

SOCIOLOGICAL PRACTICE NEWSLETTER

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Section on Sociological Practice

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Upcoming ASA Annual Meeting New York City

The ASA's ephemeral community descends upon New York City on August 11-14. In addition to the regular section session "**Is Another World Possible? The Contribution of Sociological Practice,**" there will be a round-table session with tables on Housing and Homelessness, Changing Society, and Applications in Education, Health, and Human Services. We received a large number of submissions, with 18 for the paper session. There will also be practice-oriented workshops, including "**Careers in Contract Research**" and "**Successful Organizational Consultants: Using Our Work to Build a Better World,**" relevant sessions (e.g., on Health Policy), a great book fair, and networking at the Reception to be held Sunday, August 12, at 6:30-8:30 PM. We'll let you know more details via the email list and in the summer newsletter.

If you are convening a session or have a paper accepted, please let us know so that we can inform other members of the section.

New Publications from Section Members

One of the rewarding aspects of being a sociologist is using life experiences as data and inspiration. Sociological Practice Section member, Josephine Ruggiero, drew upon those aspects to write her forthcoming book, *Eastern European Adoption: Policies, Practice and Strategies for Change* (Transaction Publishers, 2007).

Ruggiero and her husband adopted three non-infant siblings from Russia. In her book, she reviewed the literature and interviewed 121 adoptive parents, so parents considering such adoptions would have a solid resource to utilize, and parents who have already adopted children from eastern Europe could have a reality check. In addition to detailing practices and issues that arise in adopting children from eastern Europe, as an applied sociologist she included an examination of the policies and made recommendations to improve the process and outcomes.

As adoption across national boundaries is so prevalent, Ruggiero's book provides important data.

Practicing Sociology: The Interplay between Professional and Personal Spheres

One day recently, I asked my undergraduate students to identify a political event or social change that would influence their generation. The majority of students labeled 9/11 as the defining historical moment in their lives. I took that opportunity to discuss its effects.

The U.S. recently commemorated the five-year anniversary of 9/11, the memory of which remains vivid and painful. Its aftermath includes the War on Terror, the emergence of Homeland Security, and the Patriot Act, as well as micro changes such as heightened security at airports - altering the lives of Americans in profound ways. The very morning of the class, the city of Boston had been on high alert because multiple suspicious packages had been located around the city, instigating security forces to come out in full force. It turned out to have been a publicity stunt to draw attention to a new cartoon program. This event illustrates how the average American's life has been changed. Fear of terrorism prompted a state of high alert. "Terrorist" is now part of the normal public vocabulary.

I then asked the class to consider how 9/11 and its aftermath has affected Middle Eastern Americans. A special series recently published/broadcasted in the media (e.g. New York Times, National Public Radio) suggested that the daily experiences of Middle Easterners and Muslims have changed dramatically, with heightened incidents of discrimination and stigmatization. A small number of sociological qualitative studies also hint at such experiences. Louise Cainkar argues that Americans of Middle Eastern descent are no longer invisible post-9/11, and Amir Marvasti chronicles his own personal as well as other Middle Eastern Americans' encounters with dominant U.S. society as being filled with potentially negative social interactions after 9/11.

After one of my class sessions ended this week, a bright and intellectually curious student followed me as I walked toward my office. Suddenly, she stopped and asked me, "As a scientist, how do you do it?" Somewhat taken aback, I responded, "Do what?" She made the observation that I had kept a very calm and detached demeanor as we discussed the legacy of 9/11.

What had generated the student's question was my personal story. As the daughter of an Iranian immigrant father and second-generation Lebanese mother, I grew up with an *anonymous* Middle Eastern, Muslim identity. On the rare occasions when I was asked about my ethnicity, the response generally invoked a blank stare. Ethnically, I was invisible. This changed after 9/11. My children's lives, on the other hand, have been more strongly impacted. My son and daughter were only 12 and 8 when 9/11 took place. One tenet of the life-course perspective is that the effects of an event such as 9/11 produce differential outcomes depending on the age at which it is experienced. I grew up with an identity as a white American, accorded the privileges of not being forced to think about my ethnicity on a daily basis and became an adult with the *option* to announce such an identity, if I wished. My children, on the other hand, are growing up in a socio-historical period where they are constantly, in very public ways, reminded of their religion and their Middle Eastern ancestry.

