

American Physical Society

Forum on the History of Physics

Minutes of the 2015 Executive Committee Meeting

The meeting was held in Peale Room C of the Baltimore Hilton, Sunday, April 12, 2015. Present were: Brian Schwartz (Chair), Catherine Westfall (Chair-Elect), Robert Crease (Vice-Chair), Don Howard (Past Chair), Cameron Reed (Secretary-Treasurer); Members-at-Large Joseph Martin, Paul Halpern, Richard Staley, and Alberto Martinez; Dan Kleppner (Councilor), Alan Chodos (Vice-Chair-Elect), Alvin Saperstein (Member-at-Large-Elect); Greg Good (Director, AIP Center for the History of Physics); guests Joseph Anderson (AIP), Peter Pesic (Physics in Perspective), Michael Riordan, Virginia Trimble, and Felix Smith. Diana Kormos-Buchwald extended regrets that she was unable to make the meeting.

The meeting was called to order by Schwartz at 12:15 pm. All present briefly introduced themselves.

Schwartz moved that the minutes of the 2014 meeting of the Executive Committee be accepted; this was approved unanimously.

Reed briefly summarized his Secretary-Treasurer's report for that 2014 calendar year. The Forum is financially healthy; membership stands at nearly 3500.

Chodos inquired as to policies concerning reimbursement of invited speakers. Schwartz and Westfall summarized the results of the 2013 "Meeting on Meetings" debate on this topic; the main result was that speakers get a reduced registration rate of 50% off of the APS one-day rate. Kleppner expressed concern that this issue needs to be re-examined as many of our speakers are older physicists and historians who are either retired or not APS members; the Forum should be willing to support them. He offered to bring this issue to the APS Board.

Kleppner summarized his Forum Councilor's report. APS membership stands at 51,500; the annual budget is \$51 million. The Society is financially healthy; reserves could cover operations for three years if necessary. The Society is in the process of appointing a professional publisher. Some highlights of the recent APS Board meeting are: (1) The Women in Physics visiting group has been very successful; 9 site visits are set for 2015. (2) The PhysTec program has had visible impact; a proposal is in to NSF to fund half of the budget of this program. (3) New rules are now in place for Panel on Public Affairs statements: These can be issued by APS as a whole or by a group with APS approval. (4) APS will be "going green" to reduce the Society's carbon footprint by reducing the number of real committee meetings; this initiative will be announced in conjunction with the Society's new climate change statement. (5) Concern with the diminishing popularity of the April meeting continues, but two Divisions vetoed changing the meeting time to October. (6) The Prizes and Awards oversight board is being overhauled; a new \$50,000 "super prize" is being established. (7) Regarding PhysTec, it was suggested that FHP contribute to this program by preparing a book of vignettes from the history of physics that could be

distributed to high-school teachers. Good remarked that AIP has teaching guides on women and African-Americans in Physics. Martinez suggested that such contributions should address “physics myths” as many biographies are cluttered with them. Crease remarked that an obvious home for such material is the Forum’s webpage. Chodos offered to investigate getting “APS News” pieces along this line into a coherent gathering.

Kleppner summarized the status of the Physics Heritage Fund, which was established to support invited speakers. The initial funding goal was set at \$200,000 in order to generate \$10,000 in useable "Heritage Lectureship Award" funding per year. The Heritage Fund currently stands at about \$160,000 and the Lectureship Award fund at about \$19,000 (this represents, this writer understands, interest accrued from the Heritage Fund). A new category of funds called "Board Designated Funds" has been established; monies contributed to these by Units can be recovered with Board approval. Kleppner felt that the time has arrived to ask Forum members at large to contribute to the Heritage Fund and to solicit ideas for use of the funds.

Kleppner expressed concern that audio recordings of Forum sessions has been on an ad-hoc basis with rather variable results despite improvements in technology and streaming capacity. Anderson remarked that the AIP History program has paid (through APS) to contract hotels to audio-record FHP talks; these are cataloged at AIP and can be distributed as MP3 files; AIP is happy to continue to offer this service. In practice, an AIP employee goes through Bulletin to identify sessions appropriate for audio recording; the committee unanimously extended its thanks to AIP for this work on behalf of all FHP members for this effort. Anderson added that George Zimmerman had the idea of pairing these recordings with speakers’ submitted Power Point presentations. Staley asked how these materials are publicized, and suggested that APS News could help spread the word; the newsletter would be another appropriate venue.

