Typically, the annual conference has been composed of (1) formal presentations of titled papers; (2) informal presentations and discussions on a wide range of public and professional issues; (3) an address by the current AAPOR president; (4) a plenary session on broad topics of general interest to conference audiences; and (5) miscellaneous demonstrations, book reviews, "author-meets-the critics" dialogues, student presentations, didactic presentations, and the like.

Table 1 shows that roughly 437 individual formal sessions, in which some 1,329 titled papers were read, were assembled at AAPOR conferences from 1950 (when conference programs were actually formalized) through 1983.¹

Additionally, some 339 conference-arranged informal discussions took place during the same period. Totally, conference program chairs have planned, arranged for, and managed no less than 776 separate meetings within the AAPOR conferences that have been held over the past three-plus decades.

1. At best, this reflects a qualitative impressionistic examination of topics listed by title in the official programs and abstracts of the AAPOR annual conferences that took place between 1948 and 1983. Altogether, five programs of the total had not been recovered at the time of writing and consequently are omitted from the analysis.

Although a number of frequencies are reported here, they are to be considered estimates rather than absolutes. The reasons for this are many—the most obvious being that titles often do not precisely reflect the actual contents of a particular paper or "round table" discussion. No effort was made to actually read the more than 1,300 titled papers reported in AAPOR conference programs, nor were any reliability checks made regarding the classifications the author used for analyzing the data presented in this paper.

Finally, the reader is reminded that many factors enter into whether a given topic or theme will be presented at a given annual conference. The particular interests and tastes of particular program chairs; the availability of specific presenters; the amount of attention certain issues have been receiving in the press; the sheer availability of time and even physical space in which to assemble—all play a part in influencing the appearance of given subjects at the annual conference.
Table 1
Estimated Titled Formal and Informal
AAPOR Conference Sessions, 1950-1983

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Informal</th>
<th>Number of Papers</th>
<th>Informal Sessions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sessions</td>
<td>Read</td>
<td>(Round Tables, Panels, Didactics)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950-1959</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>308</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960-1969</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>331</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970-1979</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980-1983</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>437</td>
<td>1,329</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 indicates a steady growth in the number of formal sessions in which titled papers have been featured. As illustration, note that the mean number of papers read at the conferences during the decade of the 1970s rose to 50 over a mean of 31 that were presented during the 1950s. Exactly what this growth in formal presentations reflects is difficult to tell, given all the factors—both subjective and objective—that enter into conference programming decisions. One of the more promising hypotheses that offers itself here suggests that as public opinion research matured and grew in sophistication, more and more quality primary research was being funded and carried out. Thus, an increase in both researchers and formal research output was first reflected in the 1960s in a notable decline in informal discussions, accompanied by a moderate increase in the number of titled papers presented. The latter increase was followed by a roughly two-fold growth in both the formal and informal components of 1970s conferences. In other words, by the 1970s, conference participants seemingly had so much to report upon and discuss that the number of formal and informal meetings needed to accommodate them had to be doubled over the previous decade.

Books and Exhibits at the Conference

At recent conferences AAPOR members have enjoyed the opportunity to observe different computer hardware and software capabilities and to note book titles of interest to the researcher. It wasn’t always so. There was a time when books and other displays were not universally welcome at annual conferences.
The earliest located reference to book displays appears in the March 1952 Council minutes, in which it is stated that “many publishers who had exhibited books at the 1951 conference had not received orders placed by participants at the conference. It was agreed that (the Secretary-Treasurer) would hire one or two persons to properly handle the book exhibit at the 1952 conference.” This more direct AAPOR supervision seems to have been successful for the next ten years, as publishers’ booklists were displayed and orders taken and subsequently executed.

In 1962 there was some controversy over the proposal of direct sales of books at the conference. By this time a regular feature of conference programs was an “Author Meets the Critics” session and occasional other meetings in which new and relevant publications formed the main topic of discussion. Because of widespread interest in these new books, it was proposed that Council approve one or more tables for the display and actual sale of these books at the conference. Council minutes then record objections that “this would set a precedent, that previous requests for book tables had been refused, and that if some books were chosen for exhibit it would be hard to avoid the sale of others as well. Others felt that in view of the importance of these books to the present program, their sale at the conference would provide a welcome service.” The Council then voted to provide no special facilities for sales, though publishers would be asked to provide “two copies for reference.”

