

## Meeting Minutes

### **UNOLS COUNCIL MEETING Thursday, 2 October 2008 National Science Foundation, Stafford II, Room 555 4201 Wilson Boulevard Arlington, VA**

#### **Executive Summary**

The UNOLS Council met at the National Science Foundation (NSF) in Arlington, VA on the morning of October 11, 2007. Major discussion topics included:

- Crew and marine technician retention and hiring issues
- Code of conduct for marine scientific research vessels
- Conditions in which outside funding for ship use could be sought and scheduled.
- 2008/2009 UNOLS goals and priorities

Status reports on various UNOLS activities were provided. Committee Chairs had an opportunity to raise issues requiring Council attention.

#### **Action Items**

1. Investigate the feasibility of a more flexible UNOLS to meet the needs of additional users. Form an *ad hoc* subcommittee to investigate the problem and make recommendations. (Vernon Asper)
2. Work with Ocean Leadership, the NRC, and the federal agencies to ensure that the fleet is right sized and has the right capabilities for ocean sciences in the coming decades.
3. Develop and implement strategies to attract and retain the best maritime personnel in support of the UNOLS mission. Form a working group and hold a workshop in early 2009. The working group is tasked to provide recommendations and strategies. (RVOC/RVTEC Officers)
4. Continue to lower barriers to effective use of UNOLS ships caused by disabilities, gender, or other special situations. - Poll the UNOLS Representatives to determine which institutions have harassment training programs and how many need it. Based on demand, a voluntary on-line training program could be developed. (UNOLS Office)
5. Prioritize Facility Renewal and Acquisition Efforts - Organize renewal/acquisition efforts into categories of near term, intermediate term, and long term priority OR high, medium, low priority. (Council)
6. Code of Conduct for Marine Scientific Research Vessels – The UNOLS Council has recommended that the agencies endorse the Code. Action item for Agencies.

7. UNOLS Facility Review – Periodically, UNOLS should review the status of UNOLS designated facilities. Inquire into the future operating mode of R/V *Seward Johnson* by Florida Atlantic University (FAU).
8. Post Cruise Assessment Reports – Encourage greater response from all groups, particularly the marine technician groups. If needed, modify the form to better fit the captains and marine technician groups.
9. SCOAR – Continue to solicit nominations for Chair.
10. Ad hoc Committee on Data Management Best Practices – The ad-hoc committee will carry out their charge in accordance with their approved terms of reference.
11. SMR Update Project – Update the SMR documents according to the project description stated on <<http://www.unols.org/committees/fic/smr/update08/index.html>> (FIC)
12. Research Vessel Safety Standards – Finalize the draft RVSS and provide to the Council (Safety Committee and Office).
13. Continue Review of PCAR - Mike Prince will provide materials to the PCAR committee and resume the review process.
14. Fleet Improvement Plan – Complete draft (FIC) and provide to UNOLS Council for review.

**Appendices:**

I	<a href="#">Agenda</a>
II	<a href="#">Participant List</a>
III	<a href="#">Crew Retention and Hiring Report</a>
IV	<a href="#">UNOLS 2009 Goals and Priorities</a>

**Call the Meeting:** The UNOLS Council met at the National Science Foundation (NSF) in Arlington, VA on the morning of October 2, 2008. Marcia McNutt, UNOLS Chair, called the meeting to order and provided an opportunity for introductions. The agenda is included as *Appendix I* and the list of participants is posted as *Appendix II*.

**Accept the minutes of the July 2008 Council Meeting** – Peter Wiebe and Marcia McNutt provided corrections to the minutes. A motion was made and passed to approve the minutes of the July 2008 phone/web Council Meeting with the incorporation of the corrections <<http://www.unols.org/meetings/2008/200807cnc/200807cncmi.html>>. (Wiebe/Ortner)

**Crew and Marine Technician Retention and Hiring Issues** – Stewart Lamerdin reported on the issues regarding crew and marine technician retention and hiring. His slides are included as *Appendix III*.

Over the last years, there have been numerous conference calls and feedback from the fleet operators to quantify the scope of the retention and hiring problems. The main issues include:

- Lower salaries across the fleet with increased competition from higher paying employers.
- Lack of confidence in long-term viability of the UNOLS fleet. Crews and technical support groups are uncertain as to whether their ship will sail from year to year.
- Higher costs for credentials and training and a lack of dependable funding to support these costs.
- No career path for technicians and a general lack of respect from scientists and operations managers.
- Increased regulatory pressures continue to increase operational demands. New regulations require funding to implement, but there is no increase in funding.
- A shrinking and aging workforce.

