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## The Organization of an Academy

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## THE ORGANIZATION OF AN ACADEMY <sup>1</sup>

JOSEPH C. GILMAN <sup>2</sup>

The Academy Conference of the American Association for the Advancement of Science is the one place in which representatives of the state academies meet for discussion of their common interests and problems. Since in the past ten years other immediate needs have held its attention, no discussion of the ever present problem of the methods of attaining its objectives has been presented, hence the present subject:—the organization of an academy—was chosen for discussion. As qualifications for presenting this material, the experiences during the past ten years as secretary of the Iowa Academy of Science and also the representative to the Academy Conference of the American Association for the Advancement of Science may be deemed sufficient. During this period the Iowa Academy revised its constitution and in order to develop the foundation for as competent a body of working rules as was possible in the judgment of the revising committee, a study was made of the constitutions of its contemporary organizations. This study was the deciding factor in the selection of the subject for discussion at this meeting.

### OBJECTIVES OF AN ACADEMY

Any plan of organization should depend on the objectives that are being sought. All the academies agree in one common objective; that is, the advancement of science within their state or territory. The methods of attaining this objective are varied, to meet local conditions and exigencies. Each academy meets at least once a year, a few meet more often, most of them support a publication, some have libraries, and a few have museums; thus, each one in its own way, is supporting the purpose of advancing scientific interests and thought within its community.

### MEMBERSHIP

Since the personnel of any academy is of first importance, the question of membership becomes significant. Most academies desire to attract the amateur, stimulate the professional, and honor the savant. These purposes present a problem that must be met

<sup>1</sup> Presented before the Academy Conference of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, December 27, 1939, Columbus, Ohio.

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for the successful molding of the academy into a working unit. Most academies have met it by dividing their membership into classes, differentiating them on the basis of financial support and scientific merit; a compromise which seems to be effective. A common classification is: *honorary fellows*: those outstanding fellows whose contributions to science deserve distinction; *fellows*, the bulk of the professional membership, and *members* (associates), the non-professional group and the younger members who have yet to win recognition. Those latter usually pay a lower rate of dues but cannot hold the principal offices. While many academies have organized Junior Academies for the high school students, very few provide a separate classification for the college student in science. Recently a new group has arisen because of the aging of the academy; I refer to the retired scientist whose pension, or lack of it, makes the financial burden of membership too great. The Iowa Academy has met this situation by erecting a new class, "fellow emeritus" for such persons as have been fellows for the past twenty-five years. Certain academies also recognize the members that have left the territory covered in their title by the name of corresponding members. Such designation seems an unnecessary elaboration of detail. Life memberships are available in most academies upon payment of a sum designed to bring the academies sufficient interest to cover annual dues during life expectancy. In a few cases of special need, — such as the support of a museum, library or publication, — patrons, sustaining members and subscribing members are recognized purely on a financial basis. One academy designates its American Association members as national.

#### OFFICERS

The usual officers are president, vice-president, secretary and treasurer. The president is usually chosen on a quasi-honorary-political basis; outstanding men being selected from different institutions in the state; often, too little regard for their work in the academy occurs. If such a situation presents itself, difficulties may arise from the fact that the president is unfamiliar with the machinery over which he presides. The Kansas Academy has attempted to overcome this difficulty by having a president-elect as well as a president, thus providing a year of preparation for this officer. Most of the other academies promote the vice-president to the presidency and thus achieve the same result. In a few cases where the section chairmen are designated vice-presidents, this latter device cannot be employed. Such designation complicates the executive situation and does not particularly enhance the officer

with added prestige. The title section chairman is significant and clarifies that part of the organization.

The secretary of the academy is the key-man in the organization and he is the executive officer. Such being the case, this officer should be maintained in office over a period of years either by constitutional statement or by tradition. The latter method is better in that it provides a graceful method of elimination should the wrong man be chosen. Its chief drawback lies in the likelihood of continuance of the secretary after he has served his time of usefulness. Unfortunately, most men are unable to realize their own short-comings. Whether or not the secretary's office should be combined with that of the treasurer is a matter in which the academies seem about equally divided. The combination certainly gives greater executive efficiency and with proper checks in the executive committee should not lead to the placing of too much power in a single individual. The addition of another mind to the executive interests of the academy does not compensate for the added burdens of records which the separation of the offices requires. The Iowa Academy has tried both methods and now has a secretary-treasurer.

Other officers such as editor, custodian, librarian, and assistant-secretaries are to be found in the various academies and doubtless meet special needs in these groups. In the adequacy with which they meet the requirements of their respective academies their offices are justified, although the simpler the organization the better.

#### EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

The executive committee is the backbone of any academy. This committee forms the policies, directs the action, and supervises the activities of the group. Therefore, its personnel is of vital moment to the well-being of its academy. The members should be active in the affairs of the group, cognizant of its policies, representative of the opinions of the membership, and willing to work for their attainment. The choice of personnel hence becomes of paramount importance. In most academies the officers of the academy, i.e., the president, the vice-president, secretary and treasurer together with certain others make up this committee. It is the manner of selecting these others that shows a diversity of opinion in this matter. In a number of the academies the past-presidents or a limited number of the more recent past-presidents are designated as members. Since the presidents, as mentioned previously, often are chosen because of qualities other than their interest in academy activities

such as geographical location, rotation of office in represented groups, or scientific attainment outside the academy, it follows that their inclusion on the executive committee does not strengthen that body in spite of the fact that theoretically they should be the (very) persons most interested in the academies' welfare. A second group frequently used for membership are the chairmen of the sections. This method gives good representation from the different sciences concerned but has a distinct drawback in that these men are usually so busy with the immediate affairs of their sections that they have too little time for the proper deliberations of the executive committee. The substitution of section representatives instead of chairmen eliminates this difficulty but breaks down from the fact that such representatives as a rule are not vitally interested in the affairs of the academy as a whole. Experience in the Iowa Academy indicates this fact.

