation and accomplishment that society membership motivates.

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