

ad hoc Membership Committee Report to the CUAHSI Board of Directors

Last revised October 19, 2020.

Committee background and composition information

Background and Charge of ad hoc Membership: Under current practice institutions not eligible for full CUAHSI membership may apply for affiliate membership. This requires the one-time payment of a \$2,000 application fee, with no subsequent commitment. Representatives from affiliate members are not eligible for election to the Board of Directors. Given (1) CUAHSI's redoubled commitment to fostering diversity, equity, and inclusivity (DEI), and (2) recognition that many of CUAHSI's services could be particularly valuable to undergraduate institutions, the Board has decided to evaluate whether the current membership and dues structure remains well aligned with CUAHSI's overall strategic plan and our new strategic plan for diversity, equity, and inclusivity. Therefore, the Board chose to stand an ad hoc committee to explore broadening CUAHSI's reach to undergraduate and potentially other institutions, which might include full membership. Factors considered were potential bylaws changes, dues structure, and broader issues related to CUAHSI's mission.

The Board of Directors charged the ad hoc committee on CUAHSI membership to:

1. review existing CUAHSI membership and dues structure to determine if current practices are fulfilling CUAHSI's mission and supportive of the specific objectives outlined in CUAHSI's strategic plan and CUAHSI's DEI Strategic Plan;
2. evaluate the potential for attracting new undergraduate institutions to full membership status, including (1) a review of the level of satisfaction of current affiliate members, (2) reasons undergraduate institutions have not applied for affiliate status under current bylaws, and (3) actions which might attract new undergraduate institutions, whether as affiliate or full members;
3. identify any inequities that exist for current membership classes; and
4. develop potential bylaw change(s) and a dues structure which would align with the recommendations of the ad hoc committee.

The committee formed over Spring 2020 with focus on membership coming from outside of current CUAHSI leadership; there were delays associated with Covid-19.

Committee members: Each the committee members, listed here, made continuing and significant contributions to the work and products.

Jay Zarnetske, Michigan State University, ad-hoc committee chair, Board member;
Andrew Guswa, Smith College, PUI representative and Affiliate Member Institution;
Gigi Richard, Fort Lewis College, PUI representative, nonmember institution;
Susana Stonedahl, St Ambrose University, PUI representative, nonmember institution;
Beverly Wemple, University of Vermont, member CUAHSI Ed & Outreach Committee;
Steven Loheide, University of Wisconsin-Madison, CUAHSI Board Chair;
Jerad Bales, Executive Director, CUAHSI; and
Ainsley Brown, Communication Specialist, CUAHSI.

Summary of committee work

Four virtual, full-committee meetings were held, with additional work conducted asynchronously. Our first meeting on June 3 focused on background, provided by committee chair Jay Zarnetske and ED Jerad Bales, and a work plan formulated by the full committee. Committee members contributed collaboratively to a survey tool (broadly distributed), interview script (for targeted outreach) and contact lists. A second meeting on July 23 was used to share results of the survey and interviews and discuss the scope of feedback and recommendations to the Board. A third meeting on August 27 was held to have a discussion and approval of the bylaw revisions that would be presented to the Executive Committee and Board on September 14 and 21, respectively. A fourth meeting on September 25 was held to assess Executive Committee and Board feedback and update bylaw revisions. Then, the membership committee unanimously supported the proposed bylaw changes and CUAHSI secured legal review of the proposed bylaw changes. This legal review raised no issues with the proposed bylaw changes.

The Committee's first action was to determine the focus of what was the most effective and efficient way to meet the objectives of the charge. The first decision was to focus on primarily undergraduate institutions (PUIs), which intersected the most with capturing other DEI objectives and because the committee understands that existing bylaws language makes full membership for PUIs impossible.

A list of PUIs was generated for direct outreach by committee members, who followed a script when engaging PUI representatives to ensure a consistency of responses. Twenty-one outreach calls were attempted, and 12 were successfully completed by July 29. The committee also generated an online questionnaire, which focused on broadening membership. As of July 29, we had 65 participants for the online questionnaire. The committee analyzed and discussed the results of these outreach efforts. This report, including multiple recommendations to change the bylaws and practices of CUAHSI was created based upon these analyses and discussions.

On October 19, 2020, the CUAHSI Board of Directors recommended that the CUAHSI membership adopted the proposed changes to the bylaws.

