

Memorandum from the ACSP
Strategic Task Force Subcommittee

Recommendations on
Organization and Administration
of the Annual ACSP Conference

Subcommittee Members

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October 29, 1991

TO: The ACSP Executive Committee

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Strategic Task Force Conference Subcommittee Report

DATE: October 29, 1991

With the five committee members' responses in hand, the following memo summarizes the subcommittee's views of major issues associated with ACSP'S annual conference. One additional view was solicited by me. I indicate where this outside review differs from the subcommittee members' responses. This summary attempts to represent the collective views of the various ways ACSP might enhance the overall logistical operation of the conference.

The level of variation in responses to the first subcommittee survey suggests that ACSP would be advised to establish a standing committee on conferences. This committee would be charged with assisting the Vice President in continuing oversight of conference activities and structural changes that might be necessitated as the ACSP evolves. Such a committee could help establish paper acceptance and other criteria, as well as researching issues raised in the previous memo such as revenue enhancements and future issues that might arise.

The following memo outlines the general issues that the subcommittee addressed. The process by which these recommendations were developed was a first round survey (see attached) responded to by subcommittee members. On the basis of the first round of comments, a version of the following memo was drafted. This memo was then distributed to committee members with a request for comments, additions, suggestions and disagreements. This final memo represents the collective views of the subcommittee. One subcommittee member remains deeply concerned about the question of using the conference to generate profits for the organization. Accordingly, the member have indicated a desire to file a minority report concerning this issue.

For the sake of brevity, I first list the recommendations that evolved out of the written comments of subcommittee members. This is followed by more detailed discussions of individual recommendations.

Recommendation 1: The Executive Committee should establish a standing committee to formulate policies concerning conference activities and to assist the Vice President in conference-related matters.

Recommendation 2: ACSP should maintain the conference format which includes both business and academic activities.

Recommendation 3: Sunday sessions should be maintained. Allocation of papers to these sessions should remain the responsibility of the program chairperson.

Recommendation 4: ACSP should operate the conference with an expectation that a reasonable profit be generated. The level of profit should be arrived at on the basis of a discussion by the full ACSP board. Profit levels should be monitored to reduce the possibility of excess revenue generation.

Recommendation 5: The number of events that are covered by the registration fee should be maintained. This includes breakfasts, lunches, and receptions. Conference hosts should be given guidelines regarding past expenditures of funds for the different functions. ACSP should reexamine the number of conference events on an ongoing basis and make adjustments in accordance with resources and organizational goals.

Recommendation 6: The registration fee structure should be kept simple and apply across the board to conference participants. Keynote speaker's attendance fee should be waived. ACSP should adopt a restrictive policy on refunds for individuals unable to attend the conference. Student fee schedules require further deliberation by the ACSP executive committee.

Recommendation 7: ACSP should establish a mechanism that results in a handbook on ACSP conference organization. This book should be passed along on an annual basis to the host school. Host schools should be responsible for re-compiling the handbook to reflect innovations or changes implemented in future conferences.

Recommendation 8: Conference organizers should keep accurate and detailed accounts of all revenues and expenditures. These should be part of a full report on the conference to be submitted to the ACSP Board for review no later than the first Board meeting following the conference. The payment of any ACSP advance should be reflected in the accounts, as should the repayment of the advance to the ACSP Bursar. The Bursar's report should be complete before submission of the conference report.

Recommendation 9: The executive board should explore the centralization of data-intensive and reoccurring functions associated with the conference.

Recommendation 10: Improvement in paper quality should be an important goal of each conference chairperson. ACSP should provide support for chairpersons regarding the use of their discretion to reject poor quality paper proposals. Efforts should be made to strengthen the applications process and provide conference program coordinators with needed level of information to determine paper quality. Further discussion is needed to determine the viability and appropriateness of using conference track chairs or other allocation innovations to formulate program sessions.

Recommendation 11: ACSP should explore the production of abstracts at future conferences. Conference participants should be expected to bring copies of papers for distribution at the conference.

Recommendation 12: There should be pre-established criteria for different types of sessions. A format that highlights original research papers and new findings—allowing needed time to make well-developed presentations should be developed. Roundtables should be maintained with appropriate criteria for acceptance to include high quality and relevant discourse.

Recommendation 13: Small schools should be encouraged to team up with other schools to host the conference. Small school encouragement includes reorganizing the solicitation process to include examples of successful small school collaboration. ACSP should explore uncoupling the conference location from that of host schools.

Recommendation 14: ACSP should experiment with revenue enhancement innovations. Exploration of alternative revenue sources is recommended.

