
Forum

The Composition of the Council of the AMS

The August 1995 Council meeting at the Burlington Mathfest considered a change in membership of the Council. The result of the debate was not yet known at the time of the writing of this article.

The Forum Editor asked for three opinions on this issue. One is written by Peter Shalen, currently a member of the Council and managing editor of the *Transactions and Memoirs*. Another is written by Jean Taylor, a vice president and the Council's representative to the Joint Policy Board for Mathematics (JPBM). A third opinion is written by Robert Fossum, secretary of the Society, who sits, ex-officio, as a member of the EC, the LRPC, and on the policy committees.

The policy committees were established by the Council at its meeting in January 1993. The recommendation to do so came from a special subcommittee of the Committee on Committees appointed by then President Artin. The Council established the Committee on Meetings and Conferences, the Committee on the Profession, and the Committee on Publications to go along with the Committee on Education and the Committee on Science Policy. These five committees are called policy committees. Their charge is to set policy in the five areas and to review Society activities in these areas on a regular basis. The Council established the membership of each to consist of several ex-officio members, such as the president, the secretary, the executive director, three or more elected members from the Council, four to six members appointed from the community at large, and one trustee. In establishing these committees, the Council also asked that a review of the concept and operation be conducted after three years of operation. (The report of this action can be found on page 523 of the 1993 *Notices* May/June issue.)

Early this year, Joan Birman, then chair of the LRPC, appointed a special subcommittee to study the question as to whether the chairs of these committees should be ex-officio members of the Council. The committee expanded its charge by examining the question of membership of ed-

itorial committee chairs as well as policy committee chairs. The subcommittee reported to the LRPC in May 1995. The LRPC received that report and then reported to the ECBT, also in May 1995. The EC recommended changes in Council membership to the August 1995 Council. The report of the EC is attached below.

The secretary prepared an amendment to the bylaws for consideration by the August 1995 Council that he believes incorporates the full intent of the EC report.

The issue of Council membership may already have gone to the members in the current election. In any case, members should voice their views on the matter to Council members. (A list of Council members and other officers of the Society is contained in the September 1995 issue of the *Notices*.) E-mail concerning this, as well as any other matter, can be sent to the secretary at SECRETARY@AMS.ORG.

Executive Committee Report to the August 1995 Council

To: ECBT

From: John Franks, chair, and members of the Long Range Planning Committee

Re: Amendments to recommendations made to LRPC by the ad hoc Committee to Review Council Membership of Policy Chairs: Irwin Kra, chair, Salah A. Baouendi, Cathleen S. Morawetz, Marc E. Rieffel, and Jean E. Taylor

Date: April 10 by ad hoc committee and May 19, 1995, by LRPC

The ad hoc committee on Council membership deliberated via electronic mail and at a dinner meeting in Chicago on March 25 and forwarded its recommendations to the LRPC. After reviewing this report, the LRPC is making the following recommendations. Our recommendations are based on three principles, labeled P1 through P3, and involve changes in the Society's bylaws (labeled B1 through B3).

Principles

- P1. There is a need for representation on the Council of the editorial committees. Publishing mathematical journals and books is one of the main activities of the AMS. Editors represent an important segment of the mathe-

matics community. They represent a significant number of mathematicians active in the AMS, and they bring an important perspective to Council deliberations.

- **P2.** There is a need for better communication between the Council and the policy committees. The policy committees need to have an open channel to the Council. A number of chairs of these committees have maintained that lack of a Council seat is an impediment to their mission of developing and carrying out Council policies.
- **P3.** The size of the Council should not increase significantly and the proportion of appointed members to total membership should not change drastically.

Recommended Bylaw Changes

- **B1.** Five Council seats shall be filled by chairs of editorial committees, of *Math Reviews* and the primary journals, and of book committees. The Council will decide the mechanisms by which these representatives are selected.
- **B2.** Five Council seats shall be filled by chairs of the policy committees. The Council will decide the mechanisms by which those representatives are selected and which committees are considered policy committees.
- **B3.** Any resolution by the Council that results in the removal of a Council seat of a chair of an editorial or policy committee cannot take effect before one year after the passage of the resolution.

