

Multidisciplinary Program Planning Group – Organizational Proposal

Background

Most ACS technical and professional divisions are in the business of facilitating the exchange of information. In many cases this information may be classified into two types of information products. One type comprises information of great value to a person in a particular field (ACS division), but due to the specialized nature of the information, is of less value to chemists outside that field (i.e., outside that division); let's call this "field-specific" information.

The second type of information is of great value both to the person in a particular field of chemistry and to members of other ACS divisions as well as to members of other scientific disciplines. Let's call this "multidisciplinary" information.

The ACS division structure is perfectly suited to organizing and delivering field-specific information. The divisions can continue to program on field-specific matters as they have done for nearly a century. ACS national meetings are in many ways a collection of 30 or more divisional meetings held in the same place at the same time; this approach works well for scientists who care about subject matter wholly contained within one division.

But more and more scientists are interested in multidisciplinary subjects – for example, nanotech, biotech, energy - that spill across two or more ACS divisions. The good news? ACS is generating copious amounts of top quality content in these hot multidisciplinary fields. The bad news? In many instances, divisions are deciding in isolation what aspects of these fields to address, and the day and time during which the information is delivered. The result? Duplication of some topics. Gaps in the collective coverage of other topics. Related content scheduled concurrently rather than consecutively. And the realization on the part of scientists working in these multidisciplinary fields that ACS hasn't yet perfected the process of coordinating and delivering information of interest to them.

In order for ACS divisions to more completely meet the information and professional development needs of multidisciplinary scientists – and increase the relevance of our divisions in the process – we need to better coordinate our programming in this critical "multidisciplinary" area. That is, in some instances, we need to program with a keener eye toward the needs of multidisciplinary scientists.

To that end, we have been pursuing an experiment in what we have called "Thematic Programming". In San Francisco (Fall 2006) and in Chicago (Spring 2007), multidisciplinary programs were created on the topics of "Collaboration in Chemistry: Recovery from and Prevention of Natural Disasters" and "Sustainability of Food, Water and Energy", respectively. In order to get this experiment rolling, the Divisional Activities Committee (DAC) has taken the lead, and its Meetings subcommittee has done much of the work to collect and select from ideas about future themes, select organizers, and coordinate and facilitate the work of those organizers. While DAC does its very best to represent the interests of divisions, it is not designed to be a body on which all divisions have

representation. DAC has felt that the process should transition to a body with broader representation, and as a result has designed an approach for your consideration.

Charter

The Multidisciplinary Program Planning Group (MPPG) is charged with selecting themes and planning Society-wide thematic and multidisciplinary programming for ACS National meetings. The MPPG will be a body representing all divisions, as well as pertinent governance units. Every division will have the opportunity to participate in selecting representatives, providing input and suggestions to the MPPG, and will decide for itself whether to participate in particular society-wide programming. It is intended that MPPG representatives will not be current division program chairs, but rather will be individuals with program chair experience, such as long-range program chairs. The intent is to create a representative group to promote and create the collaborative, multidisciplinary, society-wide programming that most current division program chairs are too busy to create. This multidisciplinary programming will reflect the multidisciplinary nature of the modern scientific enterprise, will break down barriers and promote collaboration, and will provide opportunities for outreach by the ACS to nascent and existing communities of scientists who are practicing chemistry, but under another banner. Most importantly, it will be highly attractive to current and potential ACS members. The multidisciplinary programming initiated by this group will at the same time create substantial educational opportunities for the Society. These will include community outreach events, use of the meeting content onsite and offsite for K-12 and college education, and creation of materials that will continue to serve the membership of the Society after the national meeting is over. Multidisciplinary programming promises to enable alliances with other societies, the creation of white papers on thematic topics for educational and legislative purposes, as well as other publication opportunities.

Specific Expectations for the MPPG

The following are the duties that we expect the MPPG to perform, and a description of the most pertinent responsibilities that are outside the purview of the MPPG.

- Plan Society-wide programming, including what we have called “thematic” programming. The expectation is that every national meeting of the Society will have a multidisciplinary thematic program component.
- Select themes in a timely fashion. Divisions should have at least 24 months lead time between theme selection and announcement, and the national meeting in question. With this in mind, the first meeting of the MPPG will choose themes for the national meetings in spring and fall of 2009, and spring of 2010.
- Identify and select organizers for those themes. These organizers should have substantial prominence in the thematic field, and should also have demonstrated skill at organizing high-level scientific symposia. The role of these organizers will be to coordinate the division contributions to the theme, to work with the divisions to avoid conflict between thematic program elements, to recruit programming from the divisions as necessary, identify and recruit outstanding plenary speakers and identify outreach events related to the theme. Thematic organizers will work with ACS staff, the MPPG, and the ACS President to help create web-based information that will support the thematic topic and complement the national meeting.

- The MPPG will meet as necessary to accomplish its mission. Initially the MPPG will meet at each national ACS meeting and at the P2C2 meeting in the fall. Teleconferences and other electronic media may also be used to advance the mission of the group, at its discretion.
- The MPPG will seek opportunities to enhance ACS membership by organizing Society-wide multidisciplinary themes that relate to areas of science where chemists are heavily involved, but are not necessarily members of ACS. These areas may be existing, or nascent. Current examples of existing areas of this type might be pharmaceuticals and nanotechnology.
- For the sake of organizational simplicity and clarity as the group is getting started, the MPPG will operate functionally as a subcommittee of DAC.
- In collaboration with DAC, ComSci, and M&E, create metrics for the measurement of success of multidisciplinary programming, that will enable the Society to judge whether the investment of time and dollars in this effort is accomplishing the goals set out for it.
- The scope of the MPPG does not include directing individual division programming, nor does it include other division activities or issues; it is limited to multidisciplinary programming that is Societal in scope.

Composition of MPPG and Selection of Representatives

The MPPG will be composed of one representative from each of the ACS technical divisions (33 as of August, 2007), and one representative each from the three committees most heavily involved in Society program planning; the Divisional Activities Committee (DAC), the Committee on Science (ComSci), and the Meetings and Expositions Committee (M&E). There will be at least one ACS staff liaison member assigned to the MPPG, and staff will be involved and informed at every step of the program planning process by the MPPG. The division and committee chairs will appoint their representatives. If an appointed representative is unable to attend a particular MPPG meeting, the division or committee chair may appoint a substitute. Representative terms will be three years, and a rotation will be set up such that approximately one third of the representatives will rotate off of the group each year (in order to create and maintain a body of expertise and institutional memory in the group). For the first group of representatives, this may result in some terms not equal to three years.

Steering Group and Leadership of MPPG

Because of the importance of the mission of the MPPG, and the need for timely actions, a smaller Steering Group will be created to drive the process forward, while always seeking input from the larger MPPG and indeed from the divisions, the Society, and from scientific experts outside of the Society. This Steering Group will be composed of twelve (12) members, chosen as follows:

- The three Committee representatives (DAC, ComSci, M&E)
- The representatives of the five (5) divisions who contribute the most programming to ACS national meetings. This will be determined by the average attendance at that division's program sessions at the previous four (4) ACS national meetings for which information is available (information to be provided by ACS staff)

- Four (4) other representatives from divisions not included in the five represented as a result of bullet 2. These four representatives will be chosen by vote of the full MPPG.

Chair of MPPG

The Chair will be elected from the Steering Group. The MPPG will be convened and chaired by the DAC chair until such time as the Steering Group is in place and the Chair has been elected.