

Diversity Committee Report

Winter Policy Council 2008

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This report describes the four main goals of the diversity committee for 2008. These activities build on earlier work from presented at the 2004 Policy Council Meeting in Oxford, England and incorporate feedback and observations from subsequent Policy Council discussions on the topic of diversity. They focus on 1) updating membership statistics on diversity using the renewal form implemented in the fall of 2004, 2) developing a system dynamics model of membership and diversity, 3) organizing a diversity forum for the Athens conference, and 4) piloting a diversity workshop in Athens targeted toward SD practitioners with a specific focus on group model building and facilitation skills. We also looking for new members to the diversity committee and would welcome suggestions from the nominating committee.

1. Updating Membership Statistics on Diversity

An initial analysis of membership data was conducted prior to the 2004 Policy Council Meeting in Oxford, England based on country of origin, student status, and gender with gender imputed by first names. Results from this analysis were presented to the Policy Council and a motion was made to change the membership renewal form to include demographic information. These changes were implemented in the fall of 2004 membership renewal system. However, an analysis of membership statistics with respect to diversity has not been conducted since. So for the 2008 Policy Council Meeting in Athens, Greece, we will analyze the membership data with respect to demographic characteristics, new membership, and retention to evaluate our progress since 2004.

2. SD Model of Membership and Diversity

In preparation to the 2004 Policy Council Meeting, a small membership model was developed. Others have discussed the potential benefits of having a system dynamics model of the System Dynamics Society membership, both as a way to evaluate policy options and to make the discussion more transparent. More recent Policy Council discussions have focused on the need to develop a system dynamics model for the purpose of strategic planning. Whether in support of this planning model or as a separate effort, we plan to begin development of a system dynamics model of diversity and membership based on our previous work in 2004 and subsequent analysis of the membership data in preparation for the 2008 Policy Council Meeting in Athens. Anyone who has suggestions on this effort or interested in contributing is welcome.

3. Diversity Forum

The Oxford 2004 Policy Council Meeting sparked a series of informal conversations during the conference, which subsequently motivated us to hold a diversity forum during the Oxford 2005, Boston conference. We felt this forum provided an important opportunity for any conference attendee to discuss their experiences and

perceptions of diversity at the conference, and provide feedback to the Policy Council. While such forums do not provide systematic feedback from all participants, they do provide an important opportunity to hear voices of attendees who might otherwise feel marginalized. We plan to hold a diversity forum during the Athens 2008 conference, and provide a summary to the Policy Council by September 2008.

4. Pilot Diversity Workshop

We have tried a number of approaches for trying to increase the diversity of the System Dynamics Society, including reflecting on the motivations and merits of the goal based on last year's discussion at the Winter Policy Council meeting. In some cases, these issues have been controversial and led to divided opinion about how to proceed. One concern has been focused on the unintended consequences of trying to increase diversity through policy initiatives.

However, part of the initial inspiration for our efforts in seeking to address diversity issues in the System Dynamics Conference had more to do with increasing the cross-cultural competence of practitioners. This holds particular relevance for the field of system dynamics as we consider applications in health, social and economic development, and any number of other major social issues where solutions depend on involving diverse stakeholders and policy makers in the process. This is especially true when considering such problems as health disparities.

More generally, it has often been noted in publications and at conference that as a field, we could do more to increase our "soft" skills as modelers. That is, just as we might seek to increase the diversity of modelers, we can also seek to increase the cultural competence of experienced modelers. This would not compromise the quality of modeling, but rather expand the range of system dynamics modeling. Thus we propose to create, pilot, and evaluate a diversity workshop for the 2008 Conference in Athens. The focus of this workshop would be on developing cross-cultural competence for group model building and facilitation skills. This would also help build a community within the society that is interested in the topic of diversity for discussing and addressing issues of diversity.