UNOLS operators were polled to determine how many “near misses” there have been. A near-miss is described as not having the required manning level within 48 hours of the cruise sail time. The USCG requires a certain level of manning. In 2007, there were 37 near misses. Close to 4,000 hours were spent collectively by UNOLS operators to find staff in order to sail.

The Council members expressed concern over the comment that there is a “lack of respect from scientists and operation managers.” Stewart explained that this comment was heard mostly by the marine technicians. Marcia wondered if the lack of response stems from the evolution of the UNOLS model. There could be a perception that technicians are becoming more like community property. The technicians at MBARI feel like part of the team. The MBARI PIs are very appreciative of the support provided by the tech. She wonders if there was a way for the community to have a better appreciation of the techs.

Stewart reported that a salary survey between UNOLS crew/technicians, government, and industry was conducted. UNOLS participated in the survey with 19 ships and 17 tech groups. Government figures from NOAA/MSC were used in the survey and industry data for one container ship operation was used. The salary comparisons were based on what a person would earn per day at sea or ashore. It is difficult to make salary comparisons because there is so much diversity in the benefits. The initial results of the salary survey indicate that UNOLS salary levels are not that much different than competing ships of similar employment; however, they are lower than industry when you account for the amount of paid time off that mariners receive. Stewart presented a series of salary range charts for captains, crew, and marine technicians. The upper range of UNOLS crew salaries are at the lower level of industry salary range.

It is particularly difficult to compare the marine technician salaries to industry. The level of service that is required and benefits vary significantly between UNOLS and industry technician positions. Industry on-shore employment opportunities also compete with marine technician employment positions. The Marine Advanced Technology Education (MATE) Center is also conducting salary surveys and UNOLS is working with them.

Marcia re-emphasized that technicians must be given respect. They should be brought into the mission. It is a problem that must be addressed.

Dan Schwartz commented that the average age of mariners is 53 years old. Entry level positions typically require about \$4k-\$10K in regulatory training and licensing before new crew members can begin work onboard a ship. While it is important to talk about retention, the big problem is the pool of personnel from which we can hire is dwindling. The competition can afford to pay high entry level salaries as well as the costs associated with training and licensing requirements.

Vernon – Marine technicians should have the opportunity to provide input and feedback on cruise operations. Stewart explained that most of the marine tech groups are unhappy with the Post Cruise Assessment (PCA) form. There is a perception that when the marine tech provides a criticism of the science party there is no action taken. However, criticisms of the marine technicians by the science party are brought to the immediate attention of the technician supervisor. Linda Goad reported that she forwards the PCA reports to the NSF program managers. They are informed of any criticisms of the science party.

Stewart reviewed preliminary recommendations on how to address the retention and hiring issues:

- Revise the SSSE proposal guidelines to include training as a fundable option.
- Develop a pool of full-time, relief personnel (including technicians) that would be available for work on any of the ships in the fleet.
- Investigate the creation of a UNOLS Internship program that could provide training and certification to younger personnel for crew and technician positions.
- Create a position at the UNOLS Office to formalize and manage the pool of “relief personnel available,” promote the UNOLS fleet at various job fairs/maritime schools, develop brochures and videos designed to increase awareness, and monitor morale in the fleet.
- Continue to pursue higher base salaries for positions in the fleet; inevitably you get what you pay for.
- Create a task force from operator institutions to better engage the crew and technicians in the science they are involved in.

Dave Checkley commented that there are differences in the levels of service that are provided by technical support groups from one institution to another. Sandy Shor said that NSF provides guidance about technical service, but it is not standard across the fleet. Matt Hawkins remarked that by pooling support, crew and technicians will learn more about the other operations in the Fleet.

John Diebold said that communications are very important. Marine technicians should participate in the pre-cruise planning meetings. This is very useful, especially if it is done on the ships.

Mary Jane Perry commented that establishing a pool of crew and technicians could be helpful in addressing ship lay-up situations. Individuals who are employed on ships that have been laid up could join the pool during the ship lay-up period. This could help in retaining employees.

Stewart requested feedback from the UNOLS Council on the recommendations presented. RVOC and RVTEC will also be asked to provide feedback. Once the summary of recommendations is endorsed by UNOLS it will be forwarded to Agencies as a request for action. Stewart emphasized that the problem must be addressed now, not years from now.

**Code of Conduct for Marine Scientific Research Vessels** – Mike Prince reported that a Code of Conduct for Marine Scientific Research Vessels was established by the International Ship Operators Management (ISOM) committee. The draft document was circulated at a previous Council meeting. The UNOLS operators endorse the code, but cannot adhere to the Code of Conduct unless it is also endorsed by the U.S. agencies and the scientific community.

