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20 December 1990

Dear Jerry,

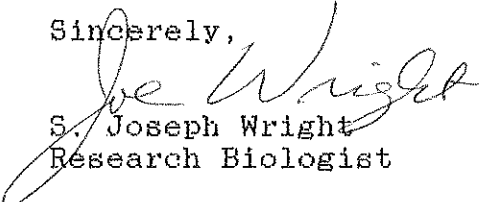
At the recent LTER All Scientists Meeting, we devoted a profitable session to the potential for cooperation with non-LTER sites. I am writing to further that process with respect to the Barro Colorado Island (BCI) field station maintained by the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute in Panama. Specifically, I would like to reiterate the advantages to the LTER program and to offer possible solutions to several reservations expressed at the All Scientists Meeting.

Cooperation with BCI would significantly increase the ecological diversity of the LTER program. BCI offers a 70 year history of ecological research in a mainland tropical moist forest setting. Ongoing projects include monitoring of climate (70 yr), of plant phenology (15 yr), of the demography of selected animal populations (20 yr) and of plants in secondary (25 yr) and primary forest (10 yr, 300,000 stems), and ecosystem level experiments including artificial treefalls (8 yr) and forest irrigation (5 yr). Many of these data sets could immediately be added to the LTER database and LTER scientists could be offered preferential access to BCI for future collaborative studies.

The reservations expressed at the All Scientists Meeting concerned shared data, administrative costs and criteria to identify cooperating non-LTER sites. Cooperating sites could be identified by their ability to share data and other facilities with LTER scientists. The level of participation of a cooperating site could then be in direct proportion to the facilities offered. As an example, shared data is always a tricky business. The level of access to LTER databases could be in direct proportion to the type and quality of shared data offered by the cooperating site. Finally, administrative costs could be minimized; cooperating sites might have a single E-mail contact and bear all costs of sending their personnel to LTER workshops.

These suggestions are offered to further the dialogue toward cooperation between the LTER program and non-LTER sites. I will look forward to developments at your January executive committee meeting.

Sincerely,

  
S. Joseph Wright  
Research Biologist

Madison, December 21, 1990

Dear dr. Franklin,

This letter is about the organization of the LTER All Scientist Meeting. The conference was months ago but you still may remember that I came to talk to you after the final meeting offering some help with workshops. Then, I promised to write a critique of the meeting explaining what ideas and opinions on organization I have before we get into a further discussion about the workshops.

I have decided to get just through the situations in which people were limited by their worries or insecure feelings. The general idea would be to make people

In general, I think that everybody on a conference has too many possibilities to be anonymous which situation gives him/her the feeling that he/she is not responsible for results of it. I believe that on one hand organizers could help participants to be more relaxed, enthusiastic, initiated and creative and on another hand people could participate more actively in the organization. Both participants and organizers would get closer to each other and develop better communication.

In this letter I am going to deal only with problems of organizers which I divided into three parts: basis, which describes my ideas about basic people's needs; workshop which deals with problems of workshop organization; and time, which gives some suggestions of changes in time schedules. The last chapter, philosophy, explains why I decided to get into the organization problems. I am always going to say what I did not like and then, I will explain how and why the situation should be changed. Most of the time I will be intuitive but as far as I know, at least sometimes my ideas agree with organization theories. I will also use very straight forward expressions of my thoughts not because I would want to attack you or anybody else, but I would like to save time and space and give you a reliable basis for further discussion. I do not want to cover my thoughts with a lot of qualifying words because I would like you to realize quick and easy what my capabilities are in this field.

First, I should probably tell you also something about myself. I am 27 and I am from Czechoslovakia. I have a doctorate from the Charles University in Prague but I am still not sure about my position in

science. I came to America about 15 month ago to work on my masters. I have some further plans for my studies and work here but as usually, everything depends on many aspects and I do not know yet what is going to happen. For now I hope to stay in the United States for a few more years.

Finally, I hope you will enjoy reading this letter as much as I have enjoyed writing it.

## I. BASIS

The purpose of the LTER Meeting was to make new acquaintances in addition to the basic goals common to any scientific conference. I think that organizers should consider more carefully the purpose of the meeting before choosing a place for it.

I thought YMCA was a nice place for our conference because people could do many things for entertainment together. They had the Rocky Mountains and a lot of sport facilities there which gave them many opportunities for free time program. Also, lodging, lecture hall, and poster space were excellent.

On another hand, I thought that there were not good enough conditions for meeting each other during meals and informal discussions. I found that people from the conference probably used to meet friends in a more pleasant environment and while eating better food because they were complaining about it. I agreed because I found some limitations too. The cafeteria was very often crowded and food was not always as good as it should be. I also thought that a poster hall was not a satisfying place for meetings, not even for everyday ones but especially not for an invitation party.

Next time I would suggest to think more about the goal of the conference and find a place which would make people comfortable and closer to each other just by its own atmosphere for example a mountain cabin.

## II. WORKSHOP

A workshop is where people are looking for new ideas, directions and programs for further research. Each member should be excited about participating in these possible scientific findings and each leader should be pleased about the honor for leading these people in this pursuit. A workshop should be the most active and alive part of a conference.

Unfortunately, that was not the case. Leaders seemed passive because they did not care how the discussion progressed and did not appear to feel responsibility for workshop results or for being prepared. Other people did not appear to be doing their best either, because they were afraid to open themselves to the group, seemed uninterested in working with other people, were not relaxed, enthusiastic, creative, honest, flexible, or respectful to each other.