Recommendation 15: There was a majority opinion that conference business meetings, with the exception of the general business meeting, should be scheduled either the day before the conference, or at hours that are not in conflict with program sessions.

Recommendation 16: Based on the Oxford experience, ACSP should explore uncoupling the conference location from the institutional location of the program chairperson. To facilitate this innovation, ACSP should explore decoupling conference program development from site selection. Further, ACSP should consider employing the services of an arrangements conference coordinator who would negotiate arrangements for hotel and food services and coordinate other logistical functions.

Detailed Discussion of Individual Recommendations

Conference Structure and Operation

In general, all subcommittee members felt the conference demonstrates a history of success. There was a strong feeling that the conference was not a problem per se, but that there were areas in which the process could be rationalized and in some instances enhanced. There was a strong sentiment that the conference successfully served both academic and business goals. There was unanimous agreement that the dual purpose of the conference should be maintained and, if possible, strengthened.

Recommendation 1: The Executive Committee should establish a standing committee to oversee annual conference activities and to assist the Vice President in conference-related matters.

Recommendation 2: ACSP should maintain the conference format which includes both business and academic activities.

Individual Participation and Sunday Sessions

There was general consensus that the conference should be organized to maximize individual exposure while ensuring equal participation. A majority of the subcommittee members felt that if time and space allocation were a problem, individual participation should be limited to one formal presentation per person. Distinction was made, however, between formal presentation and service as a moderator. One member did not feel ACSP should be expected to accommodate uncontrolled growth. By maintaining the conference at approximately its current size, logistical problems should be reduced.

There was disagreement regarding Sunday sessions. While generally subcommittee members did not see how the organization could get around holding Sunday sessions, there was concern that the number of Sunday sessions be limited. One member suggested that Sunday sessions be used to accommodate individuals who apply to the conference after the solicitation date closure. Another member was concerned that issue would unduly hamper the program coordinator's ability to build high quality sessions. One subcommittee member proposed that Sundays be retained strictly for tours. Unless the organization wants to adopt a system wherein there are more concurrent sessions, there was a general feeling that Sunday sessions were necessary.

Recommendation 3: Sunday sessions should be maintained. Allocation of papers to these sessions should remain the responsibility of the program chairperson.

Conference Revenue Generation

There were a variety of opinions regarding the level of profit generation appropriate for the conference. There was relatively strong sentiment that the conference generate revenues for the organization. Four of five members felt the conference should be expected to generate a reasonable profit. The outside reviewer indicated that in the past the conference was expected to generate a profit and that the notion of breaking even has been a recent development. One member felt strongly that the conference was a major service the organization provided ACSP members. Hence the conference should be operated on a break-even basis with a small built-in profit for contingencies.

A question was raised about other ACSP activities which are not self-supporting. There was a suggestion that all activities of the organization which are not self-supporting be reexamined and that the larger issue of cross-subsidy of non-self financing activities be discussed fully by the entire board. On the basis of this concern a member of the subcommittee has requested the right to file a minority report on the question of profits generated by the conference.

On a numerical basis, however, there was a belief that the conference should generate at least the current \$8,000 to \$10,000 surplus. There was a concern that this level of revenue expectation should be made clear to schools bidding on the conference so that there are no surprises. In addition to specifying the expected level of resource generation from the conference, one subcommittee member suggested that there be a more explicit policy regarding conference account reporting. It was suggested that the board adopt a standard procedure regarding conference accounting with dates specified for revenues to be posted and the residual returned to the organization. This procedure should be designed with enough flexibility to contend with unexpected events.

Recommendation 4: There was significant disagreement on this issue. On a numerical basis the subcommittee recommends that the organization operate the conference with an expectation that a reasonable profit be generated, and that the level of profit be specified by the board. Profit levels should be monitored to reduce the possibility of excess revenue generation.

Conference Events

There was general satisfaction regarding the organization of the conference vis-a-vis the number of events, i.e., lunches, breakfasts, receptions. There was a general feeling that the current array of services or functions provided by the conference format maximized participation. There was one suggestion to reduce the number of lunches to one with a plenary session reserved for awards presentations. There was also a concern that labor costs to operate the conference be kept to a strict minimum. It was suggested that compensated student labor be minimized and complementary conference attendance be offered in lieu of

wages. The overall consensus was to retain the various functions with the possibility of setting a limit on the amount of funds to be expended on the reception.

Recommendation 5: Maintain the number of events that are covered by the registration fee. This includes breakfasts, lunches and receptions. Conference hosts should be given guidelines regarding the expenditure of funds for the different functions. ACSP should reexamine the number of conference events on an ongoing basis and make adjustments in accordance with resources and organizational goals.

