

Summary of discussion at the DPOLY business meeting at the Boston March Meeting of the proposal to expand the division of include both polymers and soft matter

Boston, February 28, 2012

Jane Lipson, Chair of DPOLY, summarized the salient features of the proposal for expansion of the division. The slides that she used in her summary may be accessed from the DPOLY website ([Link to slides on DPOLY website](#)). Jane offered that we would plan on 30 minutes for discussion. At the end of 30 minutes she would consider if there were strong need for an extension beyond the 30 minutes allotted.

DPOLY member #1 asked if there were members on the Executive Committee (EXEC) who were not in favor of the proposal or who had concerns that they believed should be aired during this discussion among the DPOLY members. If so, this member asked that those contrary views or concerns be expressed.

One EXEC member shared that he believed much of the benefit of incorporating individuals with soft matter interests had already been realized and that little additional benefit would be obtained by the proposed expansion.

Another EXEC member noted that he had considered both pros and cons and was generally in favor. He offered the view that if our division chose not to do this, either the soft matter folks would do something on their own, or some other division would probably move to accommodate them.

DPOLY Member #2 – The DPOLY division has had problems with growth. The APS total membership is growing, but our membership has been roughly static. The following questions should be part of the discussion. Are we already doing soft matter? Is having a forum (i.e. division) that is focused just on polymers advantageous for our funding? Is that more narrow identity advantageous? He personally supports the move to expand the purview of DPOLY to include soft matter as proposed.

A member (#3) asked how many abstracts came into the 2.x sorting categories.

Jane Lipson interpreted the question to be asking how many of the abstracts in our focus sessions would be considered as falling under the broader designation of “soft matter”, as opposed to being in the narrower category of “polymer”. She answered that about 280 abstracts dealing with soft matter went into our focus sessions. [Editorial note: If the question was really how many abstracts came into the 2.x sorting categories, the answer is 232, with 126 belonging to the category of non-moving soft matter systems.]

Another member (#4) said that a soft matter group will form, one way or another, and when it forms, that group will take back those focus sessions. If we want those focus sessions we will have to fight for them if there is a separate entity for soft matter activities.

Another member (#5) opined that the proposed expansion is a good idea, but he wasn't sure if the soft matter community will feel that they have appropriate representation in an expanded version of DPOLY. Would we be willing to have a non-polymer soft matter person on the EXEC?

Member #6 said that intellectually we don't want to be isolated from the soft matter community. From a scientific point of view the proposed expansion would be good.

Member #6: If we only have polymer awards this would make soft matter people feel as though they are second class.

Jane Lipson deferred to Scott Milner, who is our division councilor and chair of the APS Prize Committee to respond. Scott noted that APS owns the prizes. Those awards cannot be unilaterally changed by the division. The Padden award is a unit award. Changing the Padden award would be easier. There has already been some discussion in the past concerning the creation of a prize for work in Soft Matter. The creation of a prize is not done lightly, however. The APS Council scrutinizes applications for new awards to avoid overlap and assure that proposed prizes can be properly endowed and contribute to the mission of APS. Raising funds for a Soft Matter prize would require considerable effort, but that is a topic that could be taken up by an expanded division.

Member #7: I do both polymers and soft matter physics. I would rather do all of my work in one division.

Member #1 spoke again. He noted that he joined the division in 1970. He experienced the changing of the division name from Division of High Polymer Physics to Division of Polymer Physics, which was done in order to embrace broadening opportunities. The change of name and scope proposed now would solidify the broadening of interests that the division has already undertaken in our activities and programming.

Member #8: He said he has been a member of DPOLY and organized a session in the DPOLY program this year. He is a soft matter person who would like to see soft matter people incorporated into a division that appreciates people that are not physicists. He mentioned that other soft matter people are interested in a separate division or a separate topical group. However, this person argued that having soft matter formally in a division with polymers would allow better coordination of the talks and sessions.

Member #9 stated that he believes that many of the soft matter people are already inside DPOLY. He asked the other members at the meeting how many of them would consider themselves as working in 'Soft Matter'. An EXEC member estimated that over half of those present raised their hands. Member #9 then remarked that it would not be a problem to formally include soft matter people in DPOLY.

Member #10 expressed the concern that there might be persons who were not supportive of the proposal that are afraid to speak in this public venue. He suggested that when the call to vote goes out to the membership there be two separate statements of equal length attending the ballot, one statement giving the "pro" position and one the "con" position. Each statement would be authored by a proponent of that view.

Jane Lipson remarked that we are creating a record of all of the comments today. The comments will be summarized and placed on the website so that they can be reviewed by any member of the division at the member's convenience.

Member #11 said that as a physics undergrad student in a strong physics program she was never introduced to polymer physics until graduate school. An important role for a division is advocacy among young scientists for their intellectual involvement in areas of physics with which they may not have had much contact in their studies.

A member of the EXCE offered the remark that if someone has a concern that s/he is not comfortable presenting in the public venue that individual can write to any member of the EXEC and share that concern.

Member #11 asked how the EXEC came up with the estimate that if the division were expanded, its membership would increase 20 +/- 5%. An EXEC member mentioned that a large number of people had already signed up as first time members at this meeting as a result of the expanded scope of the technical program. This EXEC member indicated that he viewed this success as indicative of further membership gains that could be made by broadening the division's stated interests.

Individuals that spoke in the meeting were asked to identify themselves to Mark Foster or Barry Farmer for the record of the business meeting. Those names will not be published with the summary of the discussion placed on the website.

The discussion of the proposed expansion concluded about 6:45pm, having lasted somewhat over 30 minutes, since the Chair had allowed discussion past the original limit of 30 minutes.