

Charles Ferguson's notes from the FPS ExComm meeting at the APS April Meeting, May 2, 2011

Attendees:

Charles Ferguson, Chair  
Peter Zimmerman, Chair Elect  
Pushpa Bhat, Vice Chair  
Valerie Thomas, Vice Chair Elect  
Bo Hammer, Councilor  
David Harris, Member-at-Large  
Pierce Corden, Member-at-Large  
Norman Gelfand, Member-at-Large  
Cameron Reed, Editor-in-Chief  
Brian Schwartz, March Meeting Organizer

On the phone:

Don Prosnitz, Past Chair

Report from Bo Hammer on the Council meeting

- APS is seeking to expand its publishing office. This is a \$40 million effort and will involve major construction. Dealing with environmental impact issues may delay construction and increase costs.
- APS is undergoing a strategic planning process involving the executive office, presidential line, and staff. So far, staff has driven the process and will report to the executive office and presidential line.
- APS membership is at an all-time high with 48,263 members; 25 percent are students; and 22 percent have international addresses.
- FPS is the second largest unit after FIAP (Forum on Industrial and Applied Physics).
- An important challenging question is: What will APS do with open access to scientific literature? APS journals are still among the most affordable. There is a movement to make publicly accessible published results of government-funded research. APS recently started offering its publications free-of-charge at U.S. public libraries to address this concern.
- APS has two new units: the forum on public outreach and the topical group on the physics of climate change. Both of these units' foci and work relate to and overlap with FPS.
- The Council defined a new set of procedures as to how statements can be made of modified and how membership will be allowed to comment during a 30-day period.

Report from Brian Schwartz on the March Meeting's sessions

[He has served very ably as the organizer of the March Meetings' sessions and is happy to continue in that role.]

He began by underscoring his guiding principle of finding and selecting sessions' themes based on the local interests of where the Meeting takes place. For example, this year the Meeting was in Dallas, which has a strong interest in robotics. So, Brian organized a session on that topic. The other Dallas-based sessions included: the physics of rodeo, the science of barbecue, and a performance by the Air Attack Band, which involved a performer in a Faraday suit and Tesla coils.

Brian raised the important issue of: How do we get better publicity for our sessions? We agreed that coordination with the APS Media Office is necessary but not sufficient. He talked about outreach to local press to generate news stories and public interest.

Next year's March Meeting will be in Boston, which should provide tremendous opportunities.

Report from Pete Zimmerman about the April Meeting's Sessions

At this Meeting, FPS sponsored sessions on: EMP and public policy, nuclear weapons at age 65, the physics of oil drilling, status of nuclear arms control, and the awards session. Also, FPS co-sponsored the session on science diplomacy, which unfortunately was the last session on the last day of the conference. The fully sponsored sessions were successful in terms of the quality of the speakers and the level of engagement shown by audience members' questions. But one disappointment was that the awards session had very few attendees—maybe a dozen. **We discussed the need for better advertizing of this and all other FPS sessions to FPS members. So, an action item for future years is to prioritize sending out an email notice to membership.** Also, we need to encourage award winners to write more captivating abstracts for their talks in order to generate more interest in attendance.

At the awards session, John Ahearne, the Szilard lectureship award winner, gave an inspiring talk. Cameron Reed asked him for a copy for possible publication in *Physics and Society*. It was also suggested to post his talk to the FPS and/or APS Website and to publish it or a modified version in *APS News*, potentially as a special back page article.

The Burton Award's endowment has fallen below its threshold level. APS notified FPS's leadership of this issue a few weeks ago. Benn Tannenbaum has recently recommended that FPS request that \$20,000 of our reserve funds be directed into the award's endowment to ensure continued yearly viability. [Benn was not present at this meeting.] Pete suggested that we pass a resolution to support transferring some of that money to the two awards. He wanted to husband about \$10,000 for a potential study [see later notes]. **We need to act on this transfer relatively soon and notify APS.**

Concerning future Meetings' session, **Pete proposed that next year FPS convene a special session called "Forum at Forty"** or something along those lines. In 1971, FPS was formed and in 1972 it held its first sessions at the April Meeting in San Francisco. ExComm members heartily agreed to this proposal. A number of people endorsed inviting Marty Perl, a founding FPS member, to be an invited speaker. Pete also recommended two other younger speakers who would address the present and future endeavors of FPS.

After these reports, we engaged in a discussion about the future of FPS. One generally activity is to interest younger scientists in the forum. Pushpa and Pete were particularly keen on doing that. Norman strongly suggested that FPS should serve as a resource for elected officials at the national, state, and local levels. We then discussed the concept of a “school” that would illuminate the physics of public policy issues. There was lively interest in outreach to officials. But to do so effectively, FPS would need to coordinate with regional units. There was not a consensus, however, to do this outreach. We ran out of time to have a full discussion. Pete strongly suggested that FPS return to the successful practice in the past of sponsoring technical studies. For instance, he made an argument for a study looking at the EMP issue. While many expressed interest in considering FPS taking part in one or more studies, a concern was raised about how affordable this activity would be. Could FPS do an effective study for \$10K to 20K? Here again, we ran out of time to discuss this fully.

**Pushpa recommended that FPS conduct a survey of its membership to determine what they would be interested in having the forum do.**

**Pete urged all ExComm members to send him names of people to serve on committees:**

Charles will be chairing the awards committee.

Pushpa will be chairing the programs committee.

We will need people to serve on the nominations committee to bring in new FPS officers.

Also, we will need people to serve on the FPS fellows committee.

David Harris and Jessica Clark have agreed to continue serving on the SPS fellowship committee headed by Gary White.

**Cameron urged us to distribute the newsletter to all FPS members. This is an action item for the secretary/treasurer.**

For the last 15 minutes of the meeting, Kate Kirby, the APS Executive Officer, stopped by to talk with us about APS issues affecting FPS. The main issue of concern was the cap this year for forums’ financial reserves. APS is facing significant budget constraints. As a result, for this year, APS executive office has placed a cap on the reserves. So, if a forum has more than \$50K in its reserves, it will not receive additional financial contributions this year. As of the date of the meeting, FPS has about \$87K. (This will likely drop to about \$78K after the April Meeting expenses.) Over the course of the past five to six years, we have been accumulating money because we have not printed the newsletter. Kate did not know whether the financial cap will continue beyond this year. APS executive office will be dealing with this financial issue during its strategic review. Meanwhile, FPS should conduct its own strategic review to decide on what we want to do as a forum and how the forum can become more effective.