

ad hoc Committee on ASM Member Recruitment and Retention

Committee Members: E. J. Heske (Chair), E. J. Finck, M. R. Gannon, H. C. Lanier, R. Van Den Bussche

Mission: The ad hoc Committee was appointed by President Michael Mares on 16 January 2012 to consider the problem of declining membership in ASM and recommend membership retention strategies. President Mares requested a report from the ad hoc Committee on 17 March 2012, at which time the ad hoc Committee was dissolved.

Information: The ad hoc Committee's report to the President follows.

Respectfully submitted,

Edward J. Heske (Chair)
ad hoc Committee on ASM Member Recruitment and Retention

Report of ad hoc Committee on ASM Member Recruitment and Retention

Committee members: Elmer Finck, Michael Gannon, Ed Heske (chair), Hayley Lanier, Ron Van Den Bussche

Statement of problem: Membership in ASM has declined by almost 1/3 in the past few years. We are nearing a level where publication contracts with Allen Press will need to be re-negotiated.

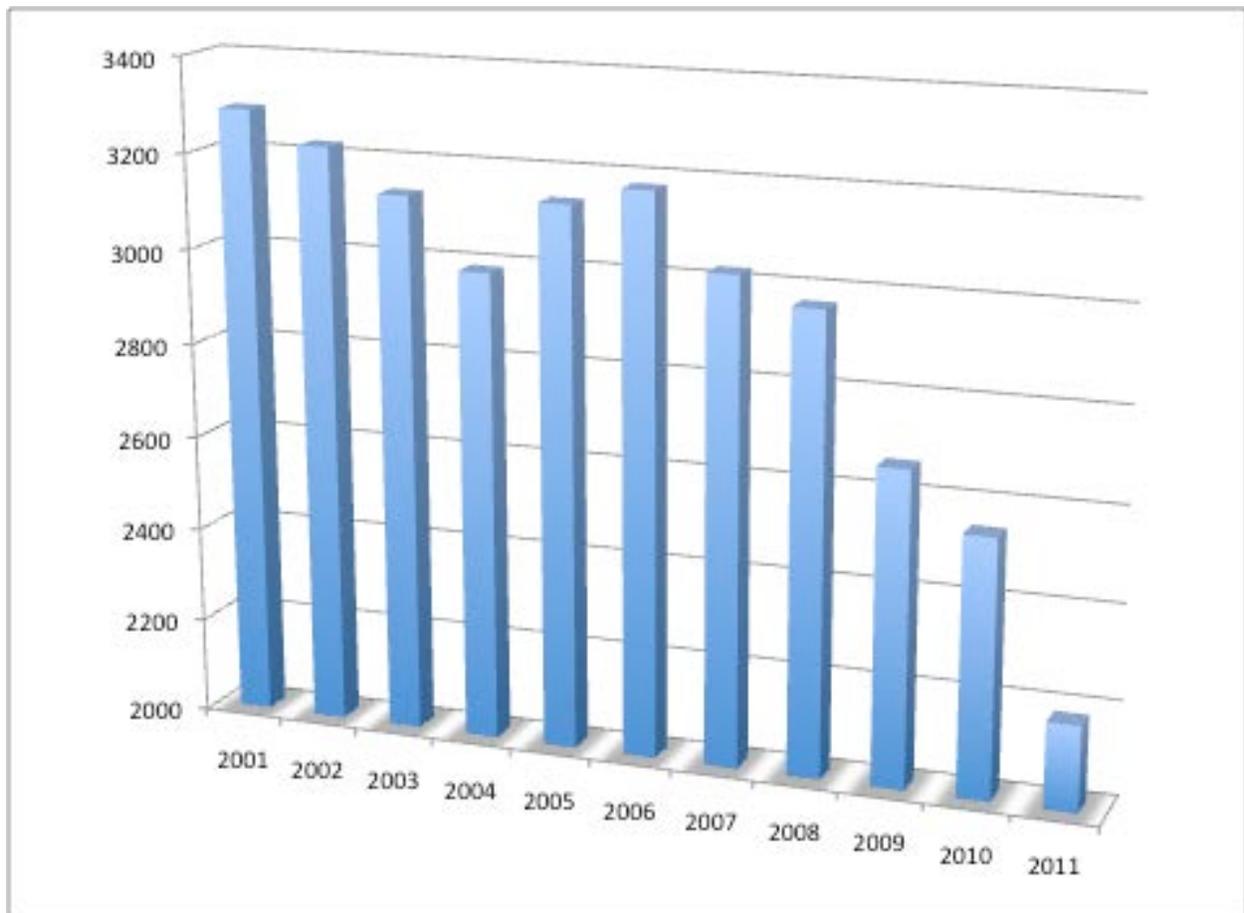


Figure 1: Decline in ASM membership since 2001. Presented to the ASM Board at the 2011 meeting in Portland by President Mike Mares.

Committee goals:

- 1) Consider likely causes for the membership decline.
- 2) Propose actions that could curtail losses and improve retention of new members.
- 3) Suggest directions for additional investigations.

Deliberations: The committee drew on several resources, notably:

1) Survey of dropped members (2003-2005) conducted by the ASM Membership Committee (only 8% response rate); inquiries to members dropped each year since then (about 10% response rate); both summarized by committee chair, Mike Gannon.

2) Summary of recommendations made annually by the ASM Membership Committee since 2002; 2011 white paper on membership by Hugh Genoways; note on the future of scientific societies from Jim Reichman; general directives from President Mares; summaries of ongoing activities and deliberations by the ASM Program Committee provided by Janet Braun; summary of suggestions by Allen Press, and responses from ASM Membership Committee 2011; articles from the recent scientific literature, most notably Schwartz et al. 2006 *Cons. Biol.* 22:1087-1089.

3) Review of member benefits offered by other societies (websites visited included TWS, SSE, SCB, ESA, AAAS, AIBS, ASIH, AOU, AFS); personal experiences as members of other societies; discussions with Director of Membership Marketing and Conferences for TWS.

