Notes From the APA Council of Representatives Meeting

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Rodney Lowman, Lori Foster Thompson, Deb Whetzel, and Deirdre Knapp attended the 2½ day session of the APA Council of Representatives (COR) meeting in Washington DC in February. This was the first meeting under a new governance structure that is being tried experimentally pending a bylaws vote by the membership to solidify the change. To allow the full COR to spend more time crafting APA’s strategic direction, the Board of Directors is handling administrative matters and a new Council Leadership Team (CLT) is managing the agenda and work of the COR. These changes require a lot of rethinking of how things get done on Council and are hard for some members of Council to swallow. So there was considerable effort during our opening plenary session to directly address concerns that were being expressed in advance of the meeting.

Our own Rodney Lowman is the inaugural chair of the CLT. His fellow Division 14 Council Reps agree that he performed exceptionally well in this role in this first meeting. He began in the opening session with a humorous account of how he happened upon this role and then gave a mock quiz that reminded everyone how the reorganization came to be and the large margins of votes that were cast in favor. Clearly Rodney has OD talents that are serving APA well.

The strategic topic to which we devoted a day of discussion was Translating Science into Public Policy. The plenary keynote speaker was former five-term Congressman and psychologist Dr. Brian Baird. His talk was well-targeted and included points that would serve SIOP well in our own efforts related to this topic. For example, when talking with policymakers, he noted that many do not even understand what true research (as opposed to searching the Internet) really is and that they have tons of information that is thrown their way. So anything we try to add to the mix must be relevant and expressed in a way that will be understood.

The same can be said for the four Council representatives who spoke the next day to share their experiences working in the realm of public policy. In another exceptional showing for I-O psychology, one of the speakers was Lori Foster Thompson, who talked about her work with the United Nations. APA’s chief counsel (Natalie Gilfoyle) also spoke about how the amicus briefs APA issues are highly regarded by the courts and bring high-level visibility and respect to APA. The collective advice offered by all these speakers included the following:
• Speak from the science; if you don’t have anything unique to add to the debate stay out of it
• Humanize the issue by telling the story of how a certain policy initiative can help solve (or create) a problem
• Engage all stakeholders; listen to all sides
• Find allies including reaching beyond psychology
• Disseminate findings in accessible language and formats

The actual strategic discussion was a little chaotic, but it was a trial process and was a welcome change from the usual COR deliberations. Participants volunteered for one of three groups: Research, Advocacy, and Educating the Public. A facilitated process was used to quickly generate ideas and then specific suggested actions for addressing two major questions posed to each group. Results of this work were fed back to the entire Council and will be triaged for assignment to the applicable boards, committees, or other groups for follow-up action.

In other action, Council adopted an interorganizational document that outlines competencies for psychology practice in primary care that will serve as a resource for graduate-level psychology programs, students, and practitioners (www.apa.org/ed/resources/competencies-practice.pdf). Relatedly, Council also approved new Standards of Accreditation for Health Service Psychology.

On the research side, Council approved endorsement of the 2012 San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment, which calls for improvements in the ways that the impact of scientific research is measured.

As a final note, APA’s financial health continues to be strong despite the fact that the 2015 budget has a projected deficit. Net assets are $67M, which reflects huge growth in recent years that can be largely tied to the stock market. Importantly, this net worth does not include the two fully leased office buildings in DC that continue to grow in value. In an effort to start putting some of the net assets to good use, APA plans to start investing 3% of its long-term investment funds each year in actions that advance strategic goals.