In the larger groups the work of the academy is performed chiefly by standing committees. This being the case, the chairmen of these committees logically might be on the executive committee. Such an arrangement serves both to integrate their work and also to implement it with power to accomplish their objectives. Unless these chairmen are properly chosen the matter of section representation becomes jeopardized. This objection can be overcome by a little forethought in the selection of the chairmen.

#### COMMITTEES

Committees, other than the executive, are largely a matter of local need. Usually they are of two types: standing committees whose functions continue over a period of years and annual committees for the organization of meetings and to provide for exigencies arising in the course of the academies' development.

Standing committees that seem to have the approval of the majority of the academies are: membership, editorial, legislative, finance, and Junior Academy. To these may be added conservation, and biological survey. By assuring the chairman continuity of office and thereby fixing responsibility (in the Iowa Academy the term is six years) such committees are enabled to accomplish their work in a much better way than when such assurance is denied.

By rotating the time of office for the various chairmen into overlapping terms and placing them on the executive committee, the functioning of the Academy is unified since in the latter committee the interrelations of their work can be integrated and their needs met by the academy as a whole; for example, the work of the committee on Biological Survey may be enhanced by aid from the Con-

ervation Committee and the whole matter completed by the Committee on Legislation. Other intercommittee relationships doubtless occur to many of you.

By allowing the chairmen to serve but one term (six years in the Iowa Academy), the number of persons stimulated to an active interest in the Academy affairs might be increased and the danger of autocratic dominance by a self-perpetuating group avoided without too frequent shifting.

Of the annual committees little need be said. Certain of them, as the committee on local arrangements, the auditing committee, the nominations committee are of necessity in this class. Others like the necrology committee, the program committee may or may not be of the standing type. The reasons for establishment are various and their classification is a matter of opinion. Other committees to care for business as it arises in the course of time will be added to these to carry on the work of the academies. Since their problems are characteristic of the academy concerned, they need not be further discussed.

#### SECTIONS

In the matter of sections, the academies show the greatest diversity; from those which meet as a whole, to those like the Missouri Academy with twenty. Natural groupings are usually followed and the inclusion of arts and letters by a few academies increases the number over those groups which limit their membership to the physical and natural sciences. The age-old division into theoretical and applied groupings also enters into this question. The interrelations between the branches of science that are being emphasized in the recent advances of knowledge may well indicate that the simpler arrangement with opportunity for workers in these interrelated fields to get together might well be the better organization for the academies. With the smaller numbers concerned, a more intimate contact and livelier discussion is possible than in a larger organization such as the American Association. One of their functions might well be to give such opportunity to their membership.

#### MEETINGS

While most academies meet only once a year, in the spring, a few like the Indiana Academy meet more frequently. The time of the spring meeting is becoming more and more of a problem. With the various scientific societies such as the American Chemical Society, the Psychological Society and the Mathematical Association of America holding spring meetings, a proper date for the

academy meeting is difficult. To avoid conflicts with these and with the many spring activities of our universities and colleges is almost impossible. I wonder if one of the problems the Academy Conference might consider would not be the possibility of a common time of meeting for the academies which would set aside a week or week-end in which the academies would meet. Such an arrangement would defend our common interests and also enable academies in adjoining states to meet together if such meetings were desirable. Occasional joint meetings should be stimulating to both academies but at present seem to be difficult of attainment.

The place of meeting is usually rotated among the scientific institutions within the state. A few academies have a fixed place, but the stimulation of the meeting to the work of an institution and the rotation of costs of attendance make the former plan seem better. It has the further advantage that when the meeting is near the border of the state, joint meetings with neighboring academies could be arranged. When the Iowa Academy met at Sioux City, visitors from the South Dakota Academy greatly enhanced the value of that meeting.

#### INTERSOCIETY RELATIONS

In the field of intersociety relations we are still at the beginning of the potentialities that may be reached. The Academy Conference is indeed a step in the right direction but has a long way to go. By enabling the representatives of the academies to meet and discuss common problems the Association has given the academies that leadership which was needed to stimulate and increase the value of the academies. The Junior Academy movement is good evidence of this influence. However, there are still ways in which this relation might be improved. In the first place, continuity of attendance is much to be desired. The representative who attends for the first time has little concept of the functions of the conference. In the second place, most of us lack sufficient authority to make the conference meetings most effective. To ask our organizations to make possible continuity of office (say three years) to their representatives and clothe them with authority to act on interacademy relations would strengthen this body immeasurably. Today the Junior Academy movement needs just such implementation. Care must be taken not to infringe upon the autonomy of the individual academies but with proper deliberation, a plan of procedure, acceptable to both academies and the Association, could be worked out. Within each state there are many other local scientific societies which might well be invited to accept the advantages which affiliation with the

state academy would bring them. In most cases such contacts have been uncultivated. If the academy meeting could be made the rallying point for these groups, both the local societies and the academy would profit. A few such affiliations prove their advantages; the Iowa section of the Mathematical Society, for example, meets regularly with the Iowa Academy. The fear of the smaller group that its functions may be lost in the larger interests of the academy seems to be the great drawback to such affiliations. Once overcome, mutual benefits from such association accrue.

#### CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I would depict the effective academy as one with an active group of officers and continuing secretary, whose executive committee, made up of those officers and the chairmen of the standing committees, was an alert group which adequately directed the work of the academy not only its internal affairs but also its relations to the state in which it was situated. Further, it should be closely affiliated with the American Association and with the other scientific bodies of its locality. Such a group would be a guiding force wherever it might be found.

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