

Looking Ahead: The SSAT Strategic Plan for the Next Decade

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The Society for Surgery of the Alimentary Tract

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Abstract The Society for Surgery of the Alimentary Tract's (SSAT) mission is to advance the science and practice of surgery in the treatment of digestive disease. An essential core value of the SSAT is multidisciplinary collaboration with both its sister societies in the Digestive Disease Week (DDW) Council and other surgical societies in Gastrointestinal Surgery. In order to achieve the society's goals, the strategic plan rests on the society's values of interdisciplinary collaboration, scholarship, education, and discovery. The strategic plan also creates a meritocracy system to foster the development of future leaders for both the SSAT and the broader house of surgery. In the short term, this plan will:

- Re-organize committee structure and reporting responsibilities;
- Clarify committee goals and deliverables;
- Facilitate member participation in the committees and governance of the society;
- Enhance member services by utilizing enhanced communication strategies;
- Accelerate efforts to meet the Maintenance of Certification needs of the membership;
- Re-focus the SSAT's energy on Quality and Outcome Assessment of GI surgery;
- Clarify and standardize the methodology for allocating funds for new projects.

Over the course of the next few years, the SSAT will:

- Develop a financial model that increases revenue to support the expanded tasks the society intends to undertake;
- Play an active role in developing the evolving training paradigms for gastrointestinal surgeons through the continuum from residency, fellowship, and early mentored practice;
- Continue to support development of surgeon scientists through Career Development Award;
- Enhance relationship with the SSAT Foundation;
- Continue to improve the experience of members attending DDW;
- Develop surgeons interested in public policy to be leaders at a national level.

The strategic plan is ambitious, and the current leadership realizes that all the tasks and objectives cannot be accomplished in 1 year. There is much to do in order to keep the SSAT the premier professional society for gastrointestinal surgery. Changes in the external environment may require modifications of the priorities or the plan itself in the coming years. Implicit in this plan is the need for annual review by the Board of Trustees at the May Board Meeting so that modifications can be made as the world around us changes.

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Introduction

During the annual SSAT Board meeting in May 2010, the Trustees determined that it was time to review the direction that the SSAT was heading and map out a clear course for the future of the organization. In October 2010, a strategic retreat was held to begin this task. Many issues and solutions were discussed by the group of 30 key SSAT leaders—past, present, and future. In simplest terms, the retreat focused on the challenges facing the SSAT, the core strengths and values of the organization, and the opportunities to help shape the future of Gastrointestinal Surgery. This document is intended to be a roadmap for the SSAT as it moves forward.

Mission, Vision, and Values

Mission (what the SSAT does):

The SSAT is committed to advancing the science and practice of surgery in the treatment of digestive disease.

Vision (what the SSAT will be):

The SSAT will provide leadership in setting the standards for gastrointestinal surgery and interdisciplinary management of digestive disease, in North America and around the world.

Values (for what the SSAT stands):

Education
Scholarship
Discovery and Innovation
Quality Clinical Care
Leadership
Meritocracy
Interdisciplinary Collaboration

Process for Implementing the Strategic Plan

The strategic plan will be reviewed at each Board of Trustees meeting, and all new or ongoing projects will be evaluated for fit within the Mission, Vision, Values, and Plan. Since the plan calls for an increase in the number of committees and the scope of their work, a transparent system for participation by SSAT members in the committees as well as promotion to positions of greater responsibility in the organization is outlined in this document. A primary goal of the strategic plan is to maximize opportunities for members to participate in the activities of the SSAT, identify future leaders of the organization, and promote

people on the basis of the quality of their contributions to the organization's mission. Committee chairs will be mentored by a senior member of the executive committee or Board of Trustees and the chairs' performance evaluated annually to ensure that the resources and leadership needed to accomplish the SSAT's goals are sufficient. Each committee, led by their chairperson, will refine the goals and priorities set out for them in this plan and establish deliverables with appropriate timeframes. SSAT funds will be allocated based on these priorities. New requests with budgetary implications will be evaluated first by the Finance Committee and then referred to the Board of Trustees for approval. All committee chairs will be asked to present a biannual report to the SSAT Board of Trustees.