Crease described some highlights of the recent (February) APS Leadership Convocation. The 2017 April meeting will be held in Washington, DC in January of that year; the 2019 meeting will be a joint March/April meeting in Boston. A common Unit problem is that of encouraging members to run for committees; it was suggested that new Fellows be approached for this. A particular annoyance for Units has been the timing of the Marshak and Beller Awards, which are aimed at attracting offshore physicists who would not normally be able to come to an APS meeting. Nominations are sought in the summer/fall period, but as awardees are announced only after programs have to be finalized, Units do not know if their nominees are successful when sessions are being organized. There was a general consensus that we should offer to cover nominee’s expenses (treating them as Invited Speakers, say), and take the risk that we will have to cover these costs if the nomination is not successful.

Discussion turned to Forum Committee Reports.

Fellowship Committee (Crease): FHP had one nomination: Kimball Milton of the University of Oklahoma, who was awarded Fellowship. APS is testing a new Fellowship nomination system this year. Two names were suggested for Fellowship nomination: Sidney Perkowitz and Dwight Neuenschwander; the deadline for nominations to FHP is June 1. Nominees do not need to be Forum members, but must be APS members.

Nominating Committee (Howard): It continues to be difficult to attract candidates; achieving diversity also continues to be a concern. Suggestions for candidates should be sent to Brian Schwartz. It was asked if positions could "broken out"; for example, we might designate an At-Large slot to be targeted for early-career candidates; apparently other Units have done this.

Pais Committee (Schwartz). The selection of Spencer Weart as the 2015 Pais Prize awardee was met with unanimous enthusiasm. Richard Staley and Paul Halpern offered to serve on this year's committee, and Virginia Trimble offered to serve as Alternate.

Program Committee (Westfall). The Pais Prize session at the March meeting was noted as being of particularly good quality. This year we sponsored a joint session with the Forum on Education, a session on Peer Review, a public talk at the April meeting (David Kaiser on the history of General Relativity), co-sponsored a session with the Forum on Outreach and Engaging the Public on the history of APS public engagement, and a session on perspectives on the Superconducting Super Collider. We are getting good attendance at Forum-sponsored sessions, but by no means are all of our 3500 members "core members" so far as involvement with the Forum or attending sessions is concerned. Suggestions for next year's program included sessions on the history of scientific publishing, large-scale material science projects, the National Synchrotron Light Source, the European Spallation Source, the SESAME accelerator, the Advanced Photon Source, Sidney Coleman's scientific legacy, the history of acceptance and non-acceptance of scientific ideas by the public, 60 years of Yang-Mills theory, a book on Einstein and Bergson on theory of time, Stone's book on Einstein and the quantum, and the 100th anniversary of death of Ernst Mach. Joe Martin volunteered for this year's committee; suggestions for other members should be sent to Westfall.

Schwartz reviewed plays performed at the March and April meetings: "Background" and "Transcendence," respectively.

Crease reported briefly on the Forum newsletter. The Fall 2014 edition was delayed due to personnel changes at APS; the Spring 2015 edition should appear soon. We need to appoint a new editor as Crease is moving up to be Chair-Elect.

Joe Martin reported on the activities of the Ad-Hoc Committee on Digital Presence. Our Twitter account is gaining traction (261 followers), but our Facebook presence has been suspended due to inactivity. It was remarked that we may need to develop a policy regarding "Tweeting" during Forum sessions.

Greg Good reported on the History Liaison Committee. In response to a recommendation by the Advisory Committee for History Programs at AIP, a meeting of chairs of the history committees of member societies of the AIP plus archivists or staff members of these societies took place in November 2014; another is scheduled for November 2015. This group is not advisory to the AIP history center, but rather is intended to help facilitate archiving and liaison programs at the various societies. AIP has not added new oral history transcripts to its online site (<http://www.aip.org/history/ohilist/transcripts.html>) during the past year because the content management system is being revised. This work will be completed by July, and AIP has

continued to conduct and transcribe new oral histories during the interim Joe distributed 2015 “Einstein” calendars, which were eagerly accepted.

The committee thanked Don Howard, Joe Martin, and Paul Halpern for their dedicated and effective service to the Forum.

The meeting adjourned at 2:55 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Cameron Reed
Secretary-Treasurer
23 April 2015