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## 2014 Triennial International Convention Presidential Address

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## 2014 Triennial International Convention Presidential Address

### **Cover Page Footnote**

Dr. Larry Heck delivered the Presidential Address at the 2014 Triennial International Convention held in Charleston, South Carolina. The 2017 Triennial International Convention will be held in Kansas City, MO.

## 2014 Triennial International Convention Presidential Address

Here we are at a history-making Triennial convention on the ninetieth anniversary of the founding of Pi Gamma Mu, our social science honor society – the preeminent social science honor society.

This moment in the convention provides an opportunity to reflect on our history, to acknowledge those who will take us into the future, and to anticipate our future.

Dr. Scott Johnston, long-time trustee, past president, and author of *First 75 Years*, informs us about the early and subsequent history of Pi Gamma Mu. He writes that a number of individuals were involved in founding our honor society, but that the preeminent (to use his word) founder was Dean Leroy Allen. In April 1924, Dean Allen, an economics professor at Southwestern College in Winfield, Kansas, and a group of student majors conceptualized an economics honor society. However, to our good fortune, the idea changed to include all the social sciences. By fall of that year, seventeen chapters were in the works.

How did Dean Allen accomplish that? The year was 1924, long before the internet and all of our instant communication devices, with quick and easy access to colleges and universities across the country. Dr. Johnston reports that each member in Winfield contributed twenty-five cents for postage. Twenty-five cents? Was this the first membership fee? But beyond the postage, a clue to Dean Allen's success surely resides in Dr. Johnston's assessment of him as a "visionary, idealist, and promoter." Those were traits that would facilitate the founding of our social science honor society.

Dean Allen remained the driving force of Pi Gamma Mu until his death in 1947. Following his death, the Board of Trustees appointed Effie Urquhart as executive secretary. That event is worth mentioning as that role evolved into the role of the executive director. The

executive director emerged to play a key role in the operation of the honor society headquarters. Only three have followed her: Ina Turner Gray, Sue Watters, and Suzanne Rupp, our current executive director. Also during the first ninety years, a total of fourteen presidents have helped provide Board of Trustee leadership. By the way, the presidents are showcased on the Pi Gamma Mu website, if you are interested in learning about them.

We remain indebted to those faithful to the work of Pi Gamma Mu – those faithful to the effort to carry out our mission. The mission of Pi Gamma Mu is to encourage and promote excellence in the social sciences and to uphold the ideals of scholarship and service. Each new member and each chapter service project helps us realize the mission. The realization rests in the work of volunteers – and we have many. Except for the contributions of our staff at headquarters, we are an organization of volunteers.

The volunteers most central to our mission are the chapter sponsors at colleges and universities throughout our international organization. They are the ones who identify students and provide the local structure for the recognition of academic excellence. They are the ones who facilitate the service projects. They are the ones who accomplish these tasks year-after-year. They are the unsung heroes who we need to thank at every opportunity.

The next set of volunteers, to whom we owe much gratitude, is the Board of Trustees. They give time and energy – more than you can imagine to the Pi Gamma Mu mission. We have two past presidents – Dr. Jean Karlen and Dr. Gordon Mercer. They graciously give of their experience and wisdom in so many ways. Dr. Karlen chairs our Strategic Planning Committee, and Dr. Mercer chairs our Chapter and Membership Growth Committee. Dr. Clara Small was elected second vice president; she chairs the Awards Committee, and coordinates our awarding activities from scholarships to chapter recognition awards. Dr. Janet Adamski,

secretary/treasurer, fills a critical role in monitoring Pi Gamma Mu resources to keep us fiscally sound. She is taking the lead in the revision of our constitution. We have four Chancellors: Dr. J. L. Kemp, Dr. Yongsheng Wang, Dr. Susan Kinsella, and Dr. Charles Hartwig; each assume responsibility for the chapters of their region, working with sponsors, supporting chapters, and always looking for new ones. In addition they assume critical roles on our committees. Finally we have two student representatives, and Michaela Dolphin is with us today – she joins the board in all our activities and represents the interests of student members.

In addition, I would like to recognize the many contributions of Michele Price, our legal counsel, Dr. Candice Quinn, our journal editor, and Sheilah Moyle and Nilda Pyronneau, members of our Alumni Council.

We have two staff members, responsible for keeping headquarters functioning and, here, providing for a flawless convention: Dr. Suzanne Rupp, our Executive Director, and Beth Biddle, our Associate Director for Chapter Services; they are probably the people with whom you have the most contact.

Finally, in recognition, we have students. Students who are active in the social sciences, who have achieved excellence, who will help carry on our love of the social sciences, and who we invite to continue to participate in Pi Gamma Mu, through their lifetime memberships.

We, all of us, have come a long way from Dean Allen's original seventeen chapters. In the past year, we accepted members from 141 chapters, bringing us – through our 90 years – to 258,939 members, to be exact.

As we start a brand new three-year cycle, in the life of Pi Gamma Mu, we pledge to position ourselves to continue to meet our mission and to position ourselves for a strong and healthy future.

To that end, we are engaged in a strategic planning process. A critical component of the process is the review and update of our constitution and the development of related documents.

Beyond that, other key components of our strategic plan include:

First: Fiscal issues. With our current resources, we are fiscally sound; however, we confront rising operating cost, and we intend to make certain we remain fiscally sound. In a partial response, the Trustees have voted to raise the membership fee by \$10, from \$40 to \$50, for a lifetime membership, effective in fall 2015. In the meantime, we hope for a record-breaking membership drive for the 2014-15 year. The increase almost, but not quite, permits us to keep up with the rise of the Consumer Price Index, since the last increase in membership fees.

Second: Membership Growth and Member Services. While we had 141 chapters sending members this year, our number of chapters fluctuates. Somewhere, a dynamic sponsor retires, and the chapter fades. Somewhere else, energetic faculty members start a new chapter. Failure to tend to the loss of chapters has negative consequences. We want to successfully respond to such fluctuations. At the same time we hope to provide member services that keep students and sponsors engaged in Pi Gamma Mu.

Third: Conventions. We desire to have strong and engaging conventions that are attractive to students and sponsors. Already we are thinking about and planning for the next Triennial.

Fourth: Technology. We want to use technological developments in advantageous ways that respond to the needs and expectations of contemporary students and sponsors. For an example, we are taking steps to make an online application form available.

To activate our strategic plan, we have an energetic, committed, and unified Board of Trustees who are ready to proceed. However, we need the continued support of all our sponsors and members.

Thanks to all of you for your many contributions toward our mission - you make it become reality. And in all of this we are able to share our common interests in the social sciences - those disciplines that we enjoy and that inspire us, as reflected in our Pi Gamma Mu motto: "You shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free." It is the motto you probably said on the day of your initiation. I am wondering if we could all repeat it together now? Would you join me? "You shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free." Thank you. Please enjoy this Triennial Convention, on our 90th Anniversary.