I recognize that negative opinions about Middle Eastern Americans are not new, but damaging encounters are no longer isolated. They take place in a sweeping and patterned manner. Today, Middle Eastern Americans are disproportionately asked to explain themselves, including their politics and personal beliefs, changing their daily lives in multiple ways. Such changes are evident in the attitudes of my children after 9/11, hinting that their identity has incurred minority status elements. Two years ago, my daughter lost a necklace at her volleyball game. It was a gold pendant with the word "God" written in Arabic inscribed. Its significance is similar to wearing a cross for Christians or the Star of David for people of the Jewish faith. She became distressed when she realized she lost it, as it was a necklace she had worn since she was a very small child. After I suggested she simply ask the coach if anyone had found it, she cried out that she cannot describe to her coach that it says "God in Arabic" for fear they will think she is a terrorist. Shortly afterward, my son expressed disbelief that he would not be considered a minority when he applies for college. A few days later, he offered as one reason why his absence from school was not recorded as "excused" may be that because he is "Middle Eastern" they are not treating him fairly.

As I presented these personal experiences to my student, I hoped to illustrate how society influences individual experiences. Through my student's question about how I discussed these personal experiences with a sense of detachment, I realized that I was practicing sociology in a very real way. The "sociological tool box" provided me with a way of seeing the world that links personal biography to socio-historical and structural arrangements. I developed the ability to analyze painful life experiences in a manner that helps me not only cope with such challenges, but also influence my children's identity development. I use sociology to provide understandings of others' behavior that helps my children and me to externalize, rather than internalize, the conduct of others. Sociological practice, therefore, not only provides skills for enhancing societal well-being, but can help us to manage our personal lives in this changing and sometimes painful world.

Art Shostak
Acceptance remarks
2006 Distinguished Career Award for the Practice of Sociology

We marked last year the 100th anniversary of the founding of our national Sociology Association. Now, in 2006 we celebrate the holding of its first Annual Meeting. That small gathering of possibly less than one hundred was presided over by one of the outstanding Fathers of our profession - Lester Frank Ward. As the first president of our organization he had just published a major, if now forgotten work entitled *Applied Sociology*, a moving testimonial to his commitment to sociological practice, and a road mark of continued relevance and value. Long before many other sociologists marched in support Ward championed women's rights. He urged establishment of universal free schooling. And he was among the first to urge a thoroughgoing reassessment of how American males were socialized, the better to help them become far less macho and far more mature.

Throughout his wide-ranging career as a pioneering applied sociologist Lester Frank Ward urged appreciation of the contribution our profession could make to alleviating pressing and emerging social problems. Admired as a theorist for his schema (Social Telesis), and also respected an early methodologist, Ward taught that applied sociology drew on comparably on abstract ideas, statistical tools, and heart-felt passion. I regard this ASA Award as a tribute of sorts to Ward's continued relevance and influence. I urge us all to give his example, his advocacy, and his writings fresh and warranted attention.

Supporters of Ward's stripe of sociology are now found in both the long-standing Sociological Practice Section of the ASA (which I was proud to head for a year in the 1980s) and in a new organization, the Association of Applied and Clinical Sociologists (AACS). Members of both organizations, people like Ross Koppel, Jay Weinstein, and Jan Fritz, among scores of others, have been very helpful across my 45 years of practice, and I cannot thank them enough. Panels, workshops, and journals offered by these two bodies, and in the case of the AACS, its two precedent organizations (Sociological Practice Association and the Society for Applied Sociology) fed my need for cutting-edge ideas and field reports of successes and disappointments (we have no failures - only challenging opportunities for corrective learning).

On this note of support, I would also like to thank role models from my years as a graduate student - Mel Tumin and Jessie Bernard, in particular, along with early colleagues whose practice inspired me - people like Marv Wolfgang and Thorstein Sellin - and Drexel University colleagues over my recent 37 years there - especially able practitioners like Julia Hall, Doug Porpora, and others. Above all, I owe more than I can adequately express to Lynn Seng, my wife of these past 20 years. She has helped me chose projects, shared my doubts and confusion, smiled along in the good times, and in 101 other ways, helped me accomplish just a little more. Applied work can be lonely and trying: Lynn has understood in important private ways.

