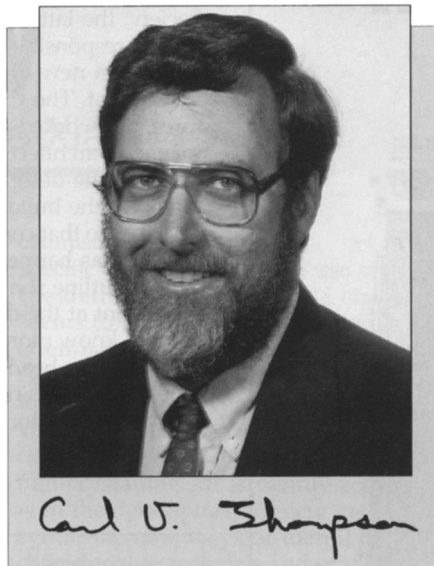


What's Up? Part Deux

What's up? A little less than a year ago I posed this question as the title for my first letter in *MRS Bulletin*, and used it as an excuse to talk about the challenges and opportunities I saw for the Materials Research Society, and to lay out the sorts of issues I expected to work on with you over the year. This time, I'm going to use this question to say a few words about what is actually going on, and specifically what the Society officers and councilors have been up to over the past year.

One of the Society's activities that has received special attention over the past year is its most important one, its meetings. At the Fall 1995 Council meeting (the last of three annual nonvirtual council meetings) there was a report on the Society's program development process, including some detailed comparisons with the program development processes of other societies serving the materials research and engineering community. This benchmarking process highlighted some striking differences from other organizations. Most notably, MRS is almost unique among societies of comparable size in not having standing topical divisions or groups whose membership evolves slowly and which play key roles in defining and negotiating program content. MRS has a single program committee with continuously changing membership which advises the set of three or four new chairs selected for each meeting. These chairs have the responsibility for the development of the Society's extraordinarily broad program. They are also given a great deal of latitude and encouragement in defining new symposium topics, and redefining or retiring old ones.

After considerable discussion, the clear consensus of the council was that our very different process for program development was a good one, and that while some fine tuning was called for, the system wasn't broken and didn't need fixing. In fact, it was generally felt that our relatively open system was the key to the continued development of exciting programs that keep us all informed at the forefront of materials research. Given this, one of the main actions inspired by this discussion was to redefine and broaden the role of an expanded Program Development Subcommittee of the Program Committee. This subcommittee is now charged with assisting the chairs in identifying new topics of emerging interest and in finding appropriate symposium organizers. This



subcommittee has also been asked to engage in long-range planning for topical coverage, focusing especially on emerging subdisciplines, working in concert with the parent committee and also the meeting quality subcommittee.

The Long-Range Planning Committee also examined issues associated with meetings, quickly focusing on two main concerns: the declining industrial participation in our meetings and whether our meeting locations provide the appropriate venue for meetings of the quality to which we aspire. A number of recommendations resulted from the discussions of industrial participation, but perhaps the most significant was the recommendation, endorsed by the Council and the Program Committee, to explore the use of MRS topical workshops. These workshops would be separate in time and location from our Fall and Spring Meetings, and would be designed to address industry-specific materials processing and development topics. These workshops are expected to not compete with our meeting symposia in format or nature, but may eventually flow into the main meetings in some way.

In addressing meeting location, it quickly became clear that there was continuing discomfort with the "three-hotel model" of the Fall Meeting, but not necessarily with its location in Boston. An alternative to this model which is being actively explored is the use of the Hynes Convention Center—which is attached to

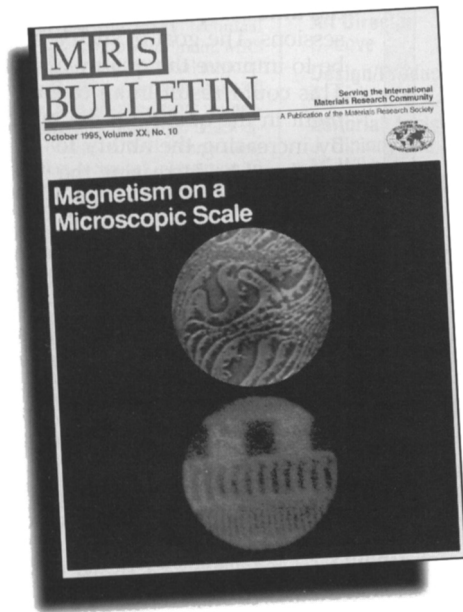
the three-hotel complex—for all of the daytime symposium sessions and poster sessions. The goal of such a move would be to improve the quality of the meeting. This could result in an overall improvement in the quality of the meeting space by increasing the ability to "symposium hop" and by increasing the "collision frequency" for attendees participating in different symposia.

Over the past year there has also been a continuation of discussions of the effectiveness of our current committee structures. One of the results has been the elimination of the public relations and corporate participation committees, their functions being captured by an advisor to the Program Committee in the former case and a smaller informal advisory group in the latter case. Also, further definitions have been made of the relative roles of the External and Public Affairs Committees, and there is an ongoing review of the roles and make-up of the Publications Committee and the editorial boards for our publications. It has also been decided that a task force on electronic services, which has served a number of important functions for two years now, should evolve into a standing committee.

The Council, through the help of a task force, reviewed the history of the International Union of Materials Research Societies, of which MRS is one of 10 adhering bodies, and the relationship of MRS to this organization. This evolved to a broad-ranging discussion and reassessment of our relationship with IUMRS. Our general conclusion was that this organization provides an important mechanism for international promotion of interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary materials research through the creation and coordination of MRS-like organizations and meetings. The Council resolved to further enhance our already strong activism within this organization.

With respect to MRS headquarters, important organizational changes have been made, driven by the executive director in order to improve efficiency, resulting in staff growth and reassignment, for example, in the area of electronic services. The most dramatic decision made by the Council affecting the headquarters staff has been to build a new headquarters building. The staff has outgrown its current rental location, both in its size, but also very importantly, in its needs for electronic capabilities and for meeting and

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office space consistent with a modern efficient headquarters operation. Given the necessity of moving, the possibilities of renting new space, buying an existing building, or building a new building were carefully considered. Given the financial stability of the Society, the latter two options quickly emerged as the only two fiscally responsible ones. In the end, after considerable discussion, building a new building was clearly viewed as the appropriate investment. The Council, through the help of a very active task force, has worked with the headquarters staff to employ a project manager, architects, and consultants to work through site selection and the design of this building. It is expected that the final plans for the building will be approved at the Fall 1996 Council meeting, so that construction will begin in the spring.

A lot has happened and a lot is in the works. I've only been able to outline some of the issues under discussion, and in some cases, hint at the difficult issues. Your input is important: If you want to know more, ask me or another officer or council member or talk to the headquarters staff. Tell us what you think. Tell us what we're missing. Help us build the Society that will be *your* primary professional society into the next millennium.

CARL V. THOMPSON

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