Generally, I would not blame workshop participants or leaders for inactivity as much as I would blame the organizers. In my opinion, the workshops were the most demanding parts of the conference and organizers left almost all of this responsibility up to the leaders. Organizers should think about leaders and they should try to help them more.

For example, I would suggest a seminar where would be determined more closely leaders responsibilities and explained that they are not alone with their

problems. In my opinion, leaders would get more secure about their role in the workshop and they could concentrate more specifically on the workshop goals and leadership.

Organizers and leaders could meet with professional organizer before the workshops begin and when they are over. On the first meeting they could discuss more theoretical problems like principals of authority, rules of discussion, leading a discussion, workshop plans, time schedules, possible results, methods to increase participant enthusiasm, creativity etc. On the second one they could put together and discuss results and actual problems of each of the workshops.

### III. TIME.

The time schedule should respect people's activity within longer (a conference week) and shorter (a day) periods of time, it should consider requirements of each of the events and put them next to each other regarding to people's characteristics and it should offer enough breaks. On one hand, it should help to intensify people's working periods, and on another hand, it should give them enough time to relax and renew their enthusiasm. The time schedule should support people. Unfortunately, it seemed to me that people were not sufficiently considered as an important factor in the time schedule. Here is a summary of the problems and some suggestions for changes.

**Weekly time schedule** should help people to get over their initial shyness but also should consider their fatigue later in the week. I think that organizers should try to support them by a schedule of free time and also by the program of the events and work. I think people meet each other easier in the beginning because they are enthusiastic while new acquaintances can supply them with some energy later in the week even in less productive periods.

For example, in the beginning the most productive periods of a day could focus on making acquaintances with people and environment. There could be workshops scheduled in between rather than lectures because they allow people to meet each other. Later the schedule could on workshops and in the end on lectures. I think that not only relationships but also other events would benefit from this schedule. Workshops in the beginning and in the middle of the week could benefit for people's energy and enthusiasm. General lectures later in a week could be more alive because it would be easier to ask questions among friends than among people who are still strangers.

**Daily time schedule** should support people by following the human biological clock. For example, there should not be workshops in the early afternoon because people are not very creative after lunch or there should not be lectures in the morning because people sitting in a dark room get back to sleep. I would rather suggest workshops in the morning and lectures in later afternoon or evening.

**Events.** I found that for many people it was difficult to adjust themselves to the next coming event. They lost much enthusiasm and energy on pushing themselves to get over stress which could result from putting next to each events with different requirements. I think that organizers should develop different strategies which would help people to remove it similarly like a good lecturer does it when he starts with some jokes and makes this way some kind of "feeling transition" because I believe that this stress can influence people's enthusiasm and capability to concentrate.

**Relaxation periods.** Both longer or shorter breaks should follow the weekly and daily dynamics of the time schedule. Longer breaks should be scheduled mostly for the beginning and support new acquaintances, while short breaks should follow daily needs and let people forget about work. Relaxation periods should be diverse and creative to be able to make the conference enjoyable and to support people's motivations and enthusiasm.

On our meeting longer breaks were represented by a field trip, an invitation party and by afternoon free time, and the short breaks were represented by meals. I would like to write some comments to each of them with respect to these ideas.

Field trip. A field trip in the beginning of the week was connected with my strategy but in my opinion its organization should support more relationships among people. Program should require personal participation rather than support their natural passivity. For example, there could be offered some competitions such as of the most beautiful photograph or of a person of with the best memory for names rather than only listening to field lectures.

Invitation party. An invitation party had a similar problem. People were left on their own and therefore, they were mostly meeting people they already knew. People could be more pushed to be social. For example, there could be offered dancing or games which would break the first barriers and make the process of meeting new people faster and easier. I also thought that there should be better food and drinks there because these things usually make people more relaxed and comfortable too.

Free time. The free time periods could be less specific in their program than other breaks but they could use some organization too. I think especially in the beginning, organizers should take responsibility for finding out what people want. Later, when people will know each other better organizers can give some suggestions for the program like a volleyball or softball game or a walk. In the end, people could be left on their own but with some information of where to go what to see or where the equipment is etc.

Short breaks. Meal breaks did not satisfy the "break" requirements in the contrary, they often even increased the pressure because people expected relaxation and they did not get it. Meal breaks also belong to certain hours within a day so they limit working periods instead of supporting them. I would suggest breaking down meal breaks as much as possible.

For example, I would offer different kinds of program for a break like listening to music, watching movie, reading and and I would also change flexibility of meal schedule giving longer periods for eating, simple lunches during a discussion or in the contrary, long dinners with some program.

#### IV. PHILOSOPHY.

I got into the problem of a conference organization because I worked as an organizer for couple years but mostly because it bothered me how people and their work on the meeting were limit.

I also found disappointing that conference participants wanted to make the meeting shorter and I wrote this letter hoping that some of my suggestions could increase enthusiasm and help people to feel better around each other. I do not like being alone and I do not want other people to feel the same way.

Finally, I thought that especially an "experimental" conference which had communication as one of its goals the organization should focus on

communication and organization experiments. I wanted to share with you some of my ideas because I believed that next time our conference could even help to find some new general rules for breaking down mistakes we are doing using a stable pattern for a conference organization.

If you become interested in my organization ideas I could write you next time about experiments I did on the conference and later in Madison or about possibilities for participants input to the organization.

Thank your for your patience when you got through the letter until this point.

Have a nice Christmas and a happy New Year 1991.

Sincerely,

*Marika Sigova'*