Finally, there is the vital matter of metaphor: How can sociological practice be succinctly understood? I commend in this matter counsel I adapt from the 2,000-year old writings of Lao Tzu - The Sage is self-effacing and scanty of words. When his/her work is finished, and something of consequence has been changed, the people have good reason to believe it is THEY who have accomplished it.

Over four decades of learning as an applied sociologist (for that is what we always remain - learners) has me persuaded this prescription of the Eastern Master is a sound guide to the collaborative, empowering, and life-enhancing work Ward would have some of us take as our Mission. I salute all who have taken up Ward's challenge, and I urge more and more young sociologists to try their hand at practice: Every other mode of sociology - theorizing, methodological experiments, policy analysis, and so on - goes better when aided by practice, and, vice versa. We have so much yet to help others try to accomplish: let's get on with it!

INTERVIEW WITH STUDENT PRACTITIONER AWARD RECIPIENT: ANTOINETTE SWAYNE-KOHLMAN

By Delores Edelin

Doctoral student and 2006 student practitioner of the year, Antoinette Swayne-Kohlman is a study in overachievement. Along with working on completing her doctoral degree at the Marshall Goldsmith School of Management at Alliant International University, Ms. Swayne-Kohlman works full-time as an internal consultant for State Farm Insurance where she provides technical support and advice to help senior management improve internal team performance. Her practitioner experience began twenty years earlier when she put her undergraduate sociological skills to use in designing a survey of the top twenty-five companies in a new field of interest in order to find out what it would be like to work in that area. The executives at one of the companies who received her survey was so impressed with her survey that they offered her a job—and a new career was begun. She continued to apply her sociological skill set to study and understand the cultural dynamics of her internal and external customers and how best to “meet them where they were” and in the process carved out a niche for herself within the company as the expert on organizational development issues. A watershed moment came when she read *The Fifth Discipline* by Peter Senge: this and a desire for more professional fulfillment led her back to the classroom to complete her doctorate degree.

Ms Swayne-Kohlman holds an orientation towards practice because it is more closely aligned with her values; she states that “if knowledge has no utility in the real world, it has no value to me.” For her, the label *sociologist* or *applied-sociologist* has very little value if it is not utilized “to help people in everyday life.” For this reason she finds both labels too confining, choosing instead to define herself more broadly as a social scientist.

A PhD student in an applied social science program, she is struggling to negotiate a balance between the “world of academia and the world of application;” she finds the world of academia as experienced in the classroom is too often divorced from the realities of the world as practically experienced. The resulting feeling of isolation, she remarks, “can be very discouraging.” Thus, being named student practitioner of the year was a “shock” to this very deserving practitioner, and she found it quite “validating.”

Upon completing her degree Ms Swayne-Kohlman intends to start her own consulting practice coaching people to “maximize their potential” and she hopes to extend her focus to assist those in the non-profit sector. In the meantime, this student-practitioner hopes to become more involved in the ASA practice section and looks forward to opportunities to receive mentorship and practice skills development to and from members of the section and to provide the same for fellow student-practitioners.

For the last twenty years, Ms. Swayne-Kohlman has been employed by State Farm Insurance, and now is business consultant for automobile claims for California, interacting with senior management on a regular basis. When asked how she managed this career achievement, she said she sought out both mentors and sponsors. A mentor is a person who serves as a guide, who can help identify potential land mines, who maps out the power in an organization. The mentor understands the difference between formal career paths and informal maneuverings, and knows the junior person’s strengths as well as areas where improvement and growth is needed. A sponsor is different: a sponsor means someone who can be a “heavy,” whose support can sway a decision-maker. Ms. Swayne-Kohlman has garnered the help of sponsors by presenting to them her goals, her support (mentors) and her accomplishments.

For a woman in the corporate world, her system of mentors and sponsors has proven invaluable. They have helped her to gain an accurate picture of her strengths and development needs. She believes that women particularly need mentors in order to maneuver through the complexities of corporate politics. While Ms. Swayne-Kohlman is an African American, she feels that the challenges in moving forward in the corporate work have more to do with being a woman than they do with being a person of color.

With all this career success, why go to Alliant International University and gain a level of sophisticated research skills? Ms. Swayne-Kohlman says that what she has been learning in this applied program has been immediately applicable to her daily work. Being able to structure proposals, to present ideas with a logical basis, and to develop implementations for these ideas are all part of her doctoral training. She feels that it has helped her tremendously in contracting for particular assignments within the company.