At this writing, we have not yet received a few data summaries (actuarial tables of ASM membership, i.e., lengths of memberships of all current members), but we do not anticipate these to greatly influence our current recommendations.

Initial focus: As noted by Mike Gannon, responses from dropped members to inquiries from the ASM Membership Committee should be considered anecdotal, given the low response rate (about 10%). However, some of the comments received indicate areas that could be immediately addressed and were considered in Membership Committee reports at various times. Excerpts from Mike's summary illustrate a range of reasons given for dropping membership:

- Don't feel they get their money's worth for their dues
- No longer need to be a member to access JM
- ASM does not offer enough to keep them engaged
- ASM doesn't represent their interests, only wants their dues; only hear from ASM when requesting dues ("If I don't come to the meetings, I don't exist to you people.")
- Meetings are uninteresting, only for core of people that run everything, exclusive
- Retired, no further interest
- Students: only joined to apply for a GIA, no reason to stay member other than that

Given the above factors contributing to membership decline (actual amounts unknown), we initially focused on these responses, which could be implemented relatively quickly:

1. Membership benefits: There should be clear incentives for membership, including financial returns that exceed membership fees and non-financial benefits reserved for members.

2. Communication and engagement: Members should receive regular communication from the Society and be included in decision-making, even if they do not regularly attend annual meetings. Communication should be informative (from ASM to the members), as well as provide a means for members to contact each other or give input to officers, Board members, and committee chairs (from members to ASM). Operation of the Society should be more inclusive.

3. Scientific excitement: Annual meetings should be stimulating as well as fun. Reduce boring parts. Ramp up quality of content (we know, easier said than done). Add workshops. Make members' meetings more interactive.

4. Self-promotion and recruitment: We need to reach our potential core constituency better, and let people know that being a member of ASM is much more than getting the Journal. Once we have recruited members, we need to keep them engaged in the Society and appreciative of what their membership supports.