Lessons-learned about PUIs

PUI Membership: There is considerable diversity among PUIs, much more so than at research-intensive institutions, with faculty at some of these institutions carrying very heavy teaching loads (as many as 8 or more courses per year) and others carrying lighter teaching loads but with high research expectations. Virtually all respondents at PUIs indicated that they are the only or one of very few faculty on their campus engaged in water-related work (teaching and scholarship) and would thus benefit from tapping into the network of water scientists that CUAHSI engages.

Particular benefits of CUAHSI engagement articulated by respondents in our interviews and from surveys included participation in (and reduced-price registration that comes with membership) CUAHSI's biennial conference for themselves and students, access to datasets for student coursework and research, access to a Pathfinder-like travel program for undergraduates, and mentoring by faculty from CUAHSI-member institutions. A few respondents noted that CUAHSI support in the form of data management plans and broader impacts would be useful to them. Many respondents said that in order to convince their organizing that membership in CUAHSI would be worthwhile, CUAHSI would need to develop a well-articulated statement of benefits that could be presented to senior administrators.

Current by-laws constraints on membership introduces limits in the ways the organization can justify use of its resources. While a change in the membership policy may not immediately lead to a rush of new member institutions, a broader umbrella of member-eligible institutions would allow CUAHSI to launch initiatives that engage a wider diversity of faculty and students.

Despite the valiant efforts on the part of committee members, we had very limited respondents from actual PUIs, but almost all want the option to become full CUAHSI members. PUI participants were not certain they could or would use CUAHSI resources, nor did they think they had any time to spare for service. The primary benefit would be for faculty who are isolated at their institution to engage with the smaller CUAHSI community/meetings rather than massive AGU/GSA meetings.

PUIs noted that they want the option to participate and engage but thought that significant service on the behalf of CUAHSI would be difficult because of teaching loads. Primarily because of a lack of familiarity with the full range of CUAHSI services, most respondents were not sure of the benefits of CUAHSI membership for their institution or for themselves, but almost all think they should have the option for full membership, regardless of how their institution is classified. Similarly, respondents from research intensive institutions almost all think CUAHSI should make their membership policies more equitable and inclusive of all academic institutions.

Barriers to PUI membership

The committee explored potential barriers to PUIs in becoming full members, assuming a bylaws change.

1. **Financial concerns** varied widely across PUI and research-intensive institutions. Most think an initiation fee of ~\$500-1000 would not be a barrier, but annual dues could be. Most acknowledge that the pandemic-induced financial crisis will affect an ability to pay. Institutional responsibility for payment and equability was a nearly universal concern/barrier.
2. The **administrative letter** required for membership application was also of concern. Smaller institutions don't see this as a real barrier, whereas larger PUIs and research institutions see the letter as a barrier because administrators are too inaccessible or busy for such a request.
3. Lack of **clear value** vs investment of money/time is a main barrier to most PUIs and non-member questionnaire participants. Need a very clear articulation of value added/exceeded vs time and money investment. For example, a very brief statement that clearly states how an investment in CUAHSI pays large benefits to individuals and institutions, especially those at a PUI. Address via marketing/outreach.
4. There appears to be a **perception barrier** with CUAHSI, as many PUI personnel who know of CUAHSI think CUAHSI is not for them. The perception issue is not surprising since CUAHSI was not developed for PUI participation nor developed with PUI participants at the table. The perception barrier could be addressed via marketing/outreach and some explicit development with PUI stakeholders.
5. There appears to be a **visibility barrier** with CUAHSI, as many PUI personnel have never heard of CUAHSI. CUAHSI was originally and mostly remains organized by faculty and stakeholders at large research institutions and has most of its efforts visible in the spaces where these institutions operate (e.g., major research projects and larger conferences). Also CUAHSI's biennial meeting, educational resources and funding programs see their highest participation from faculty and graduate students at research-intensive universities. A consequence of not operating in PUI spaces is that most PUIs are unaware of CUAHSI.

Potential solution to increase CUAHSI visibility is to start participating PUI spaces, such as participating in professional associations beyond AGU (Association of Environmental Studies and Sciences, American Association of Geographers, Geological Society of America, American Water Resources Association) and organizations focused on undergraduate teaching support (SERC, NAGT). Our work suggests that continued effort by CUAHSI to reach faculty through these organizations could be very favorably received.

6. Those familiar with CUAHSI all value the resources it has, but the **time limitations** for adoption/utilization of those resources is a barrier, and those who tried and failed to use them a couple times have moved on and not returned to CUAHSI. Possible solution is a more formal and structured mentorship program to get PUI faculty to learn how to use CUAHSI resources.

