Membership Committee

From the bylaws: “A Membership Committee of at least three members shall be appointed by the incoming President to staggered terms of three years. The Chair shall be appointed by the President, and members shall not serve more than two successive terms.”

Purpose: To support the society by maintaining a healthy and diverse membership.

Duties of Chair

- Plan and conduct a committee meeting during the PES annual meeting. Typically a breakfast meeting. Optional: communicate time and place to the program chair, so that it appears on the program.

- Work the executive director to track membership and registration trends.

- Present committee report at the business meeting (or delegate). See Appendix 1 of 1. Humor appreciated. See bullet two of “Committee Business.”

- Work with communication director on membership outreach.

- Work with incoming president to identify new committee member. President extends the invitation.

- Preserve organizational memory by communicating recent committee activities and concerns to the incoming chair.

Committee Business

- Review and discuss the recent membership and registration numbers.

- Bemoan state of field in a sort of constructive way.

- Propose policies/actions that may strengthen membership and/or the field.

Recent Activities

- Surveyed current and past members of PES to learn about lapsed members and identify ideas for improving membership. Generated a report sent to executive committee in 2015.
Appendix 1: Sample Business Meeting Report

Précis of the Membership Survey Results
Chris Higgins

General:
First, a shout out to Dave Waddington who created and administered the survey and thanks to Dave, Paula McAvoy, and Winston Thompson who met last summer to discuss the data.

The survey, which probed sources of dissatisfaction and the appeal of possible added membership benefits, was administered in April, 2015.

- We had 260 respondents, ¾ members and ¼ former members. 62% were faculty members, 10% retired faculty, 13% grad students, and 15% other.
- 75% of the lapsed members said they would potentially be interested in rejoining.
- Our current members rate their satisfaction as follows: very satisfied (11%); satisfied (49%), neutral (28%); dissatisfied (10%); very dissatisfied (2%).

Sources of dissatisfaction:
Respondents offered a wide variety of criticisms of the conference, society, and field. Responses were all over the place and hard to group. There was a lot of venting about last year—the theme and degree to which it controlled the conference, the anonymity experiment, perceived cronyism, etc.—but setting that aside some recurring themes were:

- The conference is not welcoming, the society is cliquish
- Need to do better job of keeping in touch with members between conferences
- It is hard to get a paper accepted, especially for graduate students
- Others point to uneven quality and decline from days of “serious philosophy”
- Related to this was the recurring observation that the society has drifted in a continental and/or identity politics direction (“postmodern domination drove me away”) and has become inhospitable to other, particularly analytic work
- But others decry the lack of attention to practice and PES’s inability to reach practitioners and policy makers
- Several people mentioned the need for abstracts of paper sessions; others wished for less reading papers and more dynamic sessions

There were many other interesting comments, too idiosyncratic and multifarious to group.
Possible incentives for membership

Interestingly, while lapsed members showed very little interest in our five possible new member benefits (free PES Book of the Year; online philosophy of education book clubs or asynchronous discussion groups, pre-conference sessions, more special programming for grad students), current members were pretty enthusiastic about all five.

Conclusions

The survey suggests that there are things we can do better and some new initiatives worth piloting. That said, it may be that the general downward slope in membership is due to larger, structural forces: the general decline of positions in philosophy/foundations, and the more recent financial stress on travel budgets. Conference attendance has not declined as steeply as membership suggesting that what we have mainly lost is the cadre of people who wanted to be members in a steady way even while attending irregularly. This speaks to deeper changes in the profession.