

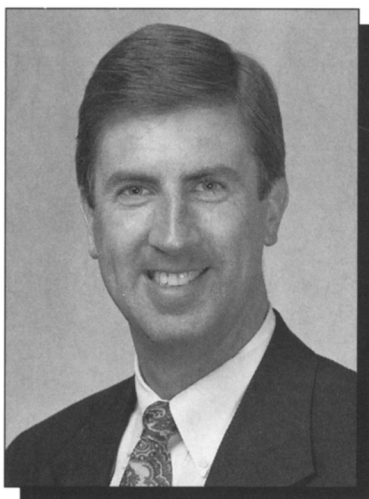
Some Thoughts on MRS Meetings

By the time this letter is printed, the 1994 Fall Meeting of the Materials Research Society will be upon us. I want to take this opportunity to tell you about some changes we've made in the Fall Meeting, and what we are doing as a Society to monitor the effects of these changes on meeting quality—and to solicit your input. The annual fall and spring meetings form the nucleus of MRS, and the Society's leadership is keenly attuned to delivering the best possible conferences that we can.

Elsewhere in this issue, 1993 MRS President Tom Picraux reminds us of our Society's membership trends. We grew at a spectacular rate for most of the 1980s but have now settled down to a more sustainable growth of 3% or so per year. Naturally, the high rate of growth in membership has been accompanied by a growth in our meeting attendance. In fact, the two go hand in hand.

In the early 1980s, we outgrew the Boston Park Plaza Hotel and moved to the then just-constructed Marriott Hotel. We soon expanded beyond the Marriott and started to make use of a second large hotel, the Westin. Since these hotels were built at opposite ends of an indoor mall, it has been possible to travel between the two sites, even in inclement weather, in the span of less than one "meeting increment"—that is, the 15 minutes scheduled for each talk. As anyone who has attended a recent fall meeting knows, both the Marriott and the Westin are now at capacity. In fact, during the past few years, we have had to use the mall theaters located halfway between the hotels.

To illustrate the growth quantitatively, consider that in 1985 there were 1,255 papers and 63 symposium-days in Boston, that in 1990 there were 2,510 papers and 86 symposium-days, and that last year there were 3,080 papers and 105 symposium-days. Fall meeting attendance in 1985 was 2,317; last year it was 3,547. Since our symposia are generated and run by our members, this has been considered "natural growth." The Program Committee, its Program Development Subcommittee, and the Council have always exercised their judgment about the quality and size of the meetings, but the enthusiasm and dedication of our symposium organizers and meeting chairs clearly led to this growth. In Boston in 1994, we will have approximately 4,100 papers delivered during 130 symposium-days.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John C. Bravman".

Is continued growth like this desirable? And if it is, how can it be accommodated? For as long as I have been associated with MRS, and surely before that, there have been lively discussions about the venues and dates for our meetings (some would no doubt use a stronger adjective than "lively"!). I won't recount all of the perspectives here, but I do want you to know that these issues have been, and will continue to be, addressed by successive generations of MRS leaders.

Such deliberations became imperative this past year when the scope of the 1994 Fall Meeting became apparent. To house everything at this year's Fall Meeting, we will use a third major hotel, the Sheraton. Like the Westin, it is connected to the Marriott via an indoor mall. With the Marriott roughly equidistant between the Sheraton and the Westin, relatively easy access to all three hotels is assured. A brisk walk should enable meeting attendees to travel from one end of the mall complex, say, from the Westin, all the way to the other end, to the Sheraton, within one of those 15-minute meeting increments mentioned earlier—even with the holiday mall traffic! While access to all the talks is important, we also want to ensure that MRS meetings maintain the "feel" for which they have

become so well-known over the past years. This atmosphere is part of the reason we have not moved to a convention center. And, most importantly, we want to maintain the "quality" of our meetings.

How does one define—or measure—the "quality" of meetings like ours? It is not simply the combined "quality" of the technical papers. What use would such a judgment be anyway, when no one can attend more than a small fraction of all the talks? To address these essential questions, I appointed a Meeting Quality Task Force, whose members have all been both symposium organizers and meeting chairs. They have been working over the past summer and will report at this Fall Meeting.

The charge to this group specified consideration of such parameters as optimal meeting size, meeting format, percentage of abstracts accepted (currently around 95%), and the importance of proceedings. They were also asked to formulate ways to monitor "quality." We are already aware of the drop in ratio between the number of meeting attendees to papers delivered. Considering the data given earlier, we find this ratio to have dropped from 1.85 in 1985 to 1.15 in 1993. (The same trend is evident for the spring meeting.) We're not yet certain what this means. It is probably related to the fact that many people cannot attend conferences now unless they are presenting a paper—but the trend is striking.