Recommendations

1. Membership benefits

We reviewed the membership benefits of several scientific societies as well as our own. We propose the following be immediately implemented as benefits of membership in ASM.

As an incentive to retain students and others, benefits should potentially return more monetary value to members than the cost of annual membership (e.g., if members attend an annual meeting or publish in *JM*). A set of attractive and useful member services should be developed and included in our website, with access (other than to teasers) restricted by password to members only. "Benefits of Membership" need to be touted prominently on our home page (sample text below), along with a link or drop-down list connecting to members-only services.

The following list and text could be implemented rapidly and integrated into our website; underlined items under "Other Benefits" need to be developed.

Benefits of Membership in ASM

ASM Publications

All members receive online access to the *Journal of Mammalogy*, a trend-setting, peer-reviewed scientific publication that was named one of the century's 100 most influential serials in Biology and Medicine by the Special Libraries Association (*JM* link here). *JM* is published 6 times per year, and covers all aspects of research in Mammalogy. ASM members may publish in *JM* for free, whereas non-members must pay mandatory page charges¹. Basic membership includes online access to *JM*, but members also may elect to receive *JM* in hard copy for an additional fee. In addition, members have online access to current and all past issues of *JM*, available through JSTOR. Members also may subscribe to *Mammalian Species* (link to *MS*), and receive a 10% discount on all available ASM Special Publications (link to special pubs).

Annual Meeting

Members receive a discount of \$100² on registration for the annual meeting of ASM. Annual meetings of ASM showcase current, cutting-edge mammal research, and provide unparalleled

opportunities for networking, professional development for students, and opportunities to influence policy statements put forth by the Society ([link to meetings page](#)).

Student Programs

Your membership in ASM supports several programs and activities targeted toward our student members. Student members of ASM are eligible at any point in their projects to apply for Grants-in Aid of Research ([link to GIA page](#)). Several other Fellowships and Internships also are available to student members who are able to demonstrate proven records of research success and/or service to the society ([links](#)). To encourage student members to present their highest-caliber research at Society meetings, Graduate and Undergraduate Student Honoraria Research Paper Awards are given to support students to travel to and participate in the ASM annual meeting. Our annual meetings are designed to make student involvement a priority. Special student mixers allow students to interact, Meal with a Mammalogist programs help students network and engage in informal conversations with professionals, and students can request to have their presentations and posters evaluated by professional members.

International Programs

Your membership in ASM supports programs targeted toward ASM members in developing countries, including those in the early stages of their professional development. The Latin American Student Research Grants ([link](#)) and the Oliver P. Pearson Award ([link](#)) recognize and support high-caliber research being done by Latin American mammalogists. ASM also offers reduced membership rates to mammalogists from developing countries, and a “Buddy System” to assist ASM members for whom English is not their first language in editing manuscripts submitted to *JM* to improve their presentation in English³.

Other Membership Benefits

ASM members have exclusive access to the Members’ Services pages on our website. Services available exclusively to members include:

- [Free posting of job announcements on the ASM Job Board⁴](#).
- [\(clever name for ASM Blog\) where members can ask other members for advice about methods, share field experiences, and post new information about emerging issues or technical advances⁵](#).
- [Access to educational material such as species lists, educational pamphlets, and teaching materials for K-12 and college educators⁶](#).
- [A wiki site where members share information on potential funding sources⁷](#).

Mammalogists are invited to connect through [our social networking presence on Facebook and Twitter](#), and browse the ASM Mammal Image Library. [ASM members receive monthly news updates about upcoming events, deadlines, Society business, and highlights in the latest issue of](#)

JM.⁸ Finally, members can run for office, vote in elections of officers and Board members, be nominated for awards, and participate in selection of ASM annual meeting sites.

Supporting Mammalogy

With your membership in ASM, you are sustaining a vital forum where information from various scientific disciplines is shared and integrated through a single nexus: mammals. Can you envision a study in ecology or conservation uninformed by insights from systematics, physiology, or natural history (or vice versa)? A biological research program at any hierarchical level that would not benefit from a broader understanding of its focal organism? In a world increasingly dominated by a single species, namely humans, it is critical to promote expertise in all aspects of Mammalogy. ASM is dedicated to that goal.