Peter Wiebe asked if the draft had been revised with the comments provided by UNOLS. Dennis Nixon replied that the UNOLS comment on chemical tracers had been incorporated, but the suggestion by RVOC to change the title had not been accepted. Dennis explained that ISOM didn't want to create new rules, but they wanted to make sure that everything was covered by an existing policy statement.

Bob Houtman asked if the UNOLS Council recommends that the agencies endorse the Code of Conduct. Mike Prince replied “yes, they had endorsed the concept last year and RVOC also endorses it.” Bob Houtman said that the agencies will take it for action.

**Conditions in which outside funding for ship use could be sought and scheduled** – Mike Prince reported that the Cooperative Agreements between the operating institution and federal agency outline some guidelines for scheduling ship use from outside sources, but basically it states that outside use would be addressed on a case-by-case basis with the agency that owns the ship). There have always been some ship time requests from non-traditional sources (industry, foreign governments, private, etc). UNOLS has requested additional guidance from the agencies regarding the type of outside use that would potentially be approved for scheduling and what would not be considered. There are conditions that should be addressed when considering ship use by non-traditional sources; such as, data collection, availability and archiving, insurance, cruise participation, regulations, and cruise results.

Discussion:

- Dennis Nixon commented that hull insurance becomes an issue. Operators often must acquire hull insurance for ship time that is not federally funded. They must determine the value of the ship.
- Marcia McNutt – This issue has been added to the 2009 goals and priorities. Marcia did an informal survey of major ship operators and found that PIs are diversifying their sources of funding. However, there are some barriers for using ship time with outside funds.
- Mike Prince said that operators must also adhere to their USCG letter of designation when considering potential work.
- Bruce Appelgate commented that ship operators already operate under a series of rules. Is this exercise to inform the community, or is it to change the rules for operations that are conducted using outside funding? Marcia replied that the goal would be to get some additional flexibility in scheduling and carrying out ship time funded by outside sources.

- Peter Wiebe asked to what extent are the rules for outside ship use governed by the operator. Is there a difference in rules between non-government owned ships and agency owned vessels? Yes. Peter suggested that we figure out ways for the institutions to own the ships. Dennis Nixon remarked that years ago the agencies bought ships then turned over the title to the operating institution.
- Marcia suggested that if the ship operators work together they could coordinate ship time so that the non-federal ships take the charter work and the federally owned ships take the federally funded work. Mike Prince said that even non-federally owned ships have limitations with supporting outside work. Marcia agreed that any commercial charters must not compete unfairly with industry.
- Steve Holbrook – The *Langseth* is a vessel that is a candidate for outside charter work. Dennis Nixon said that the *Ewing* supported industry charter operations. LDEO had to prove that the Charter work would not compete with other industry ships. It was a lot of work proving that they would not compete and LDEO made the statement that they never wanted to go through the process again. Steve Holbrook agreed that it may not be an easy process, but the current funding situation is also not easy.
- Marcia – Arrangements for carrying out charter work would have to consider data accessibility. The data should be accessible to the community.
- Linda Goad said that this is an area that is being explored.

### ***Break***

**UNOLS Policy Regarding Committee Recommendations to Federal Agencies** – Marcia explained that over the years Committees have sent letters of recommendation directly to agencies or facility operators. Some of these recommendations required significant dollar amounts to implement. Although the UNOLS Charter states that Committee recommendations should pass through the Council for endorsement, there hasn't been a consistent policy for addressing the Committee recommendations. This year, the Council decided to establish a formal policy for committee recommendations to federal agencies that include significant investments. Significant is defined as \$1M or greater. The policy is posted at: [http://www.unols.org/meetings/2008/200810cnc/Policy\\_on\\_committee\\_recommendations.pdf](http://www.unols.org/meetings/2008/200810cnc/Policy_on_committee_recommendations.pdf).

The policy was established over the summer 2008 and the Committees and Council have already used the process twice. The first time was for a recommendation from DESSC to NSF regarding acquisition options for the Replacement Human Occupied Vehicle (RHOV). The recommendation required Council discussion, further clarification, and a phone meeting. A modified recommendation was then endorsed and sent to NSF. The second Committee recommendation was from the AICC and after Council consideration the recommendation was endorsed and sent to the agencies.

There was discussion on the process and how it was applied to the DESSC and AICC recommendations:

- Marcia –In case of the DESSC recommendation there were some significant changes and the process took some time to carry out and obtain endorsement. In case of the AICC recommendation, there was a problem of getting in touch with Council. Summer time can be a difficult time to get a quick turn-around from Council members.

