

Management and Finances of the SEM Annual Meeting

Every fall the SEM Annual Meeting brings together ethnomusicologists and colleagues from across the U.S. and around the world for an exhilarating four days of dialogue, learning, music-making, and collegiality. Though the conference is the highlight of the Society's yearly calendar, it also poses substantial financial hardships for many attendees and a variety of administrative challenges for the organization as a whole. Outlined below are the main logistical and financial issues involved in the management of the Annual Meeting and the strategies that the Society is currently employing to increase the affordability of the event for members and other participants.

The fundamental challenge of the Annual Meeting is one of scale. While attendance averaged 500 during the late 1990s, it now surpasses 900 and includes 11 or more concurrent program sessions, as well as numerous group meetings and special events. A conference of this size usually requires the use of big-city convention hotels, which are constructed to provide extensive meeting room space; hundreds of guest rooms; and the lobby space, food and beverage services, and other amenities expected by large gatherings of people.

SEM generally selects Annual Meeting cities at least three years in advance and considers such factors as: 1) proximity of a university ethnomusicology program willing to host the meeting; 2) availability of multiple large hotels that could accommodate the meeting and bid competitively for our contract; 3) affordability of hotel guest room rates and contractual terms and fees; 4) quality of air service and transportation infrastructure; 5) variety of nearby restaurants, music venues, and other sites of interest; and 6) geographic diversity of meeting locations over time. Given this variety of considerations, the identification of suitable meeting sites remains an ongoing struggle. As part of this effort, we continue to investigate mid-sized cities with the hope of reducing hotel costs. However, mid-sized cities sometimes have more expensive airline service than larger cities, and the smaller number of hotels in these locales means that there is less competition when we negotiate contracts.

Another perennial challenge for the Annual Meeting is the selection of dates. October and November are among the busiest months for all types of conventions, so our options are always limited. In addition, we must select a date that does not coincide with Thanksgiving or events relevant to our host institution, while also attempting to avoid conflicts with the meetings of the American Anthropological Association, American Folklore Society, American Musicological Society, College Music Society, and African Studies Association. With limited hotel dates available in the fall and these other considerations, it is often very difficult to find any date that is free of all conflicts.

Though large conference hotels fulfill SEM's space requirements, they also pose substantial financial obligations for the Society and its members. Hotel prices for rooms and services are high and continue to rise. In addition, hotel contracts require SEM to guarantee minimum sales of both guest room nights and catered food and beverage, in order to obtain meeting room space at no charge. This is why, each year, we strongly encourage all attendees to stay in the conference hotel and why we must hold our opening night reception, banquet, and various other catered receptions within the hotel. In short, those who stay in the conference hotel, purchase banquet tickets, and organize receptions help SEM to meet its contractual obligations and contain the overall costs of the meeting.

Though SEM has been able to maintain conference registration fees for members at 2008 levels, we realize that the event remains a financial burden for many attendees, especially

students. To assist students, we offer a student member registration fee that is discounted 44% and have been successful in negotiating substantially discounted hotel guest room rates for triple and quad occupancy. We also continue to operate a student volunteer program in which students can receive a registration fee reimbursement in return for work at the conference. Other forms of conference attendance support include the Annual Meeting Travel Fund [International Awards](#), [North American Awards](#), [Student Awards](#), [Ric Trimillos Annual Meeting Travel Awards](#), and the [Gertrude Rivers Robinson Annual Meeting Travel Award](#).

Meanwhile, our Annual Meeting video-streaming project, initiated in 2011, is intended to increase access to the conference for those unable to attend in person. Each year we provide live video-streaming in one room throughout the conference and also archive these streams via the [Video-Streams](#) page on the SEM website. This archive, containing numerous program sessions, is a valuable resource for teachers, students, and anyone interested in ethnomusicology.

Though the above initiatives facilitate participation in the Annual Meeting, we continue to welcome ideas and suggestions for further improvements. We also ask that universities with ethnomusicology programs consider hosting an Annual Meeting in the future. In hosting a meeting, an institution obtains extensive publicity for its program and the opportunity for its faculty and students to expand their contacts with ethnomusicologists throughout the world. If you are interested in discussing possibilities for a hosting arrangement, please contact Stephen Stuempfle, SEM Executive Director, at semexec@indiana.edu or (812) 855-8779.