Notes on the above:

- 1) The Board approved this page charge policy at the 2011 annual meeting.
- 2) Discount for registration (member versus non-member registration fee) at the annual meeting should be equal to or greater than basic membership.
- 3) Buddy system and similar contributions of member time should be a membership benefit, not free to anyone.
- 4) We envision a job board where anyone can visit the ASM home page and read announcements, but only members can post announcements (via the members' services page). Postings are free to members, and retained for 1 month. They can include permanent positions, as well as summer jobs, internships, field tech positions, etc. There are many such boards popping up, and we won't compete with some established ones like the Texas A&M Job Board, but it could attract students to our website. People can also use social media to direct members to recent postings (e.g., post a field tech job, then Twitter about it).
- 5) The Program Committee is working on an ASM Blog Squad. We suggest this be included in the members' services pages. We did not develop specific recommendations about the blog, as others in ASM are working towards this.
- 6) Our pamphlets and educational materials are dated (to be polite). Some (careers in mammalogy?) could be left open access, but some educational materials, maybe even lecture materials to assist faculty with heavy teaching loads, could be made accessible to members only. A wiki pamphlet on mammalian conservation or powerpoint with slides useful in lectures (i.e., update the current pamphlet) would make a great start.
- 7) This would be an attractive resource. Our current list of funding sources is so old it is risible, and likely includes incorrect information. A wiki site would allow members to add new funding sources they locate, and comment on or delete unproductive sites.
- 8) These will be commented on in a later section of this report.

Additional recommendation: Membership is terminated if not renewed promptly (no 3-year wait). We suggest termination if renewal is not received by the time of the annual report of the Sec-Treas (May?). Also, we suggest that membership categories be re-organized as follows, to allow building up from a basic membership rather than sounding like “discounting” if you give up hard copy:

Membership categories

Regular member (all benefits of membership plus *JM* online)

Student member (all benefits of membership plus *JM* online)

Developing countries (all benefits of membership plus *JM* online)

Add hard copy of *JM* (within US)

Add hard copy of *JM* (international)

Add *Mammalian Species* online

Life member (*JM* online)

Student life member (*JM* online)

Developing country life member (*JM* online)

Add hard copy of *JM* (Life member within US)

Add hard copy of *JM* (Life member international)

Add *Mammalian Species* (Life members)

Patron member

Unresolved: Membership category for early career mammalogists (within 5 years of PhD)?
Member benefits attractive to mammalogists with non-academic positions?

2. Communication and engagement

We propose several ways to increase communication with members beyond the annual meeting, increase participation by members in Society business, and appeal to mammalogists that engage and interact more via social media.

Monthly email communication

Some societies (like TWS) send regular newsletters to members. Too much email can be intrusive, but we believe that a monthly contact sent to the ASM membership via Allen Press could be useful in several regards.

When each issue of JM becomes available, an email should go out to all members notifying them of its availability. The notice should include the cover, table of contents, and a short introductory paragraph noting some highlights of the issue or important deadlines and announcements. Many journals send out these publication notices, and typically they include hot links to the articles in the table of contents.

In the months between issues, a short contact should be sent to all members that covers other items intended to improve participation and inclusiveness. We envision a simple format with an ASM banner across the top, a side bar with links to social media (facebook, twitter, google+, ASM home page and relevant items on the ASM website related to this particular email contact), and about 1 page of text. Items in email contacts could include promotion of the upcoming annual meeting; reminder of times to submit GIA proposals, award nominations, etc.; recognition of winners of GIAs and Horner Award (before annual meeting; including name, title, institution, and mention of how many proposals submitted that year); recognition of winners of honoraria and other awards (after annual meeting); discussion of meeting venues (more below); electronic election information (more below); membership renewal notices; news of particular interest to ASM members, or communications from the President or Journal Editor.

