

Report of the Vice President for Publications
System Dynamics Society
February 2011

The Status of the Vice President for Publications

The current VP for Publications is filling out the remaining portion of the term of Deborah Andersen who stepped down after the 2009 Albuquerque conference. For continuity, he is nominated for a follow-on three-year appointment, 2012, 13, 14.

Overview of Ongoing Issues (outline of the remaining report)

1. Configuring the Publications Committee
2. Filling out the membership of the Committee
3. Responsibilities of the Committee
4. Ongoing work

Configuring the Publications Committee

In Albuquerque the Policy Council decided to configure the Publications Committee as four ex officio members (VPs for Publications and Finance, the Executive Editor of the Review, and the Executive Director of the Society) and three additional members. The three additional members in steady state would serve in three-year staggered terms, but the initial appointments would serve in 1-, 2-, and 3- year terms to start the rotation. The three appointed members of the Committee were to be Rogelio Oliva, Yaman Barlas, and Graham Winch. The chair of the Publications Committee was to be selected somehow from the seven members.

Problems with this design emerged (at least to this VP for Publications) quite quickly. First, it's puzzling that the person appointed to be in charge of oversight of the Society's publications is not ex officio the chair of the Publications Committee. Then upon reflection, a seven-person Publications Committee seems excessively large, particularly given the fact that historically the Publications Committee has been largely moribund and currently its responsibilities are unclear. Moreover, the VP for Finance and the Executive Director have no clear ex officio duties especially relevant to publications except in the occasional times when contracts are under negotiation or publications decisions potentially affecting the future of the Society are being considered (but then, lots of people would have to be involved). Furthermore, if one of the responsibilities of the Publications Committee is to oversee the state of the publications of the Society, currently in particular the System Dynamics Review and its Executive Editor, it is questionable to have the Executive Editor on the Committee to be responsible for oversight of his own work. Finally, the Albuquerque design appears to contradict somewhat the Policy 9 of the Society, which lays out the structure of the Committee, which does not include the Executive Director on the Committee and does mandate that the President of the Society, with the approval of the Policy Council, appoints the members of the Committee and its chair.

These thoughts suggest yet another reconfiguration of the Publications Committee, as follows:

VP for Publications, ex officio chair of the Publications Committee

Three members serving staggered three-year terms, so that a new person comes on the committee (or is reappointed) every year.

The Publications Committee (or the Policy Council) would constitute ad hoc subcommittees as necessary, as for example, contract negotiations for publishing the Review, and would involve the Executive Editor ex officio as appropriate in its planning.

To implement such a structure, Policy 9 of the Society would have to be amended.

Filling out the Membership of the Committee

If we agree that what we want is a four-person Publications Committee, chaired by the VP for Publications ex officio and including three members each serving a three-year term, then I have a suggestion for the membership of the Committee. I have talked with people I'd propose before I realized that according to Policy 9 it is actually the President of the Society who appoints the members. In any case, one of those appointed would serve initially a 1-year term, another a 2-year term, and the third the standard 3-year term, presumably matching the wishes of the appointed members.

To this observer it does seem odd that according to Policy 9 the VP for Publications has no stated role in the membership of the Committee. The President appoints "with the approval of" the Policy Council. If we are revising Policy 9 to remove the ex officio VP of Finance from the Committee, we might consider a further amendment that the President appoints "with the advice and consent of the VP for Publications." [In actuality, if the Policy Council must approve the President's appointments to the Committee, then they would be Presidential "nominations" rather than appointments. This seems to be a murky area of the Policies.]

Responsibilities of the Publications Committee

Policies 6, 9, and 10 of the Society contain sweeping statements about the responsibilities of the VP for Publications and the Publications Committee.

In addition to those listed among the Policies, Brian and other people I've talked with about the responsibilities of the Publications Committee suggest the following sorts of things:

- Informal support for the Executive Editor
 - Advice, problem solving, cheerleading
 - Interactions with Associate Editors
 - Interactions with the Publisher
- Formal advice and counsel with the Executive Editor
 - Selection, evaluation, retention, and release of Associate Editors
 - Special issues (topics, frequency, and other relevant issues)
 - Interactions with the Publisher
- Overarching policy affecting the Review and its Executive Editor
 - Editorial structure of the Review (e.g., number of Associate Editors, their responsibilities)
 - Tenure of the Executive Editor (e.g., length of term, currently unspecified)

- Special issues (mentioned above under Formal Advice and Council, but could be a matter of overarching journal policy, e.g., selection criteria for guest editors)
- The “publications arm” of the Policy Council, the place where the Policy Council sends all its concerns about publications (Can the Policy Council make publications decisions without the advice and consent of the Publications Committee?)
- Specific duties of the Publications Committee (the beginnings of a list)
 - Advising the VP for Publications on his/her selection of the next Executive Editor of the Review (and any future other journals). [According to Policy 10, section 3, the VP for Publications nominates the Editor, and the Policy Council approves; there is not stated role for the Publications Committee.]
 - All the items listed above under informal and formal advice and counsel and overarching policy.
 - Others now implicit that ought to be made explicit?

Ongoing Work of the Publications Committee

The Publications Committee and the VP for Publications are charged with overseeing the quality of the Society’s publications. Toward that end, the Publications Committee needs to develop regular, repeatable ways of monitoring quality (journal impact factors and other indices are a start) and reflecting on those assessments with the Executive Editor and the Associate Editors to help improve the quality and reach of the journal.

One of the journal ranking organizations (SJR) shows (among other things) that consistently about half of the articles published in the Review are not cited anywhere. I would think we would like to raise that fraction dramatically, but it is not obvious what to do to improve that statistic. (I don’t know the similar statistic for comparable or target journals.)

The Committee is also charged with oversight of the Society’s web presence. To date I think it has done little to be helpful in this area, so we will have to devote some attention to the Society’s web presence.

Finally, the future editorial makeup of the journal will be an important focus of the Publications Committee as we anticipate the time when Brian Dangerfield steps down as Executive Editor.

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