

A Guide to the Perplexed: The AAA Annual Meeting Review Process

Putting the AAA Annual Meeting together is a long, complex and remarkably democratic process, with many hands at work over multiple stages of review and scheduling. To inform the uninitiated and remind the rest of us, here are some key features of the process.

First, it is critical to stress that Sections are the principal agents in shaping the Annual Meeting program. In the usual year, about 95% of sessions taking place at the meeting come directly from Section submissions. The individual Sections within the AAA are responsible for reviewing and ranking the volunteered papers and sessions sent to them, as well as their own Invited Sessions. A program chair for each section, appointed for each year's Annual Meeting by the section, is responsible for coordinating this process.

The number of Invited Sessions allotted to each Section is based on the number of their members. Informal lobbying of Section program chairs for Invited-Session status begins well ahead of the deadline for submissions. Section program chairs for 2003 will be posted on the AAA website at www.aaanet.org/committees/program/ampc.htm. Sections are encouraged to collaborate on jointly sponsoring sessions, whether invited or regular.

The likelihood of a paper's acceptance is greater if it is part of an organized session than if it is a volunteered paper. Having a paper in an Invited Session makes it even more likely to be accepted. Sections that collaborate with other Sections probably improve the size of the audiences they can attract and also facilitate conversations across sections.

The president and the Executive Program Committee develop the Annual Meeting theme, as well as a limited number of Executive and Presidential Sessions. These efforts are coordinated with those of the Section program chairs.

The president, president-elect and executive program chair, at times with some additional assistance, prepare the final program schedule

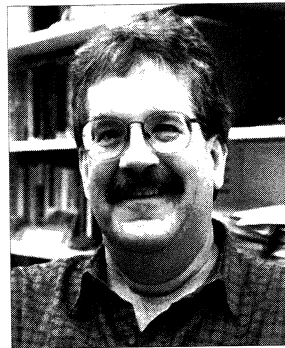
following the ranking submitted by each Section, scheduling Invited Sessions first, then proceeding to fill the remaining times and spaces, beginning with top-ranked submissions as determined by each of the Sections. The scheduling committee follows the Sections' ranked lists down as far as possible, stopping where there is no available space; rejections are based directly on Section rankings.

The 2002 Meeting catalyzed an unpredictably high number of submissions, a sign of the intellectual vitality of our field. San Francisco meetings generally draw the most submissions, followed by Washington, DC; and then with mid-country meetings drawing the fewest. This year, however, the number of submissions went up 19% from last year's already high number. The number of session rooms available actually went up a small bit from past years, but that increase

was far from commensurate with the dramatic increase in proposed panels. The crucial implication of the increased number of submissions was that, in putting the final program together, we could go less far down each Section's ranked lists, and a number of sessions that might well have found a place on the program in a more usual year were necessarily excluded. The average rejection rate over the past 10 years had been 9.9%; this year it was 20.5%, a

direct result of the increased submissions.

Given the historic pattern of submissions for Chicago meetings, we might well return to the more usual rejection rate. In the long run, one option for ensuring the comprehensiveness of the Annual Meeting is to schedule us into larger venues, e.g., convention centers. This is an option that historically has not been attractive to the Board or to members, but the Executive Board Committee on Scholarly Communication will be revisiting the issue, given the increased interest in participation.



Donald Brenneis, AAA President
Sally Engle Merry, 2003 Executive Program Chair
Deborah Heath, 2002 Executive Program Chair