We envision this monthly contact working closely with ASM social media and our web site to initiate and facilitate discussions of Society issues, and engage members that didn't attend the annual meeting in democratic processes such as selection of meeting venues and elections.

Social Media Committee (or Subcommittee)

We do not have consensus on just how this should be run, but all agree it is way past time to do it. The IT Committee already has set up an ASM facebook presence, but discussions are ongoing about what should go there and who, if anyone, should oversee content. We think this goal should be adopted, but a broader committee (we recommend a subcommittee within IT) that includes members more fluent with these media should develop any guidelines required.

Some uses for social media that we see as helpful:

Information transfer around and during the annual meeting. Announce, provide information about, and promote activities during the meeting. Post updates on schedule changes, committee meeting times and locations, directions to hard-to-find venues, etc. After the meeting, post highlights and images.

More timely announcements than relying on monthly email contact. These could be announcements of election results, meeting site selection, award winners, etc. Reminders about things like membership renewal deadlines or abstract submission deadlines could also be sent this way, but may not reach all members.

Promote discussion of Society issues. Social media could complement monthly contacts by providing a format for public discussion. For example, alternative meeting venues could be initially presented via a monthly contact, but discussion could occur on social media in an

interval before actual voting. When it comes time to consider how ASM will proceed with selecting meeting venues (i.e., conference center versus college/university host models), discussion could occur in social media. After each annual meeting, members could be asked to comment on things they liked or didn't like. Ideas for workshops, symposia, or anything else that might improve the quality of meetings could be solicited and debated. Proposed resolutions could be posted on our website, and discussed in social media prior to their being put up for a vote.

Sharing of fun field experiences, or anything else mammalogical. Networking by affinity groups (shared taxonomic or other interests). News updates about emerging issues or discoveries. Social media lovers will have lots more ideas than we can come up with. By posting a variety of items in the social media, non-members are likely to discover them and subsequently may be drawn to the ASM web site.

The ASM blog, which we recommend be a member service, can be an interactive site for professional interactions that would benefit from more space or might be more focused than postings on e.g., facebook or twitter. The blog could be a go-to place for questions and answers about field techniques or other scientific methods, more extensive discussion of Society issues or current events, etc. We defer further discussion, as this project is already being considered by the Program Committee, but support its development. Access to most social media would not be restricted to members, but access to this blog should be. If you want real technical expertise and advice, be a member.

Given the emerging variety of social media, they may serve different functions. Some, such as facebook and twitter, will be open access and may attract new members that find ASM while searching for other topics (posted on our media pages). Others (google+ or the ASM blog) may be useful as a platform for discussion of Society issues with access restricted to ASM members.

Selection of annual meeting sites

Some members have commented that we seem to have fallen out of our regional rotation, and that they can only afford to attend regional meetings. Others have wondered how we come up with the choices presented, or criticize the choices. We suggest making selection of meeting sites inclusive of more members, including members not present at an annual meeting.

We recommend that in an email contact (supplemented by social media posting), on an annual basis, we announce the geographic region next up in the rotation for annual meetings and solicit recommendations of venues. This would allow a larger group of members, especially those living in a selected region that might be more familiar with it, to nominate possibilities. The Program Committee then could review the list of suggestions, and select some for further evaluation. The Program Committee would then compile 2 alternative proposals for presentation to the membership.

In a later email contact, the competing venues are presented to the membership for consideration. Discussion among members could occur in social media, with an eventual date for voting. This will broaden participation in the selection process (e.g., members attending a meeting in the

Southwest won't dominate voting on a venue in the Northeast), and include a larger number of members in an important Society decision.

Online membership renewal

Include a notice and link in a monthly email contact in the fall, and a reminder in the email contact in December. An individual electronic notice to all delinquent members should go out in January saying "We miss you, hope you just forgot..." A late fee should be charged to anyone renewing after January (remind in Jan notice). A final "Please renew now, you are about to be dropped" notice should be sent to delinquents in spring. And of course, a "Thank you for your continued membership and support" email to those who renew.