The climate for exhibits was considerably warmer in 1970. A Council member at the January meeting “asked whether a firm with which he is acquainted might have the privilege of setting up a special display of psychophysiological measurement devices which may be adapted to response measurement, the understanding being that the firm would be glad to pay both the hotel and AAPOR for the cost of the space.” Council voted against allowing such displays for pay this particular year, on such short notice, but voiced the sentiment that “we should encourage display of useful research devices as part of our regular programs, if possible. (Another Councillor) will look into whether a special meeting or display of devices could be arranged for this year; if so, AAPOR would not charge the exhibitors this year.” By March 1973 the suggestion was made at a Council meeting that “…our Newsletter should mention that any authors who are members of AAPOR or who are on our program may exhibit two books at the conference.”

The issue of opening up AAPOR conferences to outside promotion and sales was not restricted to books and other products. The New
York State Employment Service requested space at the 1962 conference at Lake George, New York for a “professional placement center.” The request was refused because it “would set a precedent and perhaps alter the atmosphere of the meetings.” Instead, the Council voted to ask the service to describe its services in a five-minute period during the conference’s annual business meeting.

The September 1973 Council was asked by the president-elect “about the possibility of organizing exhibits at our conferences.” Space rental, insurance, and security problems were raised, but the proponent said that “even so they might make money if we set up space to sell and did it through a regular display company on contract.” One Council member suggested that voluntary displays “might be easier,” but nothing came of this proposal.

In the early 1980s, Bob Lee was given permission to invite firms to exhibit at the conference, having made the case for considering microcomputer, word processor, and software offerings. Such displays and exhibitor personnel make a welcome contribution today, and most members are probably unaware that earlier Councils had been divided as to the appropriateness of exhibits.

Recreational Activities

As befits a relatively small conference, meeting for only three days in a resort setting, the crowded conference program (with sessions scheduled morning, afternoon, and night from Thursday evening until Sunday noon) nevertheless manages to provide numerous opportunities for recreation, if not for sleep. Some early birds are on the golf course or tennis courts or in the swimming pool at 6 a.m., bars tend to fill up shortly after they open, meals are social occasions for small groups, members may take mornings or afternoons off for long walks or other excursions, and there are music, dancing, and “private” parties at night.

Two traditions, which extend all the way back to the first conference at Central City, are card-playing and group singing. Following the Saturday night program and banquet and a drink at the “president’s party,” a small group usually adjourns to a card room where two poker tables have been set up and other tables made available for bridge foursomes. The poker players usually comprise a few perennials and a mixture of newcomers and other long-time members. The players generally rotate, some arriving late, others retiring early. By 3 a.m. the game has
dwindled to a hard core of four or five at one table, who may continue 
playing all night.

At the same time, another group gathers to exercise their voices in 
song, usually well remembered popular tunes from all eras. Like the 
poker players, the singers include a few perennials and a mixture of 
ewcomers and other long-time members. It was during the early 
1960s, when AAPOR frequently met at the Sagamore on Lake George, 
that David Wallace, a Central City "pioneer" and president of the As-
sociation in 1958-1959, penned new lyrics to several popular songs. 
The first of these, "AAPOR Lament," deplored the Association's 
lengthy corporate name; the second, "AAPOR Adoration," was a 
tongue-in-cheek reference to the rewards of an AAPOR conference 
("With lots of psychology and sociology, Gee, they are things we 
adore"); and the third, "AAPOR Togetherness," celebrated the Sag-
amore's new policy of restricting single-room occupancy. (See appendix 
G, AAPOR songs.) These songs quickly became a part of the singing 
group's standard repertoire, though in more recent years they have 
been largely forgotten.

A series of vignettes of the first thirty AAPOR conferences, written 
in 1975 by Paul Sheatsley on the basis of his own and collective mem-
ories, is shown in the introduction to this book, and conveys some of 
the flavor of AAPOR's early days. Though AAPOR membership con-
tinues to expand, though the times keep changing and what was once 
a new and innovative practice has become a recognized profession, the 
annual conferences of AAPOR continue to be anticipated and enjoyed 
by all those who are interested in public opinion research.