



**the PEN**

***Postsecondary Education Network***

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*Christopher C. Morpew, University of Kansas, Editor  
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### **Vice President's Column**

*Jan Lawrence*

*University of Michigan*

It is hard to believe that we are almost half way through the summer. The program planning session for the 2003 AERA Meeting has already taken place and I'm off to Washington, DC for my first AERA Council Meeting as Vice President of Division J. However, before I share some plans for the coming year, I want to thank Linda Johnsrud for the exemplary leadership she provided over the last two years and for the help she has provided me personally with the transition.

I believe we are at a critical point in our history, a time when we must take stock of how we manage our activities and consider changes that will enhance the Division. The incoming Vice-Presidents of other Divisions have the same priorities and we are comparing bylaws, handbooks, and other methods of maintaining continuity in divisional leadership that were developed by our predecessors. Ann Morey found a copy of our Division J Bylaws and I am in the process of creating an electronic version so that the Executive Council of Division J can review it, help me bring us into compliance, and develop a set of recommended revisions that we will bring to the Divisional Business Meeting next year. I am grateful that committee chairs agreed to stay on for another year to think about how to serve the various members of our AERA Division (many of them members of other Divisions as well) and to help me begin regularizing terms in office and transitioning to new chairs. I want to thank all of you who chatted with me about your ideas for Division J. I have my "to do" list at the ready!

One other initiative that I wanted to announce concerns the relationship of AERA Division J

to other higher education research and professional associations. Together with John Burkhardt, Director of the Kellogg Forum, Bill Tierney (President of ASHE), and representatives of several professional associations in Washington, DC, I am developing ideas about how our organizations can work together to bridge research and practice. We will meet in July to share our thoughts about how collaboration can be created and sustained and I will report back to you on our progress.

In sum, I anticipate a busy and productive year. And I want to close by saying please contact members of the Executive Council with your ideas for improving the Division and please join with us in shaping an agenda for the future. The following people are Committee Chairs and Council Members for the coming year:

Linda Johnsrud – Immediate Past Vice-President and Chair, Nomination Committee  
Elizabeth Creamer – Chair, Awards Committee  
Ana Martinez Aleman – Affirmative Action Chair and At Large Division Council Member  
Laura Perna – At Large Division Council Member  
Christopher Morpew – Newsletter Editor  
Lisa Wolf-Wendel – Chair, Graduate Student Seminar  
Eric Dey & Jeff Milem – Co-Chairs, 2003 AERA Meeting Program  
Douglas Toma – Chair, 2004 AERA Meeting Program  
Adrienne Hyle – Chair, Evaluation Committee  
Kelly Ward – Chair, Membership and New Faculty Mentoring  
Barbara Townsend – Secretary  
Tatiana Suspitsina – Graduate Student Representative  
Cheryl Simpson – Graduate Student Representative

## **Thank you**

We would also like to acknowledge that the Division J reception was co-hosted by the Division and the College of Education UH Manoa and was made possible with the support of the National Center for Postsecondary Improvement (NCPI), a national research and development center funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI), and the Stanford Institute for Higher Education Research.

## **News from Division J**

James Hearn will be joining the Higher Education Faculty Group at Peabody College, Vanderbilt University effective Fall 2002.

Just released: [\*Higher Education in the United States: An Encyclopedia\*](#) by Division J's James Forest (West Point) and Kevin Kinser (SUNY-Albany) is available at quality booksellers, including Amazon.com.

## **AERA Division J Evaluations, 2002 – Summary**

*Adrienne E. Hyle and Virginia B. Benetiene*

*College of Education, Oklahoma State University*

Four types of AERA sessions were covered by this evaluation: symposia, paper sessions, paper discussions (formerly round tables), and highlighted sessions. This year, evaluation forms were mailed to session chairs or organizers prior to the conference with a request to distribute and collect completed forms and return them in postage paid envelopes after the conference. Evaluation forms were specific to each session so that data could be reviewed by session, presenter, or session type. Evaluation data was tallied into MS Excel spreadsheets organizing responses collected from session attendees and presenters. Attendee evaluation forms targeted items such as what drew the participant to the session, level of satisfaction with content and presenter, and feedback on AERA's online planner. Presenter evaluations asked about the quality and preparedness of other presenters, fit of session topics, and audience participation.

