

## 4S Ad Hoc Committee on Ethics and Public Policy

Options Paper,

**Resolved: That 4S institute a Standing Committee on Ethics and Public Policy**

### Pre-amble: about discussion and decision

At its meeting on Wednesday, November 6, 2002, the 4S Council accepted the recommendation of the Ad Hoc Committee on Ethics and Public Policy, to institute a Standing Committee on Ethics and Public Policy for the 4S. The charge for the Committee is to provide findings and advice to the President concerning issues of ethics or public policy that it finds important, or that are brought to its attention. The comment period is complete; the main comment is that the name of the committee be modified slightly to the Standing Committee on Ethics and Public Affairs.

The recommendation is for a small Standing Committee with a core membership of four. One would be the retiring president of 4S. One would be a Council member, preferably with two years of his or her term remaining. The third would be a Council member or another person appointed by the 4S president; it is preferable to have someone who is not an officer of the society. The fourth member, *pro tem*, is the 4S secretary. Additional members are welcome; some 4S members have informally indicated interest already. It is expected that the Committee would usually number 5-7 persons. Terms where appropriate are renewable.

The President and Council also accepted the Committee's recommendation to announce the results of these deliberations to the membership at large, through the 4S website and *Technoscience*, and to allow time for membership comment before the final policy is adopted. The Council's action was based on the options paper the Ad Hoc Committee provided. The Committee's chair provides a slightly revised and updated version of that paper below. She is happy to receive comments and suggestions from 4S members until June 2003. At that time, she will correspond with other members of the Committee and the 4S president and secretary concerning final action.

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4S Ad Hoc Committee on Ethics and Public Policy

Options Paper,

December 2002

Charge: To advise the President on the question of 4S's involvement in issues of ethics and public policy. Such issues may appear on the 4S agenda because questions are addressed to the 4S by non-members, or by members. The committee will address especially the following question: by what procedures should 4S react to issues of ethics and politics, on which a stance is asked for?

Status: The committee is an ad hoc President's committee. It will provide an interim report in September 2002, allowing some discussion at Council in November 2002; and then a final report in September 2003, giving the membership a chance to comment. It may be part of the committee's final recommendation to the President to establish a standing committee.

Members:

Rachelle Hollander, Chair: e-mail: rholland@nsf.gov

David Guston

Sheila Jasanoff

Knut Sorensen

Judy Wajcman

Background:

President Wiebe Bijker formed the committee as a result of thinking about two kinds of matters that the Society has faced. One is the questions that arise concerning ethical conduct in scholarship. Should the 4S have mechanisms or procedures or policies by which to inform or influence its members on such matters? The other impetus arises from public issues in which members become involved, to which the 4S may need or wish to respond. An example of the former is a question concerning a member that was brought to the President's attention; the Society has no guidance to its officers and members on this subject. An example of the latter was the 4S statement on freedom of speech that the Council approved. There are no standing procedures for the Society to follow in that kind of circumstance.

Discussion:

This ad hoc committee is charged to develop options for the officers of 4S to consider and adopt or reject. As part of its charge, it can decide whether to recommend a Standing Committee on Ethics and Public Policy. This section of the paper identifies some of the possibilities.

Option One: Do nothing. As issues arise and come to the attention of officers of the association, leave matters to the President or Council members to decide on an individual basis.

Option Two: With advice from the Council, the President will appoint ad hoc committees to take up any such issues if and as they arise.

Option Three: With concurrence of the Council, the President will establish a Standing Committee to take up any such issues if and as they arise.

This ad hoc committee will suggest some guidance and procedures for the President to use in instituting option two or three. In choosing either, it would be appropriate for the President to present the 4S Council with his recommendation and the options identified in this paper, and ask for Council approval of his recommendation. It would be appropriate to announce the results of these deliberations to the membership at large, through the 4S website and *Technoscience*, and to allow time for membership comment before the final policy is adopted.

