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*Roger:* Welcome to another Podcast from the Strategic and Emerging Technology section of the American Accounting Association. And today we are very pleased to welcome Nancy Bagranoff, the Dean of the College of Business and Public Administration at Old Dominion University, but more importantly – at least for us – the President Elect of the American Accounting Association. So Nancy, welcome to the Podcast.

*Nancy:* Thank you.

*Roger:* So Nancy, you’re a systems person and I think the third as the AAA President – am I right?

*Nancy:* Yes, I believe so.

*Roger:* So how does that make a difference, do you think, in terms of having a systems person in the highest position in our association?

*Nancy:* Well, I think it’s not just that I’m systems, but that I’m a little nontraditional in a number of ways, and I think that that’s really a sign of the organization and the changes that the organization’s been going through the last few years. You know, actually, as far as systems goes, we’ve had several people on the executive committee in the last few years – we’ve had systems representatives on the Accounting Review Editorial Board as associate editors and certainly involved in all aspects of leadership of the AAA.

And I think that we’re seeing a lot of different types of people, if you will, be involved with the AAA in leadership positions. So, it’s systems, but it’s also just a little bit of a nontraditional individual representing a different section. We are heavily financial, and our largest section is financial reporting, so it would be typical that you would expect that a lot of leadership would come from there. But in the last few years there have been leaders from all different sections.

*Roger:* What other sort of changes do you see since you led the Information Systems section back in 2004?

*Nancy:* I think the organization’s undergone a great deal of change. You know, the executive director, Tracy Sutherland, was fairly new at that time. She is a great leader, and I think that she’s brought real stability and focus to the organization. We’ve also had leaders who have understood that it’s important that you establish some continuity of leadership. You know, it’s hard with a volunteer organization to have that. Often, what would happen is that we would think of where we wanted to go.

We have our vision, we’re there for a year, and then somebody else comes with a different vision, and that just is not going to lead to an effective organization. So I think that continuity of leadership has been really big, stability focus, and actually operating a bit more like a business.

*Roger:* Now, talking about operating like a business, you have the strategic planning process. What does that mean to the organization, but also to the membership?

*Nancy:* Well, I think it means quite a lot, and I am a Dean, and so you might expect I’m a fan of strategic planning. Not everybody is, but I think people who don’t like strategic planning don’t like it because they’ve been so disappointed by it. They’ve probably been in an organization where a strategic planning process took a lot of energy, and then a plan was developed, and it didn’t go anywhere. I believe if you work hard at your strategic plan, and then you work just as hard or harder to carry it out, it really does help to drive you where you want to go.

So the process started really with Shyam Sunder and Gary Previts, and they realized that we needed to have one. I will say that before that time, I had been involved in a couple of strategic plans for the organization. But again, it was we met at our summer planning retreat, created something, next year created a new one. With Shyam and Gary, we actually brought in some help with KPMG. Scott Showalter, a partner who was then our Practice VP, and they helped us to create a plan that now, about three years later – three years into it, we are continuing to refine, revisit all the time, and also carry out.

And I think the planning process has been just fabulous for the executive committee and all of the leadership. It’s also creating an organization that is doing some different things.

*Roger:* And what would be some of those different things?

*Nancy:* Well, I think we’re a broader tent. You know, how the Republicans will say, “It’s a big tent.” I think that we are a broader tent. We’re trying to provide more value for members. Several years ago, we realized that our membership was stable and, in fact, declining a little bit, and we kept having people call our attention to that. We started getting worried. We’re worried, of course, about the decline in the numbers of Ph.D.s and Ph.D. faculty in the United States in accounting, and so that doesn’t bode well for your membership.

So we realized that we really needed to think about how we could grow members and also how we could better serve the members that we have and the new members. And I think that focus on membership has really been the biggest change.

*Roger:* Now, the visions of the association – so you have thought leadership in accounting – but I wonder about that. I don’t see presidents of the AAA out there in the news media and the business press talking about accounting issues. How is that thought leadership actually put into action?

*Nancy:* Well, I’m glad you put it that way, Roger, actually, because a lot of people say it that way. They say, “Well, how are we thought leaders?” Well, I think it’s a number of different things, and actually that’s going to be the title of my talk at the AAA meeting in New York on Wednesday. I’ve been spending a lot of time reading the history of the organization since 1916 and looking at all the examples of thought leadership along the way in our history and many examples of thought leadership today. It may not be that you see the president of the AAA quoted in the *Wall Street Journal* or on C-NBC or elsewhere, but certainly our 8,300 members are very active as thought leaders, and they do it individually.