In the future, I will report on the findings of this Task Force. In the meantime I offer this: If you have strong opinions about MRS meetings, especially ones related to our expansion to three hotels in Boston, please share them with me. I can assure you that your input will become part of our ongoing work to deliver the very best meetings possible. I thank you in advance for your help!

JOHN C. BRAVMAN

Prof. John C. Bravman
Department of Materials
Science & Engineering
Stanford University
Stanford, CA 94305-2205
Fax: (415) 725-0538
E-mail: bravman@forsythe.stanford.edu

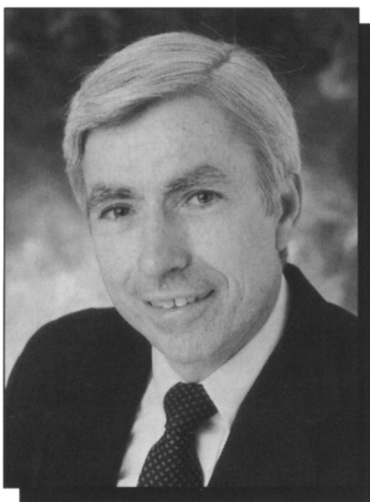
Membership Distribution in Materials Research Societies

In looking at recent membership statistics, various MRS leaders have called attention to three interesting trends: growth, increased student representation, and internationalization.

The phenomenal growth of MRS throughout the 1980s is well-known. From 1983 to 1990, the average annual rate of growth in membership exceeded 30%, with an incredible 62% jump in 1984. The 1990s ushered in a period of considerable stress on the physical sciences, on jobs, and on research in general. While we have yet to emerge from that period, the growth of MRS has continued, although at a much slower rate of 3%.

Less well-known are the changing distributions accompanying the overall growth. The proportion of student members has gradually increased, and today stands at 20% of our membership. Sitting in on meetings of student leaders from among the 31 university chapters of MRS, one cannot help but catch the enthusiasm. Equally exciting, more than 230 Graduate Student Award nominations were received for student speakers at the 1994 MRS Fall Meeting—a new record. Clearly our future is in good hands.

An even more dramatic change within the membership distribution has been the increasing proportion of members from around the world. Membership from outside the United States has grown



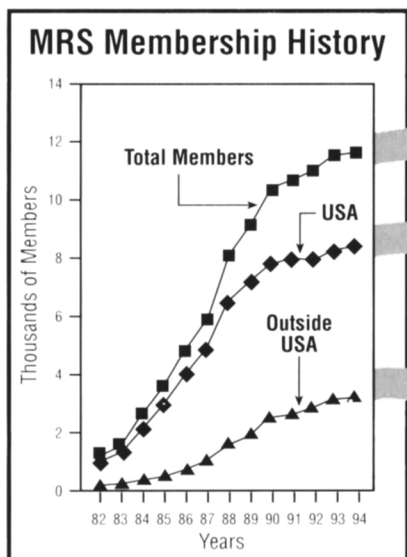
from 16% in 1983 to 28% in 1994, increasing proportionally by about 1% per year in the 1980s and 2% in the 1990s. Thus, this fraction is now well over one quarter of the membership. This increase is not attributable to any particular source, but has occurred through renewals and meeting attendance by both student and regular memberships. One might argue

that it reflects the “shortening” of global distance through communications and the strong interest in materials research around the world.

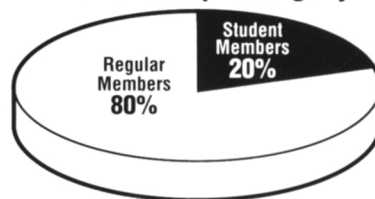
Other events point to the current strong international interest in multidisciplinary materials research. An important milestone in 1991 was the formation of the International Union of Materials Research Societies. IUMRS now has nine adhering bodies from around the world, including our own MRS. These materials research societies hold many meetings every year in their respective areas, providing important technical forums for senior scientists and students alike. IUMRS provides a means for international cooperation by hosting biannual international meetings on both electronic materials and advanced materials, by stimulating cooperative ventures, and by sharing information, experiences, and resources. We all benefit from such cooperation as we increasingly become a world community.

TOM PICRAUX

1993 MRS President
 Dr. S. Tom Picraux
 Semiconductor Physics Department
 Sandia National Laboratories
 Albuquerque, NM 87185-0350
 Fax: (505) 844-1197
 E-mail: picraux@sandia.gov



1994
 Membership Category



Geographic Location