Achieving the goals set out in this plan will require enhanced communication from the leadership to convey the scope of the changes to the organizational structure and culture as detailed in the plan and also the mechanism for implementing these changes. While the strategic plan will be posted on the SSAT web page, effective communication to the membership will also require several letters from the President and Chairman of the Board, establishment and utilization of social media, presentations at the 2011 Digestive Disease Week (DDW), and face-to-face networking with the membership by the society's leaders.

In order to implement many of the changes called for in the strategic plan, it is necessary to revise the committee structure of the SSAT so that form can follow function. Appendix 1 details the new committee structure and committee tasks. Table 1 contrasts the former committee structure with the new committees in bold font and the former committees in regular font. The prior organizational structure was felt to be too horizontal for the revamped committees to function in a coordinated fashion. Therefore, the committees have been clustered based on key activities into the four working groups of Education, Research, Members Services/Policy, and Administration.

Education Working Group	Research Working Group	Member Services/Policy Working Group	Administration Working Group
Program Committee	Research Committee	Member Services Committee	Board of Trustees
Program Subcommittees	Health Care Quality and Outcomes	Communications Committee	Executive Committee
Resident Education		Public Policy & Advocacy Committee	Finance Committee
Continuing Education		International Committee	Nominating Committee
Maintenance of Certification			
Advanced training Committee			

Table 1 SSAT committee structure now and before

New Committee	Former Committee
Research	Research
Member Services	Membership
Communications Committee	Publications
Public Policy & Advocacy	Public Policy
Health Care Quality and Outcomes	Patient Care
Resident Education	Education
Continuing Education	Education
Maintenance of Certification (MOC)	n/a
Advanced training Committee	n/a
Bylaws Committee (Ad Hoc)	n/a

Organizationally, the Administration working group will oversee the other three working groups. The Education, Research, and Member Services/Policy Working Groups will be comprised of the chairs of that working group's committees, as well as designated senior leadership from the executive committee or Board Trustees who will provide executive oversight. Oversight of these groups will be provided as follows: The Education working group will be overseen by the Secretary, The Administration working group will be overseen by the Chair of the Board of Trustees, The Research working group and the Member Services/Policy working group will each be overseen by a member of the Board of Trustees serving their second 3-year term on the Board. The senior trustees responsible for oversight of the working groups will be appointed by the President.

In the past all committee members have been appointed by The President. Going forward, however, most committee positions will be filled by members volunteering and signing up through the SSAT webpage. This is intended to enhance participation by the membership and open up active roles in the society to members who may not have been from the same institution as the top leadership. For most committees the President will appoint the committee chair and co-chair and up to 20% of the committee members. The remaining positions will be filled directly by members who sign up via the web. Certain small committees such as the nominating committee and the GI training committee (or other ad hoc committees created by the Board in response to a new or acute need) will be filled by appointment only. Nonetheless the strategic plan's clear intent is to maximize participation by the SSAT membership in the committee process by establishing this open sign up process. The committee chairs will provide an annual assessment of each committee member's participation to the senior leadership. Reappointment and consideration for subsequent leadership positions will be based on this information.

There were nearly 50 action items identified at the strategic retreat. It is the feeling of both the SSAT

leadership and the consultants who facilitated the retreat that the society can process between four and six initiatives per year. Therefore the initiatives need to be prioritized. This prioritization should be reviewed annually as the external environment changes. For each initiative the tactics, direct and indirect costs (if applicable), business plans, etc. should be confirmed before they are officially launched.