Committee Opinion:

Option One should be brought to the attention to the President and Council. They can decide that that's best. However, there are problems with in essence leaving things as they stand. The Society remains in the position of responding haphazardly to whatever issues happen to come to the attention of its leadership, without the justification that a public statement of principles and procedures provides. Its membership may perceive it as acting arbitrarily and without engaging the members as to whether they share its positions. This Committee cannot leave the matter here without being unresponsive to its charge.

Option Two and Three capture the essence of the Committee's charge; they are discussed further below. Whichever option is selected, it is a good idea to notify the members and allow them to comment, so that the leadership can be responsive to their concerns and so that members are informed about the policies and practices of 4S in considering and responding to matters of ethics and public policy.

Main Task: Guidance and Procedures for 4S on Matters of Ethics or Public Policy

It seems unlikely that officers or any committee of a society would anticipate the specifics of issues of ethics or public policy that would be brought to its attention. However, it is not difficult to anticipate, based on history, that such issues will arise. Thus, it is prudent to take reasonable measures to be able to respond appropriately when they do. These measures can include having a structure and guidance in place.

I. Structure.

There are two main options here: a standing committee or an ad-hoc committee or committees. Either option can result from a process in which the officers and members are involved; either will allow for deliberation over difficult matters. Ad-hoc committees have the advantage of being crafted specifically for an issue. They have the disadvantage that it may be difficult to respond in a timely fashion. If issues do arise, the 4S president would have the difficult task of trying to find appropriate persons to put on such a committee. There may not be much improvement from the current situation, and ad hoc bodies would not be able to be pro-active or develop long-range strategies or goals.

A mid-way solution would be to appoint a small, say three-person maximum, standing committee that would have the job of putting together small ad-hoc committees of particular duration, on particular issues. The standing committee could be the retiring President, a Council member with two years remaining, and the 4S secretary. One of them could be a member of each ad-hoc committee that was needed. This has the advantage of keeping things small and simple, unless a particular issue arises or it is decided that some long-range thinking is needed. It has the disadvantage that the busiest people in the Society have one more assigned responsibility.

In the end, it seems simpler and potentially more effective to have a Standing Committee, so long as the membership is small. Perhaps four people would suffice as a core. Actual membership can expand if needed. One member could be the retiring president of 4S, who could chair the group. One should be a Council member, preferably with two years of his or her term remaining. The third could be a Council member or another person appointed by the current 4S president. Probably it would be good to have someone who is not a current officer of the association. This person would be appointed for at least a two year term, with the potential for renewal. The 4S secretary should be a member too, *pro tem*.

The charge for any Committee would be to provide findings and advice to the President concerning issues of ethics or public policy that it finds important, or that are brought to its attention. The Chair or any Committee member can raise issues for consideration. Members with issues for consideration should present these matters, in writing, to the Chair (although they could certainly be forwarded by any Committee member to the Chair). The Chair would acknowledge receipt, generally within a week or two. Some matters the Chair may be able to attend to personally and notify the other Committee members and the President of results. For other matters, the Chair will notify Committee members about the inquiry and the Committee will develop a response. Most matters should be attended to within two months of receipt, and findings reported to the President of the Association.

The President would forward the Committee's findings and advice, with his or her own recommendations, to the Council for approval or rejection. (The Council and President also have the authority to refer problems to the Committee. Alternatively, they can respond directly to an inquiry and inform the Committee.) Results would be publicized on the 4S website, and members encouraged to comment so that the leadership of 4S can examine whether it is being responsive to its members' concerns and views.

## II. Guidance

*On issues of ethics:* The 4S does not have a code of ethics for its members. The 4S does not have the financial or human wherewithal to undertake examinations of or issue findings concerning specific cases where its members are accused of misconduct or where members accuse others of misconduct. It counsels its members that the appropriate place to raise such matters is the relevant institution, usually the employer.

