GOLDEN SECTION BYLAWS DISCUSSION

In a move which joined us to the modern era we changed our long held one-page bylaws through a Board of Governor’s approval at the MathFest of 2014 which was in Portland. Well as of 2020, the MAA committee on sections (COS) tells us that it is time to update once again. The current bylaws and a first draft of changes are posted [here](#). Below is a gentle discussion of some of the issues that COS wants us to consider. The executive committee would love to hear your thoughts and comments on anything mentioned here or other aspects of our bylaws that you think we should consider.

- ZIP CODES & COUNTIES
  In the last round of bylaw updates it became fashionable to specify section boundaries using zip codes. I would suggest that because these are not constant in time that this is perhaps not the best way to do it. I understand that the national office might need to keep track of our sections using zip codes but I don’t think these should be part of the bylaws. Traditionally, our boundaries were determined in terms of states and counties and I would like to see us return to that. For example, here are some problems with zip codes that have occurred in the case of the Golden Section. The current bylaws say that for California we should have codes 934XX and 936XX to 961XX. This unfortunately does not include the towns of Huron (93234) and Coalinga (93210) which are in Fresno county and therefore should belong to us. (Of course I don’t know that we have any MAA members here now but even if we don’t, that could change at anytime!). In the case of Nevada our bylaws state that we would have 893XX to 898XX but this leaves out some 12 Nevada towns or CENSUS DESIGNATED PLACES in the Nevada counties of Lincoln, Nye, and Esmeralda. These all have the form 890XX ranging from 89001 for Alamo to Tonopah with 89049. However, you cannot say that we get all of 890XX since for example Searchlight Nevada (89039 & 89046) and Sandy Valley 89019 belong to Clark County and are therefore part of the Southern California section. The Southern California section has taken an extreme approach – their current bylaws give a list of 923 different zip codes that they own. Fortunately, they don’t claim anything we own but I believe they are omitting some cities and towns (and parts of these) in their list to which they are entitled. The USPA has gaps in their list of used zip codes precisely because I think they are trying to predict and prepare for future areas of growth. It is true that in some states there are a huge number of counties so some sections might find themselves having to list many of these although in our case in the cases of Nevada and California we can list the relatively small number of counties that we don’t own.

- QUORUM FOR BUSINESS MEETINGS
  In accordance with a long ago suggestion from COS our current bylaws state “The quorum for a business meeting shall consist of not fewer than 8 members of the section including at least 3 members of the executive committee. No
business may be validly transacted at business meetings where less than a quorum is present.”

As for myself I must admit that in the past 7 years we have violated this constraint in a large number of business meetings. The section usually holds these in April after the annual meeting and in October as we finish planning the next annual meeting. While I for one, and I am sure my colleagues agree, would love to have large numbers at these meetings, it has just not been realistic in recent years. I think we have almost always had all 4 or 5 executive committee members (this varies when the governor is or is not already an executive committee member) except when we had a rash of resignations of our vice chairs and then we definitely had 3 plus a few other members.

Thinking about this more deeply though I find that I am quite a bit troubled by even the nature of this clause. What does it mean to say that “NO BUSINESS MAY BE VALIDLY TRANSACTED” without a quorum? Does that mean that we cannot even decide when we will meet again and try to get a quorum? Does that mean that we cannot take the opportunity to ask a great speaker if they would agree to talk at our next annual meeting before their schedule gets filled? Can we look over the facilities of the campus we are at to think about meeting logistics when we are there and have someone to guide us around campus even though we don’t have a quorum? Can we discuss what went well at the last meeting and what didn’t while this is still fresh in our minds? Are virtual attendees ok to meet the quorum? (I sure hope so because lately we are all virtual! – Is voice only attendance ok or must cameras be on?) I can understand that perhaps certain decisions about say proposed bylaws or committee or executive committee membership should perhaps not be finalized without a quorum, but I think that most of the work of these business meetings involves identifying good people to be considered for all sorts of roles and ironing out the logistics of section operations, part of which is certainly figuring out how to improve business meeting attendance.

Remember though, if you do come to a business meeting be careful because we might put you to work! (Pardon my attempts at humor here where I know this is supposed to be a serious discussion!)

**AVOIDING IMPLICIT BIAS**

In their generic suggested bylaw revisions, COS says the following:

“Describe how you work to avoid implicit bias in appointing committees, and in how committees carry out their work. For instance, the Committee is unlikely to approve bylaws in which a teaching awards committee is composed entirely of previous winners. See the [MAA document](#) for selection committees for guidance. “

While I guess we could say we avoid implicit bias in the selection of our teaching award committee – we do in fact carry an explicit bias towards membership in the teaching committee for those who are previous winners. In fact, we have always tried to appoint solely these people because of several obvious reasons. For one, we do want all members
to help by soliciting nominations (an always very difficult task) and we don’t want them trying to nominate themselves. For a second reason we feel that great teachers know a lot about fantastic teaching! It all helps us maintain our standards! However, I think if you examine our past winners (all 33 of them) you will see both genders (although only 9 Females overall even though 4 of the last 6 have been women) with a variety of institutions and ranks represented. In other areas of our work, say the slate of speakers at our annual meetings, the institutions we meet at, and the membership of our executive committee, we always have been very diverse although there are certainly institutions that have historically been involved more with section governance than others. The bottom line here is that I for one am open to whatever the section wants to put here but I think whatever we use should actually guide our future considerations and not overly hamper them. I also understand, however, that since our executive committee has a very high turnover rate (by design with 3 of the 5 positions changing every year) it could not hurt to have such language to keep everyone reminded about the importance of being as inclusive as possible.

Thanks to everyone in advance for all your input to these important discussions!

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