N.B. We recommend that, as usual, the task of composing the exact wording of the bylaw changes be entrusted to the capable hands of the secretary.

Recommended Council Action Once the Bylaws Are Changed

The LRPC believes that it is premature to suggest specific implementation details; however, we presume that any implementation will include representation by the editors of primary journals, *Math Reviews*, and AMS book editors. We also recommend that as an interim step the Council continue its current practice of inviting the chairs of the policy committees (with “standard Council” reimbursement).

Opinion

Robert Fossum

I am opposed to ex-officio Council membership for chairs of the so-called policy committees. I take this position for several reasons.

- a) The policy committees are too young to institutionalize by hard-wiring them into the bylaws of the Society.
- b) Council members should either be elected by the membership in an election or be appointed by the Council upon recommendation from a committee. Committee members, including the members of these policy committees, should be appointed by the president.
- c) The Council members should set policy objectively.

Robert Fossum is professor of mathematics at the University of Illinois. His e-mail address is robert@odin.math.uiuc.edu.

In the paragraphs below I amplify these positions.

The policy committees of the Council were established by the Council in 1993 and have been in full operation for just a short time. When these committees were established, upon recommendation by a subcommittee of the Committee on Committees, the Council agreed to review their operation after a period of three years. This review has not yet taken place. Yet it has already been proposed that the chairs of these committees be ex-officio members of the Council. To do so would require an amendment to the bylaws which would make policy committees a permanent part of the Society structure before their efficacy is determined by the review.

Suppose, however, that the Council decides that the policy committee concept adds to the efficiency of administration of Society policy and it decides to keep policy committees. The question will again be raised as to whether or not the chairs of these committees should be ex-officio members of the Council. Then the question will be whether chairs of the all of the policy committees will be members, or a select few. Suppose there are eight such committees? Will all eight chairs be members of the Council? (This problem has arisen with regard to editorial committees. Currently there are nine editorial committees named in the bylaws and there is an amendment to remove mention of one, the AMS representatives to the editorial board of the *American Journal of Mathematics*. The reason for removing mention of this committee is that the relationship between the AMS and the journal has ceased (the divorce was quite amicable). However, there are many other editorial committees, including editorial committees for book series. These committees are perceived to have a second-class status, since chairing such a committee does not automatically qualify for Council membership. When the flagship journal *Journal of the American Mathematical Society* was established a few years ago, the first action was to change the bylaws so that the chair of its editorial committee was an ex-officio member of the Council.)

I believe that the chairs and members of these committees should be appointed by the president upon recommendation by the Committee on Committees. Furthermore, I believe that these chairs should be appointed as chairs for one-year terms (although appointed to the committee for the usual three-year term), with renewal possible. If the person appointed does a good job in the opinion of the president and if that person agrees to serve again as chair, then a reappointment is possible. There have been a few incidences where a chair of a committee just is not effective, either in leading the committee in fulfilling the committee charge and following Society policy or in the administration of the committee. The chair position on a committee is not a sinecure. It should be a simple matter to replace an ineffective chair or to reappoint an effective chair simply by a stroke of the president's pen. Thus a chair would be a member of the Council for just one year, which does not allow for that person to get up to speed on Council matters. A president serves for two years. Certainly appointing a person as chair for longer than two years, especially to a committee that is charged with setting policy, would infringe on the policy and authority of a new pres-

ident. One of the most difficult tasks a president faces is appointing committee members. It is also a task upon which the president has the most influence in setting Society policy. Even conceding that a person should be appointed for two years would mean Council membership for two years at most.

If, as some suggest, the appointment of the chairs of these committees should be subject to Council approval, it would be almost impossible to discharge someone who is not doing the job well, since the Council would have to approve the discharge according to the rules of parliamentary procedure under which the Society operates.

