

Income-based Dues Structure

The System Dynamics Society has a long-held goal to disseminate System Dynamics, and expanding membership is one method of supporting this goal. An individual's ability to pay a membership fee should not exclude them from membership in the Society. Bridging the financial divide enables the Society to draw interested members from diverse geographical regions, professions, and application areas, thereby broadening our membership base.

Historically, the Society has had two membership categories: regular members and student or supported members. These two categories have helped make lower-cost memberships available, but even those lower-cost memberships are out of the reach of many individuals who are interested in the field. For example, the Chinese Chapter of the SDS is a very large chapter, and while many chapter members would value a membership in the Society, only a few can manage it. India, a country with a substantial amount of work being done in System Dynamics, has not been able to form an official Chapter because they lack the requisite number of Society members. On an individual level, others, such as those retiring, have been asking for more flexibility in our membership dues.

To address this potential membership opportunity, a committee was formed to propose a new and more inclusive dues structure. The goal was to align membership dues with what members and potential members can afford while not significantly impacting the overall membership revenue, which is used to provide services to members. This committee consulted with a diverse set of members from various regions and in various occupations. The committee considered setting dues by region or job title but neither of these dues structures met our needs. All students are not equal, nor is everyone who lives in a single country.

Using income as a proxy for ability to pay provides inclusive economic access to membership in the Society across all regions and professions. This conclusion was reinforced by our research, which showed many professional societies are transitioning to tiered, income-based membership dues for the same reason. As the bulk of the Society's expenses are paid in US dollars, the decision was made to continue to base prices on and collect the dues in US dollars.

The committee consulted with the collaborating members to ensure the proposed income ranges met the needs of diverse groups and conducted an analysis of the dues structures of several other professional societies. The committee also evaluated the likely impact on revenue, adjusting the proposed fees to ensure no substantial impact. In addition, our partner John Wiley & Sons, the publisher of the *System Dynamics Review*, was approached and agreed to provide additional financial support for lower income members and potential members. The new dues structure was approved during the summer 2007 Policy Council meeting in Boston.

The dues structure has changed, but in a manner keeping with the roots of the Society's mission statement. The new income-based tiered dues structure connects one member with another, regardless of finances, building toward an even more exciting future; helps balance distribution of membership; and works to the betterment of the Society community. We hope that members, veteran and new, always feel the sense of community and comradeship that has become a Society tradition.

We believe this new income-based tiered dues structure provides access to Society membership for a broader and more diverse audience than we have reached before, and extends the reach of the field of System Dynamics to new individuals, professions, countries, and application areas. Early reactions are primarily positive--we are pleased with renewals received to date and there is no decline in membership revenue.

The Society is a complex network of people who care deeply about the field and future of System Dynamics, all with different expectations. With change there is inevitable friction and as with all policy changes, we value your feedback. Please address any suggestions for the dues structure to 2008 President Jim Lyneis <jmlyneis@verizon.net>. The income-based dues structure will be reviewed after two years.

We are beginning a similar process for conference registration fees, and would welcome member input and involvement in the review process. If you have any suggestions or are interested in getting involved, please contact VP Meetings Andreas Größler <a.groessler@fm.ru.nl >.