Her advice to these aspiring colleagues is telling, in that it is a roadmap of her own success. She encourages fellow students to “trust their own judgment; be authentic; be curious; and be prepared for the path to have unforeseen twists and turns. Be open to go wherever it leads.”

First Person Interviews

Practitioner Snapshot: BARBARA ALTMAN 2006 Recipient of the William Foote Whyte Career Award

A desire to “translate sociological ideas into something useful for lay people” has been the guiding principle of Dr. Barbara Altman’s career as an applied sociologist. The 2006 winner of the sociological section’s William Foote Whyte Career Award, she has also had a distinguished career as a statistical expert with the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) where she worked to establish internationally comparative measures of disability rates. Now retired, Altman continues to contribute to issues related to the disabled in her new role as a disability consultant.

Dr. Altman’s non-traditional route to a career as an applied sociologist began in academia; after holding several leadership positions she returned to the classroom, but this time as a student. She went on to complete her PhD degree in sociology later in life than is customary, but has found that the additional life experiences she brought with her as a non-traditional student enhanced her educational and practitioner credentials.

One life experience that has figured prominently in her career choices was the birth of her third child. Her child’s disability was the impetus for her interest in disability issues, but her choice of sociology as a career reflected a desire to understand the disabled population through the use of good data and sociological inquiry.

Echoing the experience of many sociological practitioners, Altman reports “feeling marginal to sociology and not necessarily accepted” and so sees herself first as an applied sociologist rather than an academe. The difference between the two, in her view, lay in the practical orientation of the sociological practitioner as reflected in “the approach practitioners choose to take and the impact they want to make.” Of all her accomplishments, Altman counts her methodological contributions to the government’s efforts to make national surveys comparable among her greatest professional contributions because of the lasting impact she expects this methodological innovation will have; she counts the honor of having her work acknowledged by her colleagues who nominated and selected her for the section’s most distinguished award among her proudest professional moments.

What does the future hold for this distinguished practitioner? On the immediate horizon is a book she is currently writing in which she will translate the body of currently available disability research for general use. For the long-term she plans to continue to embrace other opportunities to make the practice of sociology relevant beyond its disciplinary borders and she sees the growing groundswell of support for public sociology within the organization a positive move in the same direction.

Sociology’s future, predicts Altman, depends on the organization’s recognition of the value of the applied side of the discipline and more fully embracing and awarding this side of the discipline a “more prominent place than it holds currently, as other disciplines like economists and psychologists have done.”

She thus emphasizes the importance of making connections with those sociologists who are connecting sociology to daily life and the critical role that the applied section plays in making the work of renown practitioners visible within the ASA by, among other things, advocating for giving these “big guns in applied areas” prominent opportunities to speak about their work, perhaps as plenary speakers at national meetings.

Dr. Altman closes her call to action with a reminder that “sociology is vitally important in our world because it holds many answers—the solutions to a lot of our problems; but, we [sociologists] haven’t captured the leadership role we should have.” She thus challenges the applied section to be proactive in “reclaiming the orphans of sociology” from other disciplines that have reaped the benefits of adopting the work of “sociology’s children” as their own.

Vote for Applied Sociologists!

Harry Perlstad once said in a Section Business Meeting that one way to effect change in the ASA is to run for office. Two members of our section are doing just that: Kathy Charmaz and Leora Lawton have both been nominated for the ASA Committee on Nominations. When you get the ballot be sure to vote to get our voice heard.

Practical Notes

Continuing a column of the Sociological Practice section's newsletter – helpful hints and suggestions for the business of being a sociologist. Please share your words of wisdom with your fellow practitioners, or just suggest a topic, by contacting me (lawton @t techsociety.com).

The Practical Sociologist **Managing the Research Process**

By Leora Lawton
Principal, TechSociety Research

One of the challenges sociologists contend with when in applied quantitative research settings is working successfully with people who do not understand the requirements of the research process, because the mission of that organization is not research. Others rely on the research input of the sociologist, and yet at the same time, these same people unintentionally create a structure that obstructs the research process. The result is a work life that tends toward chaotic, is stressful, and results in missed deadlines, dissatisfied clients, and very long hours. This article – which is part empirical and part editorial – discusses creating a structure that facilitates quality research as well as a sane life style.