In either of the two modes above, having the chairs of these committees serve *ex-officio* on the Council would mean that the president would be able to appoint up to five (5) members directly to the Council. This would be the case even if the Council were to enjoy “approval” of the appointment. Would the Council ever countermand a presidential appointment?

The Council established these policy committees to remove some of the workload in formulating policy away from the Council and to put it in the hands of committees that have some staff support. These committees would be able to learn the problems in their specific areas and be able to discuss the issues with their added knowledge. They would then make recommendations to the Council. To have the chairs of these committees on the Council would, in my mind, decrease the objectivity that the Council should maintain on these issues. The Council should listen carefully to the reports from these committees and then vote on the recommendations.

The main reason some have pushed for *ex-officio* Council membership of these chairs is to increase the level of communication between the Council and these committees. This is a vacuous point. The amount of communication depends on the level of interest shown by the chair of the committee, whether or not that chair is a member of the Council. The secretary attempts to inform committee chairs of Council actions as soon as possible after Council meetings. Certainly if a chair has not heard of the results of Council action, a simple reminder to the secretary should suffice. An associate executive director (or equivalent) from the Society offices is assigned to each policy committee. This AED is served by an administrative assistant. Together these staff members are to coordinate the activities of the committee and to handle all communication. This should certainly include the communication of actions by the Council to the members of the committee. All AEDs attend the Council meetings, sometimes with their administrative assistants. Chairs of all policy committees receive the agendas and minutes of the Council. Chairs of these committees are invited to attend the Council meetings with the standard reimbursements and privileges of the floor. Membership on the Council will not increase the flow of communication any more than is practiced currently.

Conclusion: The Society may be well served by having these policy committees. But it will not be well served if the chairs of these committees sit on the Council.

Opinion

Peter Shalen

The Council is a small body, consisting of fewer than forty members, which meets for only about twenty hours per year and which sometimes makes decisions of great importance. A majority of the members, including the president, the ex-president or president-elect, the vice presidents, and the members-at-large, are elected by the membership of the Society from a slate of candidates recommended by the elected Nominating Committee and approved by the Council. A minority, including the secretary, one of the associate secretaries, the treasurer and vice treasurer, and the chairs of certain editorial committees, are people who have been appointed to positions in the Society which, according to the present bylaws, entail membership in the Council. It seems safe to say that all Council members share a strong commitment to the Society, given that they have all accepted elected or appointed positions within the Society which consume a good deal of time and energy.

The present size of the Council is a virtue, since a small body can function more efficiently than a large one. Given the size of the body, it is particularly important that its members have diverse experience and expertise in AMS affairs. In this regard, the mix of elected and appointed members of the Council has been very valuable.

Because the Council is a small body which meets only three days during the year, it cannot be expected to give detailed consideration to all the myriad important issues with which the Society must deal. Thus the Council must depend in an essential way on the careful work carried out by the multitude of AMS committees. Many of these committees have quite specific charges. But over the years the Council has established certain committees to aid it in dealing with the complex issues involved in formulating general policy. First there was the Committee on Science Policy, then the Committee on Education, and more recently the Committees on Meetings and Conferences, on the Profession, and on Publications. The work of these “policy” committees has a particularly direct bearing on issues that come before the Council.

Nevertheless, the Council is not now benefiting as much as it might from the results of the extensive deliberations carried out in the policy committees. Communication between the Council and these committees is haphazard. One of the Council’s main sources of information about the activities of the policy committees seems to be the presence at Council meetings of Council members who also belong to the committees. Inevitably these members do not have complete information about their committees’ activities; it is only the chair of a committee who can be expected to give a full account of what the committee has done. This unfortunate system (or, rather, lack of one) has resulted

Peter Shalen is professor, Department of Mathematics, Statistics and Computer Science, at the University of Illinois at Chicago. His e-mail address is shalen@math.uic.edu.

in serious inefficiencies and misunderstandings. Hasty attempts have been made to formulate policies in Council meetings concerning problems on which committees had already spent months developing policies but on which they had not yet reported to the Council. Attempts have also been made to chastise committees on the basis of what were in effect rumors about actions that these committees had supposedly taken.