Addressing these barriers to PUI membership helps recruit PUI members, but retention of PUI members needs a more concerted effort with a new committee/team and staff to evaluate and act on developing retention actions.

Key lessons and recommended actions

Lesson: Members of the committee found that overwhelming respondents were favorably inclined towards engaging with CUAHSI, despite limited time and financial resources. Committee members felt that a more inclusive membership policy in the bylaws could open the organization up to new ways of expanding our community, broadening our impact, and building a more inclusive pipeline for future water professionals.

Recommendation: We are proposing that a new membership option be offered for undergraduate institutions. A new membership option seems to work best for capturing nearly all nonprofit academic institutions and aligns better with the bylaws associated with membership fee structures. Hence, the committee drafted revised bylaws for PUI inclusive membership options.

Lesson: Even if the bylaw policies for full CUAHSI membership become inclusive of PUIs, we expect little immediate increase in PUI and other non-water focused institutional membership due to lack of understanding of what CUAHSI can do for them and that they do not have time to commit to learning how to participate in CUAHSI.

Recommendation: Make a clear long-term effort to engage willing PUIs in redeveloping and growing aspects of CUAHSI that are designed with a range of PUI institutions. Make it clear what benefits there are for PUIs; help them understand CUAHSI benefits versus costs from their diverse PUI perspectives. Preliminary recommendation to address this is to create a new committee or team focused on PUI membership or make PUI (and DEIJ) goals part of standing committee procedures and recruit PUI representation on standing committees.

Guidance for revising membership fees and dues to be more inclusive

Note: The actual monetary values are set by the Board so are not specified in bylaws but are on the website here: [website detailing the fees/dues by member classes](#).

Guidance:

1. Committee recommends that the Board review the intent and need of initiation fees going forward. Initiation fees were identified as a deterrent by our committee and the community feedback. Largest deterrent to PUIs or other non-water focused institutions that are not sure an investment in CUAHSI has benefits warranting the investment of an initiation fee. If an initiation fee is maintained, it is recommended that it not be the same level for all member/affiliate classes, and that a waiver system be developed to lower this financial barrier to make it more equitable and inclusive of PUI and non-water focused institutions. Removal of initiation fee removes all these complexities and concerns about equity across institutions. This means putting focus on restructuring dues, which can be done with to create equity, inclusivity, and transparency across member/affiliate classes.
2. Committee does not recommend the one-time initiation fee exist for any member/affiliate class.

Committee was unsure why it exists and cannot come up with reasons to justify its continued practice. Increases accountability and engagement if shift from this one time upfront buy in model to modest annual dues model for affiliates.

3. Committee does not recommend scaling initiation or dues by the number of representatives.
4. Committee recommends developing a policy and process for dues waiver to help get more members engaged where financial burden may be a barrier.
5. Committee recommends developing a waiver policy and procedures that they can employ to help recruit new members. This helps with targeted recruitment and with removing barriers to institutions that are financially or personnel limited. Effectively, a waiver policy could serve as a trial period to incentivize initial participation and have the opportunity to show the value of a long-term membership. It is also an opportunity to gain information via feedback after a waiver/trial period.
6. Committee recommends reduced annual dues structure for minority serving institutions (MSI) institutions. Link definition of MSI to NSF definition as their definition is better assessed and curated by NSF.
7. Committee recommends that all less-water focused institutions (PUI, MSI, etc.) be eligible for reduced CUAHSI event (e.g., biennial meeting) costs and that anyone from those institutions who wants to attend CUAHSI events have the option to be paired with a larger peer institution participant. This pairing system will help with inclusion and engagement at CUAHSI events. This reduced event costs also provide clear value to the underrepresented institutions that CUAHSI is trying to recruit and retain.

Guidance for revising the administration letter sanctioning membership

Guidance:

1. Larger and research-intensive institutions think this is a bigger barrier than fee/dues. The reason is that it is hard to get administrator time and focus to provide a letter.
2. Smaller institutions think the letter is not a barrier because they have more access to administrators.
3. Committee recommends that there is no statement of financial commitment in the letter as that will be a barrier for approval.
4. Committee recommends creating and providing a memo or executive summary demonstrating the value of CUAHSI to an institution, which will provide context and support for an administrator creating a sanctioning letter.

End of Report