The main consideration here is that renewal should be easy (click on a link, use your credit card), and prompted several times (directly to member, not mass email) if a member lets deadlines pass. A hard copy can be included in a JM mailing in the fall to make sure we reach that last person on earth with no email. Do not let members just slip away without repeated attempts to retain them, including inquiries into why they dropped and what could be done that would encourage them to renew.

Online elections

The committee did not reach consensus on this, but discussion should be taken up by the Board.

Points in favor: Includes a greater number of members in nominations and elections, promotes inclusiveness and engagement; shortens members' meetings; concerns that elected officers and Board members aren't regular participants at annual meetings could be allayed by making attendance during terms of service a requirement.

Points against: Larger institutions may dominate voting more; elected officials that don't regularly attend meetings may not be as knowledgeable about Society functions; officials elected online may be less likely to attend annual meetings in person; elections at members' meetings makes them more fun.

3. Scientific excitement

It's of little use to offer a discount on registration to the annual meeting if the meetings are not considered attractive. Similarly, it's of little use to institute page charges to non-members if JM is not considered a desirable publication outlet. *We* know our meetings are fun, productive, and are especially valuable resources for our students. *We* look forward to our bi-monthly issue of JM. However, we have also heard some say that they don't attend ASM meetings because they do not find them as stimulating as other meetings and they can only afford to attend 1 or a few meetings per year. Many members that attend ASM meetings find the members' meetings too long and boring and often skip them. We have heard many pleas for members to send their best papers to JM.

We found this a difficult subject to address, as we all already want our annual meetings and our journal to be the best they can be. No one works harder towards these ends than the Publications Committee and Program Committee. The Program Committee in particular is working hard to consider new ways to make annual meetings more stimulating and streamlined. The Publications Committee strives continually to improve the quality of content (we'd all love an impact factor of 10.0) and speed up time from submission to publication. We defer to these committees in their activities, and strongly encourage a continued focus on these matters.

We offer some suggestions below to reiterate or supplement the work of other ASM committees.

Journal of Mammalogy: A way to get accepted papers formatted and pre-published online, as most other prominent journals do, is essential to making JM a more attractive outlet. Many journals post a doi (online) version of papers within weeks of acceptance. They can then be reported by authors on annual productivity evaluations, and papers on emerging or time-sensitive issues would more likely be submitted (available in 2-3 months rather than a year). Access to these pre-publications would be an attractive membership benefit as well.

Annual meetings: We are currently giving the convention center model of meetings a trial run, let's assure a valid and open discussion of its merits and drawbacks via the monthly contacts and social media described above. This issue is of major importance to our members.

When selecting meeting venues, consider mammalogically interesting places. This could be facilitated by adding greater member participation in nominating venues, as described above.

Expand our base by inviting regional societies or more specialized societies to conduct joint meetings (for example, Texas Mammal Society if in Texas; Marine Mammal Society if on the coast; North American or regional bat societies; Latin American societies if in accessible place like Miami). Offer special sessions to these societies, and "honorary member" registration discounts to any of their members that attend who are not already ASM members.

Recruit more interesting symposia, organize presentations into "special sessions" on timely subjects as appropriate, and start each day with a special morning session of wide appeal. We know, easier said than done (bring down gas prices while you are at it), and the Program Committee is working on this. Social media would be a good way to get broader input, and to appeal for organizers. Recruit symposium organizers located in each host region to generate presentations on emerging issues (e.g., "Who's doing hot research and works near Philadelphia?"), and offer free registration as incentive.