All in all this is an intolerable state of affairs, and it seems obvious to me that it can be corrected only by the presence of the policy committee chairs among the membership of the Council. Inviting policy committee chairs to particular meetings cannot solve the problem. Sometimes it is clear from a specific item on the agenda that the presence of one of the policy committee chairs is required at a Council meeting, but this is by no means always the case. In fact, the discussion of the need to amend the bylaws so as to include the policy committee chairs on the Council was precipitated by a major misunderstanding between the Council and one of the policy committees resulting from the absence of the chair of the committee from a Council meeting. The chair in question had not been invited to the meeting because there was nothing in the agenda that made the need for an invitation apparent.

It has been suggested that instead of adding appointed policy committee chairs to the Council membership, one could deal with the problem by recruiting these chairs from among the elected membership of the Council. I think this would be a very serious mistake. Chairing a policy committee requires experience and demonstrated effectiveness in the area of responsibility of the committee. The qualities that are required are not the same as those which I, as a member of the Society, look for when I am voting for (say) a member-at-large of the Council, and I see no reason to think that I am exceptional in this regard. Indeed, a former president of the Society has remarked that one of a president's hardest jobs is to make the right appointments to key committee posts. Presidents put a great amount of effort into this task, and it would be very unfortunate to institute a system that would tie their hands.

The problem that then arises is how to add appointed policy committee chairs to the Council without upsetting the balance between elected and appointed members or increasing the size of the Council. As the importance of leaving the secretary, an associate secretary, and the treasurer and vice treasurer on the Council should be beyond dispute, one is led to the solution contained in the amendment proposed by the LRPC, which is to limit the number of editorial committee representatives.

I hope the reasons for an editorial presence on the Council are obvious. Publishing is of course one of the main activities of the Society. As I have said, accepting an editorship demonstrates a commitment to the Society. During my term on the Council, I have found (leaving myself out of the sample) that some of the editorial representatives have been among the most dedicated members of the Council and have made some of the most valuable contributions to the deliberations of the body. However, whereas I have made the case that it is essential that *all* chairs of policy committees be members of the Council, I do not see

any compelling reason why there must be eight or nine editorial representatives on the Council and why the bylaws need to specify which editorial committees will be represented.

Furthermore, there is a difference in nature between an editorial committee chair's commitment to the Society and that of a policy committee chair. While the job of a policy committee chair is in a certain sense inherently political, the chair of an editorial committee can remain largely aloof from politics. An editor who happens to be politically inclined will, if appointed to the Council, take an active role in its deliberations; an apolitical editor is more likely to regard Council membership as a chore and is therefore less likely to become actively involved in the work before the Council. (Some editorial representatives almost never come to Council meetings.)

This suggests that the Council should decide which editorial committee chairs should be among its members, as the amendment would dictate. The Council might decide to let the editorial committee chairs vote among themselves to select their representatives to the Council. It might also decide that chairs of certain editorial committees should automatically serve.

According to the proposed amendment to the bylaws, the number of editorial committee chairs on the Council would be reduced to five. This would make a total of ten editorial and policy committee chairs on the Council. Until now, the number of editorial committee representatives on the Council, including the representative of the *American Journal*, has been nine, so that the amendment would indeed involve no perceptible change in the proportion of elected and appointed members of the Council nor in the size of the Council, especially since it is likely that at least one of the editorial or policy committee chairs would already be an elected member of the Council.

Opinion

Jean Taylor

The Council of the AMS is currently considering whether it should change its composition. The most pressing need is that five policy committees have recently been established, with broad charges over various aspects of Society functioning, and their chairs feel that communication with the Council has been inadequate and that by their becoming members of the Council this problem will be solved. An ad hoc committee, of which I was a member, was formed to make recommendations. I regard the compromise that we came up with as being reasonable, but not my first preference. Since then our recommendations have been further revised by the EC in a way that is not major but that I regard as being worse, and the debate has broadened.