They do it through their sections in their regions. They do it through committees. We have a financial accounting standards committee that has been sending in comment letters on all kinds of things: FASB and IASB, our education committee and our VP for Education have been commenting on IAESB proposals. I think you see thought leadership in many, many ways by individual members and by the organization.

*Roger:* Indeed! Now, of course, this is a Podcast for members primarily on the technology side of our association. How do you see – and as a systems person, how do you see the interface between accounting, computer science and information systems? How do you see that interface working?

*Nancy:* Well, I wish I had it figured out. When I was President of the IS section, I tried to figure it out. I tried to figure it out when I first got involved in AIS years ago, and I’m still not sure. I do think that there are things that the IS section has done and can do that can really help the rest of the organization, and I’ll just name two of them. One is, you know, I contacted you, Roger, because when I was putting together the talk on thought leadership, I wanted to highlight a couple of specific topical areas: one’s fair value, one is IFRS and the other was XPRL.

Certainly, the IS and SET sections have had the lead on that initiative for many years. You’ve all worked very hard on that, and I think it’s our technology – the faculty who are systems and Emerging Technologies who can really help us with XPRL – help the rest of us figure it out. So I applaud the effort of thought leadership through those sections on that. Another area, I think, is with respect to the Commons and perhaps technology in general. The AAA is trying to figure out how to use technology to be most effective today and serve members. I think it’s great that you’re doing a Podcast. That’s a good example of something that we could do.

But the AAA Commons is certainly the biggest technology initiative that the organization has taken on. And I know that all of the sections and regions have members of an editorial board that are trying to help us figure it out. And SET and IS – when I came to the section meeting – the joint section meeting in I think it was January, there were wonderful comments that were made and put from the sections on the Commons. And I think you can help us figure out how to do a good job with the technology diffusion of that.

*Roger:* Now, you mentioned earlier the deficit in the production of Ph.D. qualified faculty and this is perhaps particularly worrying in Auditing and Tax and systems, and our colleagues in the Information systems section are doing a fantastic job in trying to build up the programs of Information systems faculty. But when I look at the universities that are designated or self-designated as producing Information systems – Accounting Information systems graduates, we see a number of the major universities that are missing. What can we do to bring the mainstream of Ph.D. programs back to also producing AIS graduates?

*Nancy:* That’s a great question, and I really don’t know. I know that the IS section has considered some initiatives to try to help that. We’ve got the ADS project – the Accounting Doctoral Scholar project that has a lot of funding that’s trying to develop in Audit and Tax Ph.D. candidates. And they’re doing at it literally by throwing money at it. They’re providing funding for the Ph.D. students. But you have two issues, and one is that issue: how do we get students interested in it? And it’ll remain to be seen how the ADS program plays out. But that’s where they’re going after it and trying to help the students get there.

But the other issue, and the one that seems to me to be harder to figure out – and with respect to systems, too – is how you get the schools to be interested because if the university doesn’t care enough or the college, and they don’t have the faculty who are interested in helping these students – I don’t know – it’s sort of a circular problem that is really a tough one to figure out. You know, IS itself – IT is really suffering right now. We’ve seen a national decline in Information Systems students as undergraduate majors of maybe as much as 50 percent, and that’s not helping matters, either.

*Roger:* So what can the association do to assist in this matter?

*Nancy:* Well, I think that the SET and the IS sections are probably going to have to take some leadership on that. And again, I’m not sure exactly what the answer is there. Certainly, trying to build the membership of those sections, trying to help bring awareness is one thing that you can do. I know from the student side, something that I did for several years that was really fun and I thought a good thing was to show off the career of an accounting academic.

Now, we did this at Beta Alpha Psi meetings. Stephanie Bryant and I put on a presentation for a few years at the Beta Alpha Psi meeting on an academic career, and in that presentation we highlighted the different kinds of concentrations. That might be something that the sections would want to take up.

*Roger:* And, of course, the AAA and other academic organizations don’t exist in a vacuum. How do we work with a technology focus here? How do we work with academic and professional organizations – ISACA or XBRL International, the Institute of Internal Auditors – how do we work with those organizations?