First, there are certain steps in the research process that are fairly consistent, with organizational variations. These typically include:

- The initial contact – an inquiry via sales (external clients) or requests (internal clients). The researcher adds to the proposal or request response, and clarifies objectives, and ‘specs out’ requirements for the analysis, methodological considerations, staffing and the time (hours) required. Other production staff (e.g., programmers, data entry) contribute input here as well, usually provided via the researcher.
- Research design – the instrument, guide or plan, sample design and frame, programming/formatting, QA (quality assurance). Carried out by the senior staff, providing direction to junior staff.
- Data collection – trained interviewers of whatever sort, skillful programmers, incentives, proper delivery.
- Data cleaning and preparation – usually by the junior analysts
- Univariate and bivariate tabulations – tables and charts, carried out by junior staff.
- Report preparation – analysis plan, tables and charts. Planning directed by senior staff, tables and charts provided by junior staff.
- Interpretation – depending on the requirements, junior, midlevel and/or senior staff
- Presentation – senior staff with client-facing team member.

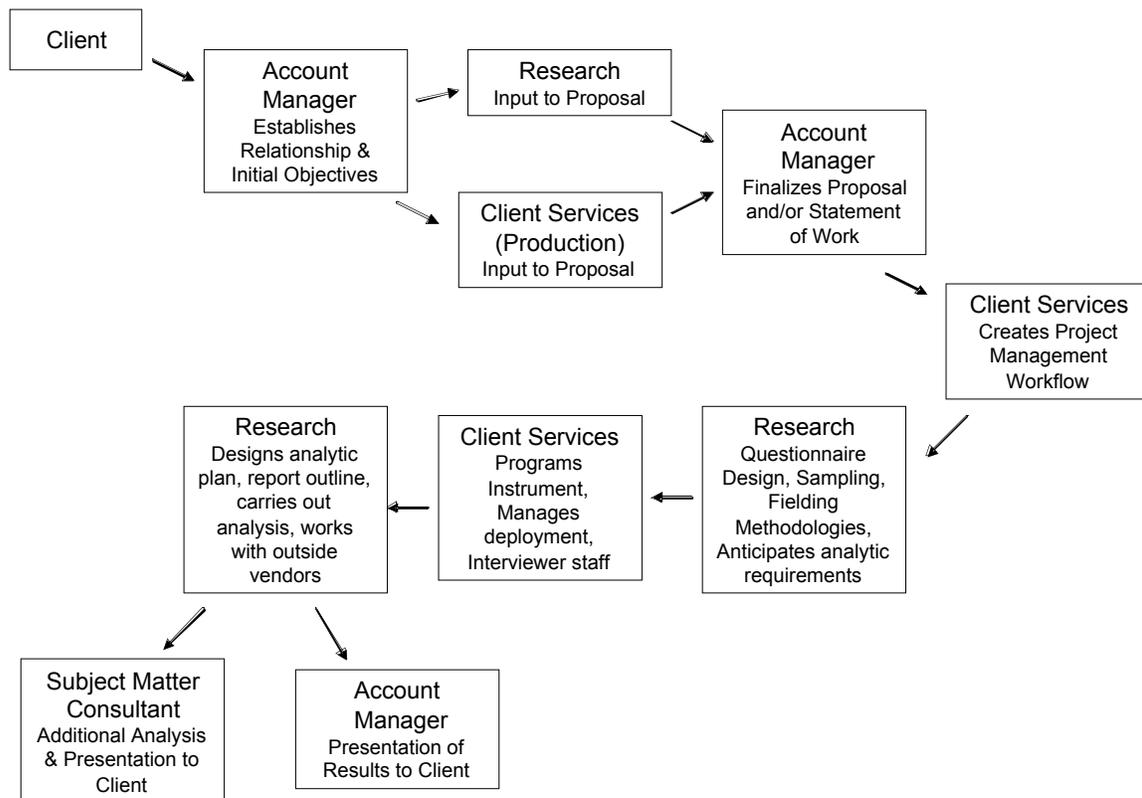
An example of a process flow is in Figure 1, below. In order to have all of these steps occur with standards consistent with the ethical requirements of the ASA and other professional associations, the following process guidelines have been found to be essential.