Jean Taylor is professor of mathematics at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, NJ. Her e-mail address is taylor@math.rutgers.edu.

My guiding principles have been that the Council should have a very substantial majority that is elected, and that the Council should not be much larger than it is now. These are principles that the Society has been edging toward for a long time. In particular, the Council used to be larger, felt it was too unwieldy, and worked hard to cut itself down. It also removed all one-candidate elections, in particular making clear the distinction between truly elective and nonelective positions. The non-elected members now are many journal editors, the secretary and an associate secretary, and the treasurer. In addition, the executive director is a nonvoting member.

The compromise that our committee advocated is fairly consistent with the principles I listed above. That compromise was to choose the policy committee chairs from among the elected members of the Council if possible and to reduce the number of editorial positions to three or four (perhaps *Notices*, *Bulletin*, *Math Reviews*, and one other, or some other group). Since the means by which the secretary and treasurer should be appointed was decided relatively recently, we did not consider changing that. The EC changed our three or four to five and made various other changes.

There are many other solutions that would also be consistent with these guiding principles. In particular, we could move further towards reducing the number of appointed members, either by electing more members or by having a smaller Council. In particular, some members of the Council are advocating that *all* Council members be elected, and I feel a certain sympathy for that position. Here is a recent e-mail message from Anil Nerode (another vice president of the AMS): "My view is that governance should be in the sole hands of those directly elected for this purpose. This is on the principle that executive functions such as editing and holding meetings should be separated from legislative functions. I also think that policy committees are an executive function and the policy committees should not be able to have nondirectly elected members vote on the Council. This reflects on the performance of no one at all at any time, simply on the separation of powers in an organization built on membership dues." In this proposal, no editors or policy committee chairs would automatically have seats on the Council. (They would, I presume, be free to be elected to the Council before or after assuming these other positions.)

So what about communication between the Council and the policy committee chairs, the issue that precipitated this debate? I believe that we should take seriously the idea that chairs be appointed from the Council membership. Those who have been involved in appointing these chairs say that that is difficult, that the ability and experience and willingness to be a good policy committee chair are not often found in one individual and are not necessarily found in one who has surfaced through election to the Council. Maybe I'm still naive, but I have the belief that such abilities are more widely spread and that Council members who have previously served on a policy committee should be great sources for new chairs.

In any case, there will still probably be times when a policy committee chair will not be able to be appointed from the Council. What should one do then? My recommenda-

tion is that some Council member who is on that committee be given specific responsibility for communication between that committee and the Council. The designated member could be required to give a report at each committee meeting on new developments in the Council which relate to the work of the committee, and vice versa. It has to be a specific person; if there is group responsibility, then it won't work. I find it hard to believe that such a responsible Council member could not be designated (probably by the chair). The current chairs are not enthusiastic about this idea, and in fact I could not sell it to the ad hoc committee, and so I went along with the compromise. But in my opinion it remains the best way to handle the problem.

None of this should in any way be taken as an attack on the excellent service to the Council that many editors have made or on the performance of the policy committee chairs who are not currently members of the Council. The fact that many editors have been terrific Council members, in spite of the fact that they might not have even known they would become Council members when they accepted their editorial positions, indicates to me that there is the kind of depth of talent among the AMS members that I believe to be there. One thing that sometimes happens is that when particularly capable people are found, they are appointed to one position after another. I think that we should keep the process as open as possible and not keep appointing the same people, as capable as they may be, to positions of responsibility indefinitely. Rather, I would hope that we could engage a broad and changing group of mathematicians in all aspects of Society leadership, both in policy committees and on the Council. This should in fact be the most basic guiding principle of all.

Note: The Council, meeting in Burlington, VT, on 05 August, tabled the proposed amendment that appears in the agenda above. It is proposed that the Council will discuss this issue at its meeting in January 1996 in Orlando, FL. The *Notices* is interested in the expression of other views on this issue and will publish them as Letters to the Editor in future issues.