

From the Executive Director

Susan E. Fox

“You will come to a place where the streets are
not marked.
Some windows are lighted. But mostly they’re darked.
But mostly they’re darked.
A place you could sprain both your elbow and chin!
Do you dare to stay out? Do you dare to go in?
How much can you lose? How much can you win?”
(From Dr. Seuss, *Oh, The Places You Will Go*).¹

Navigating the New

One characteristic that sets the Acoustical Society of America (ASA) apart from most professional societies is the exceptionally high regard that our members have for the Society. Multiple surveys confirm that in many members lives, the ASA serves as more than a professional home. The ASA became and is an intellectual, spiritual, and emotional anchor, a place where like-minded colleagues share purposes and values. This foundational community is so strong that it became our rock during this global pandemic.

Over the course of the past two years and still counting, the ASA anchored us, and as a community, we rose to meet challenge after challenge, united in our commitment to each other and the greater good. The ASA, I am pleased to report, is even more robust, resilient, and cohesive as ever before.

Challenges

The biggest and most immediate challenge involved deciding what to do about our spring 2020 meeting that was scheduled to take place in Cancun, Mexico. We had no choice but to cancel that in-person meeting that was eventually held virtually. The fall 2020 meeting planned for Chicago, Illinois, was also held virtually. Then-president Diane Kewley-Port appointed a Virtual Technology Task Force chaired by Andy Piacsek to assist us in considering options and strategies for mounting our first-ever set of all-virtual semiannual meetings. Given the complexities

of securing and deploying a suitable platform and the very short period in which to plan, one fellow society CEO likened the exercise to “building a plane while you are trying to fly it.”

Virtual platforms for holding a digital version of professional society meetings do exist so none of us were left completely in the cold. However, none of the platforms performed well, and there is a cultural disconnect between software engineers who develop these platforms and the functionality needed by the scholarly society market they wish to capture.

This added an additional stress point to our desire to pivot in a way that best serves our members. It was the commitment of the ASA leadership, members, and staff that brought us to the point where within eight weeks we managed to have a fully virtual spring 2020 meeting, Acoustics Virtually Everywhere (see acousticalsociety.org/overview-ave), including meetings of our administrative committees, a plenary session, and “social hours.” It wasn’t perfect by a long shot, but the postmeeting survey revealed understanding and patience on the part of our members. Importantly, we kept the work of the Society moving forward and we provided a way for us to connect as a community despite the many odds against us.

One would think that a virtual meeting would produce significant savings from the costs of producing an in-person meeting. One would think wrong. The cost of virtual platforms runs into the six figures. We saved some monies but not as much as one would expect. Unlike many societies, some of whom depend almost entirely on meetings for revenues, The ASA’s fiscal stability is well established through journal revenues, a source of ballast and relative security as we navigate our way forward.

We learned a great deal from the Acoustics Virtually Everywhere meetings that we applied it to the next virtual meeting in fall 2021, Acoustics in Focus (see tinyurl.com/ya569f9r). With experience under our belt, this meeting ran a bit better

¹ Dr. Seuss, *Oh, The Places You Will Go*. Copyright 1990, Random House.

but not without challenges. Nonetheless, the postmeeting survey again revealed general satisfaction with the outcome, especially given the alternative of no meeting at all.

We held our first in-person postpandemic meeting December 2021 in Seattle, Washington. To keep everyone as safe as possible, we observed vaccination protocols and social distancing. After two years apart, the joy of convening together physically remained palpable throughout the week. With over 1,000 acousticians, our attendance figures paralleled those of “before times.” By the time you read this, we will have held our second in-person meeting in spring 2022 in Denver, Colorado, with hopes that we are fully back on the road to recovery.

Of course, there were other challenges to the ASA aside from the necessity of reinventing meetings. After George Floyd’s tragic death, we responded to the need to become even more sensitive to issues of diversity, inclusion, and equity by creating the Committee to Improve Racial Diversity and Inclusivity (CIRDI; see tinyurl.com/2p9duycx) cochaired by Tyrone Porter and incoming president Peggy Nelson. Through CIRDI, the ASA went on to establish a Summer Undergraduate Research or Internship Experience in Acoustics (SURIEA; see tinyurl.com/3v7nsvsv).