- Bob Collier – In the case of the DESSC recommendation, there was an issue of the Council reviewing and re-evaluating past decisions. Maybe we should narrow the focus of the process.
- Marcia – This was indeed the case for the DESSC recommendation. The project had been peer reviewed years before and the Council doesn't need to revisit the decisions that considered the merit of the project. In the end, the DESSC recommendation that was endorsed allowed for options with less risk.
- Julie Morris commented that the RHOV recommendation was a challenging issue to address. The funding for the RHOV acquisition comes out of the same budget as science.

The new UNOLS policy also recommends that the Council establish facility priorities. Vernon Asper stated that it will be difficult to establish facility acquisition priorities:

1. In many instances facility comparisons are like comparing apples and oranges. Many times the items are not competing against each other for funds. As an example, the top three facility acquisitions might fall under NSF funding, while the fourth item on the acquisition list, is an ONR project.
2. Recommendations are made at different times and it becomes difficult to rank them at any one time.

Discussion and questions arose:

- What items should be included on a priority list; capital investments only, operation costs, or both? It was generally agreed that the Council should address both capital and facility operation recommendations.
- Should all facility acquisitions projects be considered, regardless of which agency is supporting the effort? Or should only priorities that apply to items that are on the same budget levels.
- Bob Collier - Is the Council a group that can make unbiased facility prioritization decisions? Mike Prince – No matter what group you look at, there will be conflicts of interest; however, the Council can give advice.
- Marcia – If the Council is to be an expert on fleet operations and shared-use equipment, then the Council should weigh in on decisions in as balanced a way as possible. The Council is elected group of representatives. The Council should try to represent those who have elected them and provide the best advice possible.
- Marcia suggested that instead of the Council attempting to rank order facility priorities, they could instead categorize the priorities as near term, intermediate term, and long term OR they could group the priorities as high, medium, and low.

The Council agreed to the approach of identifying the priorities and then grouping them as appropriate. This will be a task for 2009.

**2008/2009 UNOLS Goals and Priorities** – Marcia McNutt presented the draft 2008/2009 UNOLS Goals and Priorities (they are included as *Appendix IV*). She didn't receive input prior to the meeting, so Marcia went ahead and drafted the goals and priorities on her own. The slides include the UNOLS vision and mission statements.

Marcia reviewed the UNOLS goals that were established for 2007/2008 and graded UNOLS on how we did in working towards the goals:

1. Enlarge the group of supporters for UNOLS both in terms of capitalization and operations. - We didn't make progress on #1 except for some additional users of the fleet.
2. Extend our planning horizon to ensure that we are building a UNOLS that really meets what the infrastructure needs will be for ocean sciences in the coming decades. - The distraction that came from continually focusing on goal #1 prevented us from effectively dealing with #2. The 2008 ship schedules became healthier, but it really didn't have to do with diversification. We need to determine if UNOLS can be more flexible to re-engage more agencies?
3. Continuously work to lower barriers to effective use of UNOLS ships caused by disabilities, gender, or other special situations. - UNOLS did a good job addressing issues that are within its immediate control (e.g., #3).

Marcia reviewed the goals for 2009:

1. Investigate the feasibility of a more flexible UNOLS to meet the needs of additional users. Marcia said that she doesn't think that NOAA is going to change their chartering procedures for UNOLS. UNOLS needs to change for NOAA to better meet their needs. We need to work together to solve this problem.
2. Work with Ocean Leadership, the NRC, and the federal agencies to ensure that the fleet is right sized and has the right capabilities for ocean sciences in the coming decades. UNOLS needs to work with all of these groups. We shouldn't be doing this alone.
3. Implement strategies to attract and retain the best maritime personnel in support of the UNOLS mission. This is something that UNOLS must address. Activities are already underway to develop possible solutions to these problems.
4. Continue to lower barriers to effective use of UNOLS ships caused by disabilities, gender, or other special situations.

Marcia reviewed the issues that are associated with the 2009 goals.