As an academic and professional society whose members do research and occupy academic teaching positions, 4S has a responsibility to inform its members that it expects them to follow relevant research regulations and the ethical guidelines in professional codes that are suited to their kinds of research and academic activities. These codes can be found at the websites of such professional organizations as the American Association of University Professors, the American Historical Association, the American Anthropological Association, the American Sociological Association, and the American Political Science Association. The urls for these groups are below. There are other professional societies to which 4S members belong, and their codes also provide appropriate guidance and should be respected.

AAUP: <http://www.aaup.org/statements/Redbook/Rbethics.htm>

AHA: <http://www.theaha.org/pubs/standard.htm>

AAA: <http://www.aaanet.org/committees/ethics/ethcode.htm>

ASA: <http://www.asanet.org/members/ecoderev.html>

APSA : <http://209.235.241.4/pubs/ethics.cfm>

An important issue for discussion in the 4S is whether members from countries other than the US have suitable guidance from these codes or should be referred to other guidelines. Is this an area where 4S needs to develop some special guidance?

In discussing the needs of 4S with respect to ethical matters, members of this ad hoc Committee had different opinions. Some believed that our Committee could do the research and provide appropriate guidance to the President, Council, and 4S. Others suggested using a future ad hoc Committee to do it. Others believed that this was an appropriate part of a future Standing Committee's charge. The primary tasks are to clarify (1) what the Society's position with respect to issues of research integrity is, (2) what guidance with respect to research ethics it believes is appropriate and how to provide that guidance to its members, and (3) how it will respond to future research ethics issues that may arise. The results will need to be communicated to the leadership of the Society, acted on, and communicated to members. This task lies beyond the scope of the ad hoc Committee. Thus, it is the President, in association with the Council, who will need to decide finally which of these options make the most sense. This Committee believes that it makes most sense to have ethics issues be part of a Standing Committee's

remit, if the 4S decides to create one. The task could be taken up and completed by an Ad Hoc Committee, if that is the mechanism the 4S selects.

*On issues of public policy:* While the 4S cannot initiate or respond to matters involving the individual conduct of its members, the Society recognizes its responsibility to provide a voice for the profession in the promotion of best practices and with respect to matters of public policy relevant to it. Currently it does this in numerous ways, for instance, by holding special sessions at annual meetings, by joining with sister societies in issuing special statements, by developing awards, etc. A Committee on Ethics and Public Policy should be attentive to the broad range of developments in public policy and public affairs that may have ramifications for 4S members and be ready to provide guidance and recommendations to the Society as needed. This charge will require that the Committee at times initiate activities. These could include the kinds of activities mentioned above as well as others. The Committee should notify the current President of 4S when such activity is beginning. The procedures outlined above will be followed.

In its discussion, this ad hoc Committee believed that the need to be pro-active about such issues provided the strongest rationale for a Standing Committee. It provided several examples of the kinds of issues to which a Standing Committee might wish to respond: the science wars, filing amicus briefs, responding to S&T legislation or executive actions, reacting to science controversies. The type of response would vary depending on circumstances, but part of a committee's charge would be to look for opportunities to engage about such issues. The Committee might develop criteria by which to select issues for consideration (e.g., polling the membership, relevance to most of the members, professional relevance, social visibility or social justice). Consideration should also be given to the degree to which the issues go beyond those such as freedom of speech that can be said to be directly germane to members' concerns. Some may involve more matters of science, technology, and society where members might have different political opinions or positions.

Another idea for the Committee to consider is the development of an award in recognition of public service in responsible science and technology (or integrity and responsibility in matters of science, technology, and society). Such an award could go to a member or non-member. Here too criteria for the kinds of activities that might qualify would need to be developed. Might they include improving public literacy about S&TS, public engagement on sensitive issues, outreach in/from 4S meetings, international involvement, courage in response to political opprobrium? Here too care would need to be taken to maintain a professional or ethical rather than political basis for the award.

The role of a Standing Committee would be to speak to 4S, through its leadership, on such matters. The leadership and 4S members speak to the broader society.

*Conclusion:* This Committee recommends that the President take steps as indicated above to institute a Standing Committee on Ethics and Public Policy for the 4S.