Fee Waivers and Fee Payment

Regarding registration fee waivers, there was a strong sentiment that everyone, regardless of his/her function or reason for attending the conference, should pay full fee. There was substantial agreement that in-person fee levels should be significantly higher than for pre-registration. It was recommended that ACSP adopt a restrictive policy on refunds. Refunds should be made only in very unusual circumstances. This policy should be reflected in application documents. There was a suggestion that non-ACSP members who attend the conference for only a single presentation pay a reduced fee. There was considerable sentiment that there be a reduced fee for students, and it was suggested that the reduced fee for students still provide access to the lunches, etc. One subcommittee member noted, however, that other conference members would therefore be expected to subsidize the direct costs of students participating in conference functions. Given this fact, there was no consensus on this point. On the question of whether to pay the keynote speaker, there was one dissenting view concerning a fee for the speaker. But in general there was implied agreement that the keynote speaker should be modestly compensated and his/her fee waived.

Recommendation 6: Registration fee structure should be kept simple and apply across the board to conference participants. Keynote speaker's attendance fee should be waived. ACSP should adopt a restrictive policy on refunds for individuals unable to attend the conference. Student fee schedules require further deliberation by the ACSP executive committee.

Developing an Institutional Memory and Centralizing Reoccurring Functions

Institutional Memory

There was a unanimous sentiment that an effective means of developing an institutional memory should be developed. At least two members referred to the need to develop a guide to conference organization. Two members commented on the existence of such guides. There was one recommendation that a guidebook be generated based on the Portland, Austin, and Oxford experiences. This book would be loose-leaf in construction and passed on to schools hosting future conferences. At the end of each conference, the host school would be responsible for amending the book to reflect the experience of the recent conference. One subcommittee member volunteered to help assemble such a book in conjunction with Sheldon Edner.

Centralization of Reoccurring Functions

There was a diversity of views regarding the centralization of reoccurring functions associated with the conference. These functions include registration fee collection, program production, call for papers solicitation₁ and local arrangements.

In general the subcommittee members supported efforts designed to centralize reoccurring functions. In one instance it was felt that this type of effort would have the side benefit of helping to develop an institutional memory. There was no consensus as to how or where this centralization should occur. There was a general feeling that this issue could not be dealt with in isolation and needed to be part of a larger discussion of organization data collection and record administration needs. There was at least one opinion that the organization should select an individual with substantial conference experience to be the point of convergence for conference functions. This could include contracting with someone (Sheldon Edner has been suggested as a strong candidate) to complete the relevant tasks. A second suggestion was that schools bid on this function—perhaps in conjunction with the maintenance of a database on the organization. There was concern expressed that this latter suggestion would be difficult to implement. Consolidating control over the conference and other data related functions would diminish the ability for other schools to participate in ACSP related activities.

It was strongly felt by subcommittee members that an explicit reporting system be adopted for the conference. Conference chairpersons should be instructed about the type of information required and the timing of account submissions to the Executive Board.

Recommendation 7: There was a strong sentiment that the organization establish a mechanism that results in a handbook on ACSP conference organization. This book would be passed along on an annual basis to the host school. Host schools would be responsible for re-compiling the handbook to reflect innovations or changes implemented in future conferences.

Recommendation 8: The executive board should explore the centralization of data-intensive and reoccurring functions associated with the conference.

Recommendation 9: Conference organizers should keep accurate and detailed accounts of all revenues and expenditures. These should be part of a full report on the conference to be submitted to the ACSP Board for review no later than the first Board meeting following the conference. The payment of any ACSP advance should be reflected in the accounts, as should the repayment of the advance to the ACSP Bursar. The Bursar's report should be complete before submission of the conference report.

Improving Paper Quality

Regarding paper quality, there was a general consensus that the organization should strive to improve the quality of paper submissions and corresponding paper presentations. There was a difference of opinion regarding how this could be accomplished. There was disagreement about the efficacy of increasing the length of the abstract. One subcommittee member recommended that abstracts be lengthened significantly. There was concern that such efforts would ultimately not alter the quality of papers presented. Nonetheless, there was a general sentiment that ACSP should experiment with ways of improving paper quality. One subcommittee member suggested that the only sure way to increase paper quality was for the program chair to exercise the option of rejecting papers that appear of inferior quality. Another subcommittee member indicated, however, that while this is probably every program chair's goal, the need to generate the necessary revenues to cover direct costs would make it difficult to reject many papers. At a minimum, program chairs should be given encouragement to use their discretion in accepting or rejecting papers. Another subcommittee member suggested that the moderator be given the responsibility of coordinating panel members. Furthermore, it was suggested that presenters be required to submit papers in advance to the moderator, and that the moderator be given the right to reject papers which are of insufficient quality. There was a strong sentiment that abstracts should be published and distributed before the conference. There was also some sentiment in favor of requiring authors to bring a pre-set number of paper copies to circulate at the conference.

