

# DECISION LINE

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## PRESIDENT'S LETTER: The Year of the Member

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When I attended my first Institute meeting in 1978 as a graduate student preparing to embark on an academic career, I never dreamed that I would some day have the opportunity to serve the Institute as president. I feel honored to be writing this first of my President's Letters, knowing the caliber of the individuals who have preceded me in this position. The tremendous success of the Institute over the years has been a direct result of the efforts of many people, including officers, members, and the home office staff. I want to thank Past President Jim Evans, the 1997-98 Board of Directors, 1997 Program Chair David Olson, and Executive Director Carol Latta and her staff for their hard work over the past year. It is comforting to assume office at a time of such success and stability within the Institute.

And yet, as the saying goes, we cannot "rest on our laurels." We have many things to do if we are to achieve our vision of becoming "the premier professional organization of choice for business scholars." The Executive Committee met in March to discuss strategies and action plans to move us toward this ultimate goal, and the new officers and Board of Directors met in April to make decisions about how to implement all of our new ideas. The new officers and Board are a terrific group of individuals, and I am very excited to have the opportunity to work with them this year.

The focus of much of our discussion in April was how to better serve our members. Each new president usually sets some agenda early on for what they hope to accomplish during their brief time in office. This agenda has a considerable impact on the charges which are given to the committees. Last year, Jim focused the Institute's committees on the task of identifying and improving key processes to achieve better performance. Thanks to his

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efforts, and those of the many committees and individuals who served last year, we have considerably improved our institutional memory of how to effectively carry on the Institute's business.

In searching for my agenda, I suppose I returned inevitably to my roots in the Southeast Region where I began my involvement with the Institute and asked, are we doing everything we can to serve the members' needs? While we have developed many important member benefits over the years and have always had a member focus, the answer is obviously no. This is mostly because the members' needs are a moving target. As time goes by and the nature of our jobs evolves, so must the ways in which the Institute serves its members. For example, the renewed emphasis on quality teaching in recent years at most institutions has created a greater need for professional development in the area of instruction. And so, I have decided to declare this year to be the "Year of the Member." Of course, every year should be the year of the member, but this year in particular we are going to attempt to closely examine many of the ways in which the Institute serves its members and make whatever improvements we can.

As an indication of the commitment of the Board of Directors to this idea, one needs only look at the current list of goals of the Institute. For the past several years, the Institute has been working under a set of five priorities which were widely publicized and scrutinized by the various committees. This year the Development Committee for Excellence in the Decision Sciences recommended a new list of seven goals to replace the old priorities. At its March meeting, the Executive Committee ranked these goals, and presented them to the Board of Directors in April. At that point, the new list of prioritized goals were adopted. They are as follows:

- Improve dissemination of innovation in teaching, curriculum, and scholarship;
- Increase the number and variety of professional development activities;
- Enhance member services at the international and regional levels;
- Increase membership and participation of all disciplines;
- Increase globalization;

- Promote the development and dissemination of research having educational and practical importance;
- Expand interdisciplinary activities.

Not only is enhanced member services one of the top three goals under the revised plan, but goals one and two are also items which relate to improved services. Certainly, wider availability of teaching information and increased opportunity for professional development are services which will benefit the membership of the Institute. I am pleased that the Board has adopted a set of guiding goals which clearly establish improved member service as a major thrust.

The Board of Directors has already undertaken two initiatives this year which are in line with this new thrust. I am very happy to announce that attendees at this year's annual meeting in Las Vegas will, for the first time, get a choice of either hard copy or CD-ROM proceedings. Individuals who register by a certain date will get a choice of format, while those who register after the deadline will automatically get the CD-ROM version. The registration fee will not be dependent on this choice. This change will not create any burden on paper authors. Papers will still be submitted in the same format we have used in the past, and then will be scanned to create the CD-ROM. This will be an indexed, searchable CD-ROM which should be much easier to use (and certainly easier to carry and store) than the hard copy. However, those who still want a hard copy or need one to satisfy their local publication criteria will be able to get one. We believe that this will serve the members in the best possible way with no additional burden.

The second initiative relates to improving the dissemination of information on teaching innovations. For some time, suggestions have been raised that the Institute should have a second journal that could provide a venue for such information. It has been suggested that such a journal could serve as a major additional member benefit and could help solidify what we perceive to be a significant "distinctive competency" of the Institute. However, there are many issues related to the decision as to whether to form a new journal, such as cost and resources, sufficient availability of high quality papers, competing journals, etc. Because of the complexity and

potential impact of this issue, it is one which will demand very close study. I have appointed an ad hoc committee which will explore this issue and report back to the Board of Directors. Harvey Brightman, Georgia State University, has agreed to chair this committee. The other members are Robert Carraway, University of Virginia, Tom Clark, Louisiana State University, Lori Franz, University of Missouri-Columbia, Brenda Killingsworth, East Carolina University, Lee Krajewski, University of Notre Dame, and Ram Narasimhan, Michigan State University. If you have an opinion about such a journal, feel free to contact me or Harvey ([dschjb@gsusgi2.gsu.edu](mailto:dschjb@gsusgi2.gsu.edu)).

Obviously, there are many more initiatives which we probably should undertake, and we are going to attempt to identify the need for these as the year goes by. The best way to determine what our members really want and need from the Institute is to ask them. We are in the process of developing a web-based member survey which should make it quick and easy to respond. I will be contacting each of you in the fall and asking for your response to this survey. When the time comes, please take a few minutes and provide your input. I guarantee that it will be greatly appreciated and that the Board will use the feedback to try and improve member services.

As I indicated earlier, a year is a brief time to accomplish the many things that we would like to accomplish, but the 1998-99 Board is going to give it their best. We have developed a long list of Board Objectives for the year (see elsewhere in *Decision Line* for a complete list of these objectives), and have consequently charged the various committees of the Institute to help us achieve them. I hope to be able to report back to you next spring that we have made major progress toward these objectives. As the year proceeds, if you have any questions or comments about any aspect of the Institute, please do not hesitate to contact me. Best wishes. ■

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