- Flexibility - Our science is being supported by a more diverse array of stakeholders (private support, foundations, state support, etc.), at the same time that support for UNOLS is getting less broad in its base. We need to better understand this divergence (cost problems, insurance issues, mission mismatches, different decision timescales, etc.) and do what we can to re-converge. It is suggested that an *ad hoc* subcommittee be formed to investigate the problem and make recommendations.
- Planning for the Future – The fact that facilities costs are exceeding funds available is not just a UNOLS problem, nor even just an OCE problem. For that reason, the solution is unlikely to come from UNOLS working unilaterally, but rather UNOLS working in concert with Ocean Leadership, the agencies, and institutions. Facilities must be right sized for the budget and appropriately designed for the science mission. UNOLS must be ready with its input as the expert on ship operations and must be at the table, but will not be able to solve the problem alone.
- Maritime Personnel - Crew and marine technician retention has always been a challenge for UNOLS vessels. The issue is now reaching crisis proportions and it is very difficult for academic salaries to compete with the offshore industry. So much specialized training is



invested into each shipboard crewmember to meet the regulations that turnover is a huge financial loss. The RVOC and RVTEC Chairs and Vice-chairs are proposing strategies for addressing this issue.

- Equal Access – UNOLS is making progress in ADA access and will experiment with online training to increase awareness on what actions constitute sexual harassment and the negative consequences of such behavior on UNOLS vessels.

#### Discussion:

- The Council members agreed with the goals and priorities.
- Sandy Shor – The downturn in the marine industry might result in personnel (crew and technicians) becoming available.
- Peter Wiebe commented that another item that should be addressed is the visibility of UNOLS. We should do more to educate the community and staffers about UNOLS.
- Peter Ortner asked how agencies will deal with partnerships and diversification of the Fleet. Bob Houtman replied that there are issues associated with accommodating outside sources of funding for acquisition and operations support. This will have to be examined.
- Marcia – It would be useful if UNOLS is provided with agency guidance regarding partnerships and diversification.
- Dave Checkley – In developing the Fleet Improvement Plan it became evident that the Fleet and science ship users are facing a dire situation. He isn't sure that the community is fully aware of the situation.

#### Status Reports:

- RVOC Safety Standards (RVSS) - Peter Zerr commented that it has been a lengthy process updating the RVSS. He reviewed the major changes to the format of the document.
- Safety Standards for Human Occupied Vehicles (HOV) - Annette DeSilva reported that all comments and revisions to the draft safety standards for HOVs have been received and are being incorporated. It has taken longer to complete this task than originally envisioned. Some of the committee members have retired.
- Science Mission Requirements (SMR) Update Project – The SMR project description is available at: <<http://www.unols.org/committees/fic/smr/update08/index.html>>. Mike Prince encouraged everyone to complete the on-line form regarding the Ocean Class SMR threshold and priority values. The Fleet Improvement Committee will use this information to update the Ocean Class SMR document. Once this document is complete, the SMRs for the other vessel classes will be addressed.
- Harassment at Sea – Mike Prince reported that the state of California uses an on-line training program to provide their required harassment training program. The on-line program can be tailored for UNOLS. Many states have mandatory training. Mike will poll UNOLS members to determine the need for UNOLS to offer training. If there is demand, he will institute the on-line training and it would be voluntary.
- Facility Reviews – Periodically reviewing facilities is a UNOLS responsibility. We will need to address this at a future meeting. Mike said that *Urraca* should be reviewed since it hasn't had an NSF inspection in years.

**Recommendation for the next UNOLS Office Host Institution** - Marcia McNutt reported that a UNOLS Evaluation Committee reviewed proposals for the next host of the UNOLS Office.

Three proposals were submitted. The Evaluation Committee's recommendation was sent to the Council and membership for comment and endorsement. The Committee recommended the proposal from URI with Jon Alberts as the Executive Secretary. The next step is for URI to submit their proposal to NSF. It is unsolicited. UNOLS will send the agencies a letter of endorsement for the URI proposal.

- Nancy Rabalais thanked the evaluation committee who reviewed the proposals and conducted the interviews. They did a very thorough job. All three candidates were very good and it was not an easy decision.
- Peter Ortner added that all of the proposals included good ideas. He hopes that URI can look at these proposals and take advantage of the ideas.
- Linda explained that since the proposal is un-solicited, anyone can submit a proposal.

**Committee Activities and Issues requiring Council Attention:**

**Ship Scheduling** - Sandy Shor asked if this year's ship scheduling model will continue next year. Will they skip the September scheduling meeting? Stan Winslow replied that after this year, the committee will have to make a decision on how to schedule the 2010 ship time. Linda Goad suggested that they have phone meetings early in 2009 year and then a face to face meeting in September. She added that in the past, the July meetings weren't effective because the funding decisions weren't known early enough.

**UNOLS Council Winter Meeting** – Marcia McNutt offered to host the winter Council meeting at MBARI. The effort could be coordinated with MLML. The weeks of March 2<sup>nd</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> will be considered.

*The meeting adjourned at noon.*