

## FORUM AFFAIRS

### The Story Behind the Annual FPS Membership Statistics

Every year in late January, the American Physical Society (APS) holds its Units Convocation at the Physics Ellipse. This is an opportunity to meet and learn from dedicated people during Units' "show and tell" and a live exercise in the "the Unity of Physics". The Units' leadership (typically the Chair and Vice-Chair) is invited to attend this informational get-together. Last year, Peter Zimmerman and I attended, while this year, Laurie Fathe, the incoming Vice-Chair and myself (as outgoing Chair) represented the Forum on Physics and Society (FPS). This is a brief overview of newsworthy items from the recent Convocation, with a special focus on FPS membership statistics and trends.

This year for the first time, Congressional visits were organized preceding the Convocation. The effort was well planned and scheduled in advance with the assistance of Christina Hood, a Public Affairs Fellow working with Mike Lubell. Both Laurie and I participated in this very educational and useful activity, after being briefed on the APS messages concerning timely legislation and initiatives on Science Education and federal R&D funding issues and given useful handouts for our Congressional offices. Each of us was teamed with another APS Unit official from a nearby state, and met with key legislative staff from our Senators' and representatives' offices. In the afternoon, Mike Lubell discussed the APS agenda to effectively enhance "the national appreciation of the importance of Physics" and with first hand impressions and recommendations from those who lobbied Congressional offices.

There were also opportunities for breakouts led by APS staff on information services, improving unit meetings, increasing unit membership and streamlining financial reporting. The informal lunch allowed unit leaders to exchange views based on their experience and to discuss jointly sponsored activities. The Convocation ended with a presentation on APS education programs and partnerships (see **Error! Bookmark not defined.** ).

This year's theme was the need to improve K-12 science education and to increase non-health R&D funding share. A formal agenda was distributed, including a Welcome from the APS President, George Trilling; a report from Judy Franz, APS Executive Officer on the Society structure and activities, as well as formal presentations from the APS Treasurer, Editor in Chief and other APS officers. Martin Blume, Editor in Chief, made a good presentation on APS electronic publishing of traditional and new virtual journals, and of international links maintained. I pointed out to him that it would be desirable to acknowledge the Units newsletters as APS Publications and link them to the APS publications website, so that our international readers can easily access their unit's latest issues and to facilitate browsing. (Activation of a hotlink is now in process).

All units were asked to report on their respective education and outreach activities and program. Several offer student stipends for attending meetings and for presenting papers, an example we might try to emulate if our finances improve. FPS outreach and education efforts do not traditionally go beyond organizing invited and co-sponsored sessions, but we do put on informative and balanced sessions on interesting and timely topics, and have now a much improved and more transparent website. The most vigorous effort to attract and expand student membership was shown by State and Regional Sections. This is an example worthy of our consideration, as suggested below.

The most useful resource distributed is a "Guide for Unit Officers", which contains basic information about the APS membership, number and make-up of units, APS publications, attendance and program of annual meetings and other outreach activities. Official APS 5- year membership statistics were handed out, which highlight the increasing diversification and fragmentation of the physics community, instead of the desired "Unity of Physics". There are now 41,570 APS members, down from 42,662 in FY00, distributed amongst 14 Divisions, 8 Topical Groups, 5 Forums and 8 Sections, all drawing formula funding shares in spite of considerable overlap (chiefly between Topical Groups and larger Divisions). Some Divisions (e.g. Laser Science) and all Sections hold their own meetings and administer separate budgets and membership programs.

The FPS current FY01 membership is 4,496, down from last year's 4,596, vs. 4,749 in FY97-our highest year both by number and in fractional representation. Our fractional membership share is now 10.82%, down from a high of 11.91%

in FY97- when we were the second largest after the Division of Condensed Matter Physics! Compare this with the FIAP membership in FY01, the largest Forum (5,806 representing 12.73% of APS) and consider the budgetary implications. This downward trend in membership is worrisome, and comes in spite of our campaign to increase membership by distributing "Join the FPS" flyers before each FPS session and posting them on tables at last year's March and April meetings last year and by upgrading our website to become better integrated within the APS and more transparent and accessible as well. Our FPS membership roster on Jan 18, 2001 counted 4,235 members with e-mail out of 4,532 members listed, i.e. 94% reachable by e-mail membership messages (presumably having also web access).

What could the FPS Executive Committee do to increase membership? Obviously, we need to enhance our visibility through more and better sponsored and co-sponsored sessions at the two annual meetings in March and April. But I believe that each of us must become actively involved in regional and State Section meetings and bring our flyers (posted on our website) along, speak to students to raise their social awareness and to attract their interest. For years, I have seen the same set of aging activists at FPS sessions leading me to think that we are preaching to the converted. Perhaps organize a competition and post rewards (award a new FPS prize?) for student papers describing their grassroots involvement in physics and society activities and showcase such student efforts in FPS topical sessions at Section meetings.

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**Results of the 2001 Forum Election:**

*Vice-chair:* Andy Sessler  
*Treasurer:* Andrew Post-Zwicker  
*Ex-com:* Sherri Stephan and Brendan Plapp

There were over 700 votes cast. Fortunately, none of the elections was Floridian--the closest was 60 votes.

The bylaws amendments were approved.

*Marc Sher*