

Report from the Special Committee on the Online Paper Submission and Selection System American Association of Agricultural Educators (AAAE)

Meeting: March 24, 2010 at 2:30PM EST via Skype

Committee Members Present: Tracy Kitchel (UKY, chair), Neil Knobloch (Purdue), Grady Roberts (UF), Shane Robinson (OK State)

Committee Members Absent: Bobby Torres (MU)

Preface: At the 2009 National AAAE Conference, a recommendation was moved and passed via the Research Committee to consider alternatives to the Fast Track system for online paper submission and selection system. Research Chair Dave Doerfert appointed Tracy Kitchel as chair of the special committee. Tracy Kitchel subsequently appointed current/previous AAAE national or regional research conference chairs Neil Knobloch, Grady Roberts, Shane Robinson, and Bobby Torres.

As the committee began deliberating issues about the online system, it became clear that it was difficult to discuss the online system issue without addressing peripheral issues such as reviewer reliability, the review form and “reviewer fatigue.” The sections below are split up into recommendations and considerations. The recommendations are specific to the charge of this special committee and are targeted to the Research Committee for a course of action. The considerations are suggested points of discussion that this special committee would like to see the Research Committee address, perhaps in more detail within (an)other special committee(s).

Recommendations:

1. AAAE should continue to use an online system for paper submissions and reviews

Rationale:

- *Although there are some noted issues with the current system, the committee acknowledges that an online submission and review process is more efficient.*

2. AAAE should continue to use the Fast Track system for the immediate future.

Rationale:

- *Tracy Kitchel received information from the All-American system that AERA uses for its conference, which processes thousands of submissions. The cost was similar to*

Fast Track for a product that was similar in ability. For the needs the committee felt were warranted, the price tripled.

- *The committee also felt that to pull the profession into another system while only using the current system for 2 years would create problems and frustration.*
- *There is discussion of Fast Track having the capability of having multiple forms for reviews which could solve some problems.*

3. Future conference chairs are encouraged to work with George from Fast Track directly to address issues.

Rationale:

- *Although George is not an academician himself, he very much wants to make the Fast Track product better. Again, there is discussion of Fast Track having the capability of having multiple forms for reviews which could solve some problems.*

Related Point: Shane Robinson and Neil Knobloch plan on sharing concerns based upon their experiences with southern and national conferences, respectively.

4. It is recommended that each conference chair (1 national; 3 regional) be given full permission to the FastTrack system and that the contact for FastTrack (for purposes of continuity) be an appointed AAAE member (i.e. an Executive Committee member, Research Chair). In doing this, AAAE would need to confer with George about training the chairs, which may include an additional cost (which would be worth such costs, assuming the training would assist in proactive problem-solving). If possible, AAAE should work with George to ensure that the proper conference chair only receives emails for his/her conference instead of emails for all conferences.

Rationale:

- *Having one person with the "key" permissions seemed duplicative. That person is at the request for clerical tasks 4 times per year. Granted, the issues arise with all conference chairs having access to information such as passwords, but perhaps George can hide that information.*
- *This type of system lays the responsibility on the chairs; as noted below in considerations, perhaps conference chairs should be given reimbursement for this.*

Considerations:

1. It should be considered that AAAE conference papers be submitted as 2,000 word abstracts versus full manuscripts.

Rationale:

- *One of the issues cited with the conference review process is the lack of quality feedback from reviews. Committee members noted a “reviewer fatigue,” whereas, members of the profession were being asked to review papers 2-3 times a year, not to include journal reviewer obligations.*
- *Related, shorter papers also lessen “conference chair fatigue” as they process and “identity scrub” the papers in the review system.*
- *Abstracts also solve APA and Promotion and Tenure issues regarding “dual publications.” Whether this is interpreted as a real or perceived issue by members of the profession, it could get faculty members in trouble at their home institutions.*
- *It was noted that there seemed to be little changes in manuscripts from conference to conference to journal. Having the opportunity to change and make the paper better had been a keystone of conversations past regarding keeping full manuscripts for conference paper review. In addition, it was cited that faculty are submitting to conferences and journals simultaneously. Although there is interpretation as to the ethics of this (is a conference paper a terminal publication?), it still supports the notion that little to no changes are being made from conference to journal.*
- *Several other professions such as NACTA and AERA use this type of format; as noted, it doesn’t seem to have lessened the value of the organization’s scholarships.*

2. AAAE should consider rolling the research poster selection process into the paper presentation process. When a paper is submitted, authors would have the option of having the paper selected for presentation, poster, or considered for both.

Rationale:

- *This committee also discussed how to combine poster and paper processes into one online system. Although this does not solve the Innovative Idea Poster process, it does allow the profession to make reviewing more efficient by folding three review processes into two processes.*
- *Committee members noted that several other professions use this tactic already and it seems to work well.*

3. AAAE should consider a small honorarium for conference chairs using the current system.

Rationale:

- *Feedback was clear that even though an online system is helpful, the conference chair role is still cumbersome. The time and effort far outweighs what little appreciation (a thank you letter and a line on a vita) is provided for the service.*

4. AAAE should consider password protecting the archives of conference proceedings to stay in line with APA guidelines on keeping non-terminal publications on limited circulation.

Rationale:

- *Passwords are already in place for the website; members would not need another system to remember.*
- *Protecting the archives makes the proceedings a limited circulation. Promotion and tenure committee members who chose to investigate an agricultural education faculty member's record could deem a paper to be published twice by doing a simple web search of the journal publication and the AAAE website.*