Streamline the members' meeting. Delete the boring stuff and focus more on interactive subjects, such as Society issues where engaging the membership is important. Reduce the members' meeting to a single day (use the opened time for a special contributed paper session or symposium). Former agenda items like readings of the Board minutes, committee reports that don't require member approval of action items, etc., could be shifted to online. Use the social media to post that the minutes and annual reports are now available (with link) in real time (at the meeting). If we move to online voting, much additional time could be saved. Make the Vice President a 2-year office, voted for along with President-elect, rather than doing it every year. If voting for Board members at the meeting is retained, set up a special bulletin board on the first

day of the annual meeting with nominations posted there (they can be prepared in advance, or generated on day 1 of the meeting), use social media to remind members to view the nominations, and have votes cast during the single members' meeting (list of nominees prepared in advance and shown overhead at start of voting). Instead of rote presentations of reports that could be posted online, leave time for presentations and discussions of matters of import.

Add workshops before the meeting, on the day of the first Board meeting. These could be student-oriented, or technically oriented. For example, a workshop on a new statistical approach or software on the afternoon before the meeting starts, or a workshop on writing DDIGs by a couple people that recently served on a panel; or a workshop on how to go about preparing for and applying for Federal or other agency jobs could be attractive. Even something narrow or technical like getting started in R, or tips on SAS modeling, or occupancy modeling. (TWS holds several workshops at each meeting, to its advantage.) Charge a small fee for specialized workshops if necessary, with discounts being another membership benefit.

Add an Early Career special session (good replacement for that second members' meeting?). This session could highlight high-caliber research being conducted by mammalogists within 5 years of receipt of their PhD (i.e., postdocs and other early career scientists). The session could be competitive, with abstracts evaluated by the Program Committee. Presenters selected for inclusion in this session could receive something like free registration. The goal here is to generate a stimulating special session while facilitating attendance by postdocs and other early career scientists.

4. Self-promotion and recruitment

Two of us (EJH, RVDB) reviewed an offer by a professional "membership service" and did not see anything attractive there. Services replicated things already done for ASM by Allen Press, or were targeted toward a business environment. Two of us (EJH, EJF) inquired about professional services engaged by TWS (e.g., marketing and recruitment). The person hired by TWS as Director of Membership Marketing and Conferences has an office and small staff in D.C. in the building that houses other TWS Washington staff, but is willing to consult for ASM as well (\$100/hr or \$1500-\$3000/month depending on amount of time). The weekly news briefs and other media offered by TWS seem like more than ASM could produce without a costly, dedicated staff, and membership fees of TWS are at least twice as much as those of ASM to pay for these things. Several suggestions by the TWS director of membership are included in the list below.

ASM should consider producing a promotional short video about the Society, and the advantages of membership. TWS produced a video for about \$9000. This video could be posted on our website, You Tube, linked to various social media postings, and used as a recruiting tool by sending it to likely candidates for membership.

ASM should provide student members with video cameras and let them create their own short videos on what they liked about each year's annual meeting, to be posted on You Tube. These videos could be produced nearly free.

ASM should attract prospective members to our web site (where they can peruse our membership benefits and/or promotional video) by whatever means possible. Regularly post interesting items from any available source on facebook, for example, and tweet about them. Browsers searching for these items will also find links to ASM by that means. Recruit new members from various lists that could include prospective members, such as a list of dropped members, a list of authors that published in JM but were not members, a list of attendees at the annual meeting that were not members, and membership lists from other societies. Perhaps once per year, send out a recruitment letter and links to our membership benefits and promotional material to selected lists.

ASM members should be encouraged to recruit new members from among their students and colleagues. Providing members with promotional materials would make this easier.

Summary recommendations:

- 1) Membership benefits should be clear and valuable. Benefits should offer a monetary return that is greater than the cost of being a member, as well as professional benefits reserved for members only.
- 2) Members should be actively engaged in Society affairs. Do not let members feel forgotten or taken for granted if they do not regularly attend the annual meeting. Seek engagement from more than the core group when possible. Promote regular communication with and among members.
- 3) Membership renewal should be quick and easy online. Members should not be permitted to just slip away without repeated attempts to retain them.
- 4) Develop promotional materials, and use whatever resources are available (e.g., social media) to recruit new members or at least draw them to our web site.

We provide recommendations regarding each of these goals, and urge rapid implementation of as many as possible.