SURIEA, a 12-week paid summer undergraduate research program for students interested in acoustics, is designed for underrepresented minority undergraduates from across the country. It provides training, mentoring, research, and preparing students for graduate studies and careers in acoustics.

Reflecting on the past 24 months I can’t help but step back, rest a moment, and appreciate with gratitude our ability to respond to extraordinary events with extraordinary commitment and grace. We worked together as a team, and we are blessed with a long-tenured, deeply knowledgeable staff. In many ways, they are our unsung heroes: Nancy Blair-DeLeon, Jolene Ehl, Dan Farrell, Keeta Jones, Mike McGovern, Elaine Moran, Ambri Phillips, and Kelly Quigley.

Looking Forward

As you can see from these examples, the ASA community is undaunted by the unexpected. We are emerging much stronger, more aware, and more committed than we have ever been.

We now begin the process of planning for the next strategic plan and how we will navigate a new set of unmarked, dark streets. An important part of that process, especially now, will be to conduct a trend analysis. Once we move past these times, what will our world look like? It’s almost incomprehensible how much everything has changed: the labor force, geopolitics, global supply chains, business models, and on it goes. Our mission is to generate, disseminate, and promote the knowledge and practical applications of acoustics. What impacts post-Covid must we consider as we position the ASA to best serve the needs of acousticians in a fundamentally changed world?

Here are a few top line factors I’m personally following with an eye toward the future and what role the ASA can play to enhance or mitigate consequences:

- Women, early-career researchers, and students from disadvantaged backgrounds have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic. Early studies (see tinyurl.com/mr2ysdjp) show that across disciplines, the publishing rate of women has fallen relative to that of men amid the pandemic. Will this rate rebound or is this indicative of women and early-career researchers dropping out of field entirely? It’s too soon to tell.
- A perennial on my radar relates to the act convening in all its forms and how that advances the collaborative work of science. Studies (see tinyurl.com/y633savn) suggest that we may need to rethink the programmatic design of scientific meetings. “...The way organizers design conferences can have a direct effect on which scientific collaborations are formed and, by extension, on the direction of scientific inquiry.”
- Related: What will be the impact of advanced artificial reality (metaverse) (see tinyurl.com/ycknkhjf)? How will this affect and redefine meetings, if at all? Does form follow function or will it evolve into something else with form more in the lead?
- International cooperation and collaboration have always been valued in the ASA, but today they become even more important as we become a highly interdependent world. One-third of the ASA membership comes from outside the United States. Now that we have the technical means to involve members more effectively and broadly, what do we need to consider? How can we serve this part of our membership best?

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

- Environmental sustainability can no longer be ignored. What is the ASA's obligation to the planet? How do we promote and employ awareness and best practices as ASA members and citizens of the planet?
- One question has a permanent place on my radar: What do I need to be aware of that I'm not?

With these trends and others in mind, the future, although now foggy and fraught, presents as much opportunity as it does threat. I'm grateful to the thousands of people who as members support the ASA. I'm grateful to our staff, to our leadership, to you. I think of us as an ant raft, coming together in rough waters, connecting, constructing,

emerging buoyant, and riding it out to the other side. To me, this is the meaning at the heart of resilience. In community, we win far more than we lose.

Onward!

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ASA WEBINARS

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The Acoustical Society of America has established a Webinar Series with the goal to provide ongoing learning opportunities and engagement in acoustics by ASA members and nonmembers throughout the year, as a supplement to content presented at bi-annual ASA meetings.

ASA Webinars will be scheduled monthly and will include speakers on topics of interest to the general ASA membership and the broader acoustics community, including acoustical sciences, applications of acoustics, and careers in acoustics.

Find a schedule of upcoming webinars and videos of past webinars at acousticalsociety.org/asa-webinar-series

The Journal of the Acoustical Society of America

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