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Schedules and Plans and Things You Should Know

Sharon McNeely, MWERA President
Northeastern University

The Association Council and the Board of Directors of MWERA have been busy dealing with a number of issues and trying to meet the needs of association membership. In the past few years a number of important initiatives have taken place that I would like you to know about. There are also a number of other upcoming events you should mark on your calendar and be sure to attend!

AERA is in Chicago this year. We are hoping that MWERA membership comes to AERA, and shows everyone what high quality work our members do. At the last Board of Directors' meeting, we agreed that we should have a social hour at AERA that is hosted by MWERA. In addition to attendance by MWERA members, we hope that we will attract potential members, and friends from other regions! Watch your AERA schedule for the time of this event.

The Holiday Inn Mart Plaza has been kind enough to agree to provide comparable room rates for AERA. The hotel may not be listed in your AERA program. Call them directly at 312-836-5000. Please make sure you use this number and not the number that was listed in the program. That was a bad typo! If you were thinking that the Bismarck might be a spot to stay, you need to know that the Bismarck is closed for business as of January 1997. I am not sure if and when they will reopen. They are dealing with a number of building-related issues.

I am so glad that we decided to change hotels this past year. I know that it was a bit of a problem for some of our members, but I think that the vast majority were pleased with the change. I also am really glad that we aren't trying to hotel-hunt right now, with the Bismarck closing. Quality, inexpensive hotel space for an organization our size is so limited in the downtown Chicago area! I don't want to rehash the numerous problems that we were having in dealing with constantly changing managements at the Bismarck, or the lack of space, or the issues of security, etc. Rather, I would like to take a moment to dwell on the positives. After our membership told us that they want the convention to stay in downtown Chicago, we began a number of initiatives. We toured numerous hotel in the Chicago area, and sought information about rates, space, etc. We considered the ease of membership traveling to hotels, parking, safety, and cost. We also wanted a place where the person we talked to one week would be available the next week, and our contract would still be valid and on the books! We were blessed with the wise guidance of the years of Charles Anderson working with the Bismarck to tell us what issues we needed to clarify up front, and what problems we might anticipate. When we found the Holiday Inn Mart Plaza, we felt we had the best of all worlds.

Chicago is an expensive city to visit. The average hotel room rates are typically 50 to 75% more than what we are able to book for the conference. Few hotels have meeting space that is not outrageously priced. Few hotels would let us bring in equipment, use the lobby for exhibits, etc. Few hotels would hold rooms so late before a conference because so many of our members get materials after their semesters or quarters start. The Holiday Inn provided us with the best offer. Yes, we now have to pay for meeting space. However, if we have enough sleeping rooms used by our membership, that cost is minimal. There were some problems this first year at the Holiday Inn with booking rooms. The problem was one of getting the word out that the hotel phone number was printed wrong, and getting membership to meet the deadline. The deadline for booking rooms is important. The number of rooms booked by deadline is part of what goes into figuring the total cost of using the hotel for the conference. PLEASE book your room early. In fact, now would be a great time to make that reservation for the 1997 meeting.

Yes, we are locked into the hotel for 1997. Mark your calendar for October 15-18! Call the hotel and make your reservation! Also, we are moving to lock in the next few years. Mark your calendars for MWERA to be October 14-17 in 1998, and October 16-19 in 1999. We'll let you know about the year 2000 shortly!

The Board of Directors knew that the move to any hotel would be expensive for the organization for the first couple of years. We have new costs to consider, and have to find some new ways to cover those costs without raising the rates of membership, registration or dues. I hope that if you have some ideas, you will share them with us. One of the hidden costs to us that is not a large problem, but is also one that we want to acknowledge and try to deal with, is the problem of cancellations and no shows for the program. We know that we will have to cancel certain workshops, etc., based on enrollment. However, for the regular program, we really do expect all of those people who have submitted presentations, been reviewed and accepted, to show up or make arrangements for their presentations to be given. The submission rate for various Divisions has been high enough that we have to reject some quality work. It is a shame that there are rejections and yet some accepted works are not presented. I know that people get ill at the last minute, have family crisis, etc. However, when someone signs the proposal and agrees to present, he/she needs to follow through. The Board of Directors has been continuing discussion about how to be supportive of our membership and yet deal with this issue. If you have suggestions, we welcome them!