1. Training of all staff, from sales to presentation in the output of the organization. Everyone should understand the totality of the project and of the research process, even if their role will always be only one step. For example, the person programming the survey should have a basic understanding in questionnaire design.
2. The right person for the job – it needs to be clear to everyone who does what, so there should be an organizational structure.
3. Documentation of all processes allows for ‘scalability’ (organizational growth), documentation also increases organizational memory and quality, and decreases the negative impacts of staff turnover.

4. Project management. This means a clear understanding of how many hours it takes for each step, each project. A project manager schedules time ‘backwards’ from deadline to check that each step occurs on time and in order. In order for there to be quality project management, all staff members must keep track of their hours for each project, and each task. Over time, it will become very clear how much time it takes to complete a project.
5. Templates. Having standardized templates expedites delivery, and again, ensures for quality standards. Templates should exist for Proposals, Statements of Work, Programming requirements, Questionnaire design (when similar projects are done), requests for internal deliverables, reports (e.g., the organization’s PowerPoint template, with logo and formatting already set), and invoices. Some organizations have raised this to a fine art of expedited processes with macros, automation and more.
6. The Statement of Work (Scope, or details in the Final Proposal) spells out what the project requires and what the client expects at the end. Any changes must be entered into this document, communicated to team members, and be available readily, not saved on someone’s laptop or worse, in their head. Confirm changes with the client in writing.
7. A standardized, organized filing system (electronic and physical) that is also as simple as can be. Electronic back-ups (offsite) are part of disaster planning.
8. Review. As those in the peer-reviewed world know, everything written can be improved by an objective read. Often this part gets short shrift, and yet could save untold embarrassment.

Organizations without these procedures solidly in place are chaotic and stressful. Organizations with solid processes allow one to spend valuable time on the job for better quality research, and off the job for a better quality life.

Figure 1: Possible Work Flow Chart



If you work in qualitative or non-research applications, what is your experience? Please consider contributing to the summer edition of the Sociological Practice Newsletter.

Q & A: Member- to-Member

Q: As a new sociological practitioner, I was recently invited to participate on a local task force addressing juvenile justice inequality issues. At the inaugural meeting, I was struck by the inability of the other members to distinguish between sociologists and social workers; they knew what social workers did and assumed that sociologists did “something similar.” The two disciplines were essentially indistinguishable to them. Have any other sociological practitioners encountered this problem? How do they answer the question, “what is a sociologist?” How do they differentiate what sociologists have to offer from what other more recognized practitioners like social workers offer?

A: Yes. Others have encountered the same problem. Here is one suggested response to the questions you pose. The next time you are confronted with the challenge of defining for others what it means to be a sociologist, or of distinguishing yourself from social workers, you might confidently say something similar to the following:

I am a sociologist. Sociologists study and solve problems related to the structures and systems that allow groups of people to live together, get things done, share meanings, adapt to change, or that determine which groups of people are able to get some resources and which are not. A sociologist’s basic job is to ask the right questions (identify which structures and systems are contributing to which problems, and which are not); find the right answers (by using the appropriate tool to collect and analyze data: survey, interview, focus groups, etc.; and determining the validity, reliability, generalizability of findings); and to use the answers right (as an applied sociologist this might involve translating findings into practice by developing programs, creating marketing/action plans, training practitioners and advocates, writing policy recommendations, becoming advocates, etc.).

The difference between basic sociologist and applied is that basic sociologist ask the right questions and find the right answers, applied sociologists go the extra step of using the right answers, right.

The difference, therefore, between sociologists and social workers is that social workers work to help individuals to get resources from the structures and systems that they need and are not able to get; sociologists work to change the structures and systems that prevent all individuals that are in the same position of need from getting the resources they need. Social workers are thus interested in helping one individual in need at a particular time while sociologists are interested in helping the entire group of individuals with the same need, for all time. So social workers work at the individual level and work within the limits of the structures and systems; sociologists work at the structural level and work to change the limits imposed by them.

Next question to members: I am a sociology student who is interested in being a practicing sociologist, but I am confused about the difference between an applied and a clinical sociologist. Can someone explain the difference between the two?

Can you answer this student’s question? Submit your answers for publication in the next issue of the newsletter.

Do you have a question for fellow practitioners? Submit it for the next issue.