*Nancy:* Wow, that’s a good question, too, Roger. A few years ago, as part of the strategic planning, one of the initiatives is strategic partnerships. And I started to do an inventory of all of our strategic partnerships, so it’s kind of amazing when you think about it. I just mentioned Beta Alpha Psi. There’s FASB. There’s IASB. There are all the standard setters. There are all the government entities. There are all the different kinds of accounting organizations like IAA, IMA and so on. There are now so many international organizations that we’re involved with.

There are the firms, AACSB – the list goes on and on. What we’ve been trying to do is inventory all of them and then look at where some of the relationships exist. It’s hard to – you know, we’re process mappers, systems people, and flow charters, and you really have to do that when you think about these strategic relationships. Some of them are maintained with the organization as a whole maybe through the executive committee, maybe through headquarters in Sarasota and our staff. Some of them – many of them are through the sections in the regions. Let’s think auditing and PCAOB.

The IS section I know is working with ISACA. SET, I think, is working with the XBRL organization. So a lot of them are maintained by sections, even regions, and some of them are maintained by the organization as a whole. We are a tough organization to get your arms around because there is a fairly small staff that does a lot of work to maintain all the sections, regions, journals, the – now the Commons and all of the meetings. And then we’re largely reliant on volunteers, and so volunteers have to maintain those associations with those organizations. And it’s tough to keep those ongoing.

*Roger:* And what do you see some of the challenges being for accounting education and research over the next few years?

*Nancy:* I think they’re really big! Starting with education – right now, we still have not figured out the 150 hours – what we’re doing with that. A lot of states have kind of backtracked, and now you can sit for the exam with 120 hours. So I think figuring out that 150 hours and supporting it as best we can is something that’s challenging for education. Another thing, of course, that’s facing education is if we get IFRS, and even if we don’t get IFRS, I think that students are going to have to understand it whether it’s a U.S. standard or not because we have so many multinational corporations that we’re dealing with that we really have to understand that sort of standard. So education has its work cut out for it there.

Research – AACSB just did a research impact study, and they are moving towards – they’ve got some model schools right now that are trying to measure the impact of research. We’re having to do that – I can tell you, business schools are having to do it and accounting researchers because the public and public funding for higher education is less than it ever was, and certainly in this economic crisis it continues to erode. So we have to show that our research does have value. We don’t get funding for it, so if you’re a president of the university, you look at the business school, and you look at accounting, and you say, “Hey, what good is all of that research that we’re investing in if you’re not getting grants?”

So it’s important that we show that our research has value. And our research is often narrowly focused in accounting, and that makes it difficult also I think to continue to show that we do have impact and value.

*Roger:* And what about – last question here – what are some of your personal ambitions for the year as President?

*Nancy:* Well, I have a lot. First of all, it’s to continue to carry out that strategic plan. I think that we’ve done such a good job in putting in shape. I just hope that I can contribute to it as well as the last few presidents have done. So I want to carry out that strategic plan with the initiative of thought leadership, with serving and growing members. We’ve expanded the annual meeting quite a bit, putting a lot more pieces in so that we’ve grown it, and it attracts a lot more members. And that’s through a lot of educational offerings as well as the research offerings for our scholars.

You know, we added CTLA a couple of years ago – the Conference on Teaching and Learning – and that’s been successful. And I think this year we’ll be surprised at the number of people attending that. So, I want to continue to do that – continue to look at the meeting and make sure that we have all of the pieces there that will serve all of our membership. We also are going to be thinking about how we fit in a global economy. We are the American Accounting Association, and being globally aware and globally relevant is something that’s important to me and will be during the next year.

*Roger:* Well, Nancy, thank you very much, indeed, for your time, and good luck over the next 12 months and beyond.

*Nancy:* Well, thank you so much, Roger. And I wish you luck, too, in this section. And again, I think the Podcasts are a great idea.

*Female:* This Podcast was produced by Roger Debreceny of the University of Hawaii at Manoa, and Stephanie Farewell at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock on behalf of the Strategic and Emerging Technologies section of the American Accounting Association. The SET section strives to simulate and improve the research, teaching and application of emerging technologies, methods and techniques in accounting. Visit the section online at AAAHQ.org/SET. The SET section thanks our sponsor, CaseWare IDEA, on the Web at CaseWare.com.

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