Recommendation 10: Improvement in paper quality should be an important goal of each conference chairperson. ACSP should provide support for chairpersons regarding the use of their discretion to reject poor quality paper proposals. ACSP should explore the production of abstracts at future conferences. Conference participants should be expected to bring copies of papers for distribution at the conference.

Recommendation 11: There was a diversity of ideas regarding the paper selection process. In general committee members felt the need to formalize the format for presentations. There was also interest expressed in the adoption of some mechanism that selects papers based on pre-set criteria. There was some agreement that an aspect of the format applied in Austin be institutionalized, i.e., paper sessions limited to three papers. There was less unanimity regarding other formats and functions of presentations, e.g., roundtables. There was no general agreement about what the criteria should be. There was also interest in maintaining the position of discussant. There was a collective consensus that distinctions should be made between original research papers and those of lesser significance. It was suggested that the Call for Papers instruct participants regarding the paper selection procedure and presentation format.

Recommendation 12: There was general agreement that there be pre-established criteria that selects among papers for different types of sessions. Desire was expressed for a format that highlights original research papers and new findings—allowing needed time to make well-developed presentations.

Small School Participation and Site Selection

There were a number of recommendations concerning the desire to facilitate small schools' ability to host the conference. One recommendation was that there be a lower expectation of profit from smaller host schools. However, there was equally strong sentiment that small schools working together could manage the conference successfully. There was strong feeling from the outside reviewer that the organization could not excessively subsidize the conference to ensure that small schools have the opportunity to host the conference. In general, there was consensus that in cases when small schools wish to host the conference, teaming schools to work together might be the most viable strategy. One member recommended that future solicitations include examples of successful small school collaborations. One member recommended that the conference location be freed from the requirement that a host school be proximate to the site where the conference occurs.

Three members felt that the use of an outside consultant to coordinate local arrangements would facilitate the operations of the conference.

Recommendation 13: Small schools should be encouraged to team up with other schools to host the conference. Small school encouragement could include reorganizing the solicitation process to include examples of successful small school collaboration. ACSP should explore uncoupling the conference location from that of host schools.

Revenue Enhancements

There was a diversity of opinion about ACSP conference capacity to generate revenues. Given several alternatives, subcommittee members generally agreed that revenue enhancements that included organizational innovations should be experimented with but should not be counted on to generate significant revenues. There was concern that subcontracting out functions such as the book fair would not work and that ACSP was too small to attract advertisers. There was general agreement, however, that such innovations should be tried over time.

Recommendation 14: There was general agreement that ACSP experiment with revenue enhancement innovations. Exploration of alternative revenue sources is recommended.

Conference Program

Regarding the reduction of time involved in sorting and compiling conference panels, two subcommittee members suggested institutionalizing the track chair concept for future conferences. The outside reviewer suggested establishing a revolving committee to help compile program sessions. At least one subcommittee member felt strongly that allocating program development to a track chair system would remove the most interesting activity of the conference from the local host institution. Another member felt equally strongly about the limits of the track system noting that track chairs may view panel formulation as an end in itself rather than viewing the position of track chair as including insuring high quality paper presentations.

Concerning accommodating business meetings, three members felt that business meetings should be held the day before the conference, or at such time that they are not in conflict with conference sessions. One subcommittee member suggested that conflicts should not be the responsibility of the program chair to resolve. Individuals, special interest groups, journal editorial boards, etc., should be required to submit their requests for time and space according to the same deadline as paper submissions.

Recommendation 15: Further discussion is needed to determine the viability and appropriateness of using conference track chairs or other allocation innovations to formulate program sessions. There was a majority opinion that conference business meetings, with the exception of the general business meeting, should be scheduled either the day before the conference, or at hours that are not in conflict with program sessions.

Recommendation 16: Based on the Oxford experience, ACSP should explore uncoupling the conference location from the institutional location of the program chairperson. To facilitate this innovation, ACSP should explore decoupling conference program development from site selection. Further, ACSP should consider employing the services of a local arrangements conference coordinator who would negotiate arrangements with the hotel, food service and coordinate other logistical functions.