A total of 280 evaluations (61 presenters and 219 attendees) were received from 24 of 65 sessions for a response rate was 37%. Over half (59%) of respondents were Division J members; 19% of respondents belong to other divisions. More session presenters than participants have attended more than five AERA conferences (54% and 29% respectively). A third of the respondents, both presenters and participants, have attended fewer than five AERA conferences and the New Orleans conference was the first attended by 18 % of the presenters and 32% of the participants.

### · General Findings

Overall, most participants reported that they planned to attend a particular session (93 %) because of a professional research interest (58%), interest in a specific presenter's (38%) or discussant's work (10%) or a preference for a particular session format (6%). Most participants (93%) reported that the session format was appropriate for the particular topic. Three quarters (72%) of attendees rated sessions overall with an "A;" three quarters (73%) of participants rated presenters with an "A." Discussants were not evaluated as positively; 56% received an A and 24% did not evaluate discussants at all.

### · Findings by Session Type

**Symposia** yielded the lowest return rate (32%) representing 7 of 22 sessions. Half (51%) of the respondents were members of Division J; 28% were members of other divisions. Attendees were drawn to symposia because of interest in their research area (65%), presenter's work (53 %), discussant's work (12%) and a preference for the session's format (10%). Virtually all participants (94%) noted that the session format was appropriate and the overall fit of the papers presented was evaluated as "good" by 100% of presenters.

Clearly three fourths (78% )of attendees rated their session an “A” 86 % rated presenters an “A,” and 57 % rated discussants an “A.” Overall the quality of symposia presenters (professionalism, communication of knowledge, interaction) was evaluated as “excellent” by 88% of other symposia presenters. Fifty-nine percent (59%) of respondents evaluated audience participation as “very good;” 41% rated it as “acceptable”. Participants wanted to have papers or at least handouts with references from presenters; they made the following remarks: “handouts with references/citations would be appreciated,” “I'd like to know the sources of the graphs,” “a list of references for these type of sessions would be terrific,” “need more handouts for all attendees”.

Evaluations were returned from 11 of 31 **paper sessions** (38% return rate). Most respondents (56%) were members of Division J and most attendees were drawn to the session because of their interest in a particular research area (68 %). Ninety-three percent (93%) of attendees found the format to be appropriate for the topic. Most participants (62%) rated sessions an “A” and most presenters received an “A” (56%) as well. Discussants fared better than presenters with 66% receiving a rating of “A.” Remarks regarding session quality as well as presenter’s and discussant’s work, varied from extremely positive to extremely negative. Some presentations and sessions were characterized as “excellent,” “well articulated,” and “outstanding” while others were perceived as “uneven,” “fair presentations, not great ones,” and “standard presentations, little imagination.” Presenters were “uneven” or did not provide papers. Remarks about discussants also varied and reflected extremes. Some discussants and the comments were viewed in a very positive way as “organized, substantive insights and questions – that made me think we should ask discussants to provide copies of remarks as well,” “excellent critique of research, good analysis and questions,” “to the point - did not belabor over minutia, focused on ‘big picture,’” and “very to the point, outstanding discussant.” Discussants were most criticized for taking too much time, “talking too much,” being “penetrating, arrogant, condescending, and much too heavy handed” and for not being “knowledgeable of method: quantitative discussion for qualitative work was an awful problem.” Overall, participants complained about too little time for discussions and about crowded rooms, especially when high-interest issues were discussed, such as community colleges in higher education, educational transitions from high school to college, or faculty representations in media. Research on community colleges and students seemed to be an exceptionally interest-drawing topic; participants suggested having more research and more sessions devoted to that particular theme or topic.

Most of the **paper session** presenters’ evaluations (86%) of the preparation of their fellow presenters were positive. Discussants again fared better than presenters with 89% of presenters saying their discussants knew their role and performed it well. Overall, presenter

quality was evaluated as “excellent” by 66% of fellow presenters and as “good” by the remaining 34%. Fifty-seven percent of presenters thought that audience participation was “very good” and 40% evaluated it as “acceptable, there was some interaction.” Presenters added remarks that there was not enough time for presentations and discussion, sometimes there were too many papers – 5 – scheduled for one session, and that the discussant talked too long and too much.

