



INSTITUTE

DOINGS

The annual meeting of the Governing Board was held late in March. For six hours the members discussed activities under Institute management and a number of issues of broad concern to physicists. These included, on the one hand, formal matters of procedure, the election of officers and committees, the organization of the operating staff and its administration, the unhappy fact of rising printing costs, and the special financial problems of the Institute's own journals. On the other hand were included the whole question as to whether a system for accrediting physics departments should be established, the long range problem of financing the publication of the results of research, the need for local sections at colleges and universities, and the optimum relationship between the Institute and the National Research Council.

Leaving aside formal matters of narrow significance and the election of officers, which was reported in May, two kinds of conclusions came from the meeting. For some matters, special committees were appointed to analyze problems, to recommend policies, or to plan definite procedures in appropriate detail. In other cases it was evident that further and more general discussion was necessary before the time could be considered ripe for plans and decisions.

Accreditation

The question of accrediting physics departments certainly falls in the latter category. Physicists are not in accord on the desirability or undesirability of establishing in their field accrediting systems similar to those in chemistry and in engineering. In fact, they seem preponderantly against it. The viewpoint of employing agencies and some others is sometimes different, and the AIP is frequently called upon to provide an accredited list of institutions.

It is hard for government agencies and small industrial corporations to know, without such a list, how good a certain bachelor's degree 'with major in physics' is. It is sometimes said that a physics department gets less favorable attention from a college administration than another department by which

the college will be publicly judged through an accrediting system. It is possible that the existence of an accrediting system operated by the profession itself would forestall state-imposed licensing of physicists which might be inappropriately designed and ineptly administered.

On the other hand, the Institute's Policy Committee reported to the Board a study of existing accrediting systems in other fields together with its conclusions that the cost of operating such a system for physics would be greater than the AIP could afford and that the time required of committee personnel, investigators, and physics department staff members would be more than could reasonably be asked of them. The problem of setting standards and finding reliable methods of appraisal is difficult and perhaps insoluble within an acceptable margin of error.

The difficulties outweigh the advantages. At the suggestion of the Policy Committee the Board authorized a special committee to search for alternatives. It was suggested that a system of achievement tests might be set up on a voluntary basis, open to any graduates of physics major curricula who wish to take them. Agencies for the development and administration of such tests already exist so that if a useful system could be based on them, there should be little or no cost to the AIP or to physics departments. A study of this possibility is in progress.

College and University Chapters

The Board was in accord with the feeling of individuals at various institutions that there are now enough physics students to merit the establishment of local chapters at colleges and universities, designed to foster interest and professional responsibility and to establish a first link to the Member Societies and the Institute. Such chapters would not be restricted to students but would exist mostly for their benefit.

In view of the experience and cooperative attitude of the physics honorary society, Sigma Pi Sigma, as well as the success of local chapters in other technical fields, the Board felt that little further discussion was needed and authorized a committee to meet with a companion committee of Sigma Pi Sigma and draw up a plan for such local chapters. The two committees have been named and are at work.

HENRY A. BARTON