A couple of years ago the Board of Directors asked Terri Strand to develop the history and archives of MWERA. We knew that there were records in many places, and that we needed to pull this together before we got too much further along in our development. Terri has done an outstanding job of gathering materials, organizing, archiving, and establishing a system for retrieval of key documents. The Board of Directors recently received a report from Terri, and we anticipate that you will be hearing more about this in the near future.

The Association Council may also be meeting at AERA. We are working on dealing with some important By-Laws changes, and may need the time to finish this up, although I am hoping we will be done before then. The change in the By-Laws that we are considering has to do with moving the election of the Vice President-Elect ahead by one year, bringing that person "on board" a year earlier. As you know, the Vice President is in charge of the conference program. This is a huge job. Currently, the election of that person happens a year in advance, and when he/she is VP-Elect, that year is used for learning about how the organization works, and planning for the conference. There is very little time, actually, as conference planning goes, to get on board and make plans. Let me use this year for an example. Tom Parish was elected in the spring of 1996. His first Board meeting and conference was this past October. He had a couple of weeks following the meeting to get his program committee organized, get his call for papers done, and plan his main speakers. He reports to the Board in January, and we move ahead to deal with issues from there, for him to have the 1997 meeting in place. Tom is new to the Board, and there are a great many procedures and policies for him to learn and implement in a very short period of time. I know that he will work very hard on this.

The proposal for the change would have elected Tom the year before, using the example, in 1995. That would allow him more time to plan, to meet with the Board, to lock in speakers, to go to AERA to meet with people, etc. It would also give the membership more of an opportunity to know who they were working with, and to make plans for meetings that best met the multiple needs of our membership.

At the Association Council meeting there was some discussion about changing the By-Laws so that we eliminate the position of President-Elect, or have the President-Elect be the program chair. I am not in favor of either of these because it puts MWERA at risk. The President is the person who is ultimately in charge of the financial affairs of the organization. The President must work with the Executive Officer, and oversee the expenses of the program chair. If the position of program chair moved to immediately (later in that program) become the president, he/she could potentially spend whatever he/she wanted to and then sign off on it! We could potentially ruin the organization in one swoop! I cannot and will not support this position. Some people asked me this past year what I did as President-Elect. There are a lot of things that the Board oversees on an ongoing basis, and a lot of things that have to be taken care of for the program. The President-Elect ends up doing a great many small, but important jobs for the organization. I never realized how many things there were to be done!

A few years ago, when we knew that Charles Anderson would be stepping aside as the Executive Officer, we all worked hard at trying to make the transition go smoothly. There were many policies and procedures that had been in place, but were not written down. Additionally, the organization was growing at a tremendous rate, and many new members probably had no idea about the day-to-day operations (nor did they probably want to know)! I have worked with previous presidents and Charles to draft a policies manual. The current Board of Directors is working to refine that manual. When we are done, we will have a working document that should be helpful for our membership and future leaders to keep the organization running in the professional, well-developed manner that it now works.

The Association is you, the membership. I am delighted to have the opportunity to serve you, and to try to meet your needs. I am hoping that you continue to provide input to all of your elected officers, and will be patient as we move ahead with trying to help the organization grow. I am also hoping that you will take this opportunity to share the call for proposals with others, and to bring new members into the association. We know that our membership joins us because other members take the time to share, to tell about MWERA, and to encourage others

I wish you the best for a great year, and hope to see you soon!

AERA ANNUAL MEETING INFORMATION	
MWERA ASSOCIATION COUNCIL MEETING	MWERA RECEPTION
Wednesday, March 26, 1997	Thursday, March 27, 1997
8:15 - 10:15 a.m.	7:00 p.m.
Addams Room, 3rd Floor, West Tower	Erie Room, Level 2
Hyatt Hotel	Sheraton Chicago Hotel and Tower