Evaluations were returned from half of the **paper discussions** (formerly round tables), 5 of 10 sessions. Three quarters (75%) of presenters were Division J members while one third (32%) of participants claimed Division J membership. Forty-five percent of attendees chose the particular discussion due to presenter’s work, and another 45% - due to their interest in that researcher area, 24% - due to discussant’s work, 17% chose “other” reasons for their attendance, and 7% had a preference for this session format. It seems from participants’ remarks that they were confused about the title of these particular sessions: “paper discussions” was not a clear title representing round tables. Most (93%) attendees believed the session format was appropriate for the topics presented. Sessions were rated an “A” by 97% of participants and presenters were rated an “A” by 93% of participants. However, only 40% of presenters were evaluated by their fellow presenters as well prepared. Discussants were rated an “A” by 31% of attendees. Attendees praised the larger table space and suggested to have conference bags to those pre-registered for these sessions.

Evaluations were received from one of the two **highlighted sessions**. Almost half (43%) of the respondents were Division J members. A little over half (57%) reported attending because of their research interest. Forty-three percent (43%) of attendees rated the session and presenters an “A” and 29% a “C.” The discussant received a rating of “A” from 71% of the participants.

#### · Additional Comments

One quarter (22%) of the participants provided recommendations for next year’s program committee. In addition to recommendation about the online planner, most of the remarks suggested more precisely scheduled session times and more time for presenter and participant discussions. Some participants noted that they were glad to have evaluation form.

Approximately one third (38%) of session attendees rated the AERA online planner as helpful. However, the majority (53%) did not use the planner or did not find it helpful. Many reported slow downloading and lost data, and strongly suggested that AERA use an independent professional contractor to update and improve the planner for upcoming conferences. Some of those who did not use the planner either did not know about it or had too little time to do so before their departure for the conference. Many reported that a paper

copy of the AERA program was faster to use for decision-making about attendance of particular sessions.

### · Conclusions and Recommendations

Overall, attendee and presenter satisfaction was high for all sessions. Overall, the quality of presenters and discussants was high, and the overall fit of the papers was good.

Evaluation findings suggest insights that may help next year's conference committee.

**Paper discussions** appear to be a good alternative to round tables. At the same time, paper discussions were the most confusing for participants who were uncertain about the application of traditional definitions of presenter and discussant roles. Next year it may be helpful to provide paper discussion attendees with a description of the sessions format and participant roles.

**Discussant roles** may benefit from clarification and confirmation. Discussants were praised for being short, providing the "big picture" on the topic, making organized and "to the point" comments, and being constructive and positive toward the presenters and their papers. At the same time, discussants were criticized for taking too much time, being arrogant and critical, and being able to address the research method used in the reviewed papers. In some sessions, discussants received more positive rating than presenters and such praises as the "discussant was the best part of the session." This suggests that discussants were the most advanced scholars in some particular sessions. This also suggests that they can make or break the session. Therefore, it may be wise for the conference committee to more carefully select scholars for discussant's role making sure that they are experts or at least advanced researchers in a certain area and in a specific research method or paradigm. For next year it may be beneficial to have a questionnaire designed for the discussants targeting their perceptions of their role and session/presenters quality.

Finally, the **AERA online planner** needs improvement if the conference committee is serious about encouraging more participants to use it as the main reference source of the annual conference.

More information on the evaluations can be obtained by emailing Adrienne Hyle at [ah@okstate.edu](mailto:ah@okstate.edu).

### **Nominations for Vice-President of Division J 2004-2007**

The nominating committee is seeking nominations for Division J Vice President, elected in 2003, to serve 2004-2007. Candidates must be members of Division J, with a history of service to the Division. Members of the nominating committee are Linda Johnsrud ([johnsrud@hawaii.edu](mailto:johnsrud@hawaii.edu)), chair, Judith Glazer-Raymo, ([JudithRaymo@email.msn.com](mailto:JudithRaymo@email.msn.com)) and Frances Stage ([fks1@nyu.edu](mailto:fks1@nyu.edu)). Note that the term of the office is now three years. Please forward the names of nominees to any member of the nominating committee (it will be

helpful to the committee if you indicate the nominee's record of service). Deadline for receipt of names is July 15, 2002.

### **Information for an Upcoming *Pen*?**

If you have information that you think would be appropriate for an upcoming edition of *The Pen*, please contact Christopher Morphew at [morphew@ku.edu](mailto:morphew@ku.edu) or 785.864.9845 or 421 Joseph R. Pearson Hall, 1122 West Campus Road, University of Kansas, Lawrence, KS 66045.

Appropriate *Pen* contributions might include (but are not limited to) short informative original pieces on issues that are of general concern to Division J'ers, news of publication outlets, or news concerning professional happenings around the Division. The next *Pen* will be out in Fall 2002.