The short-term priorities for 2011 are:

1. The membership committee will develop, administer, and present an evaluation of the member needs survey results to the board in May 2011
2. The SSAT website will be revised making it a major unifying educational resource not only for our members but for all professional and lay people interested in the current art and science of GI surgical practice. The Board of Trustees intends to make a significant financial commitment to expedite achievement of this goal
3. Restructure Committees to better serve the Mission of the SSAT
 - a. Bylaws revision via the Bylaws subcommittee recommendations
 - b. Create a Committee Handbook
 - c. Change the Committee appointment process
4. Intensive effort to provide Maintenance of Certification (MOC) content to membership and create a vehicle for members to fulfill MOC Part IV requirements
5. Establish and energize the Health Care Quality and Outcomes Committee

The long-term priorities are:

1. Education
 - Annual meeting
 - Maintenance of Certification
 - Resident education day
 - Lead efforts in GI Surgery training both during and after surgical residency
2. Research
 - Continue present commitments to fund research without adding more Career Development Awards
 - Strive to be the premier venue for presentation of translational research work pertinent to gastrointestinal surgery
 - Be a home for high-quality outcomes research
3. Public Policy
 - Inform policy makers, healthcare providers, and patients about issues impacting the delivery of quality GI Surgical Care

- Engage in healthcare politics
- Create future leaders who will influence public policy
- Focus on quality and outcome metrics that are valid for GI surgery

Goal Areas

1. MEMBER SERVICES

Objective

Serve as the premier member resource center for Digestive Disease

Initiatives:

a. Expand the role of SSAT in Maintenance of Certification

Tactics:

- Task the MOC Committee with creating a plan to address MOC issues for our members. The plan will include an overall objective, lines of activity, and key needs in the MOC project(s). Timelines for an execution of the plan and points of accountability will be determined in the planning phase of the project. Identify what other competing MOC products exist and at what price points, and examine alternate, more cost-effective platforms for delivering MOC as well as potential collaborative and cost-sharing efforts with sister societies
- Further task the MOC Committee with determining the feasibility of CME sponsorship for internet enduring materials versus pursuing self-accreditation
- Report to the Board of Trustees with a preliminary outline and benchmarks by May 2011
- Flesh out the “SSAT road show” concept that would address MOC Part IV via case reviews by expert panels

b. Conduct a comprehensive member needs assessment to drive SSAT programs and services

Tactics:

- Identify names of consultants who could advise the SSAT, help establish protocols, coordinate question development and mailings/emails, tabulate/analyze responses, and prepare a report. Request proposals from consultants; interview no more than three consultants and hire one by March 2011

- Identify a major Task Force comprised of a diverse and representative group of members to participate in the development of the assessment project. Identify a strong Chair of the Task Force who will help drive the agenda and get it done. Appoint the Chair by the end of 2010 and finalize the Task Force by January 2011
- First report to the Board of Trustees on preliminary work and final timeline by February 2011
- Explore various data collection methodologies, including conducting a baseline survey followed by members with those who do not participate/attend DDW
- Present survey results to Board of Trustees by May 2011

c. Explore the opportunities for SSAT at the “DDW Oasis”

Tactics:

- With the Program Committee, work with DDW-Administration to identify new interdisciplinary programs and communication opportunities that the SSAT could offer within the Oasis—and whether those opportunities are something on which the SSAT could take the lead
- Prepare an outline of ideas and a white paper detailing the pros and cons of—and a budget for—any SSAT offerings

2. FINANCE

Objective:

Ensure financial processes are defined and resources appropriately allocated to meet the member needs

Initiatives:

a. Define the role, structure, policies, and procedures of the Finance Committee in managing the fiscal resources of the SSAT (Reserve Policy, Investment Guidelines, Business Plan templates, etc.)

Tactics:

- Schedule a series of conference calls with the Finance Committee to develop, review, and modify a white paper outlining reserve options and a fiscal policy manual, as well as a business plan template. Present a progress report to the Board of Trustees by February 2011 and a final paper by May 2011

Suggestions for Finance Committee white paper

Reserve Options:

- The SSAT should maintain 1-year operating reserves at all times in a Permanent Fund that must grow by the Cost of Living (COL) *every* year. If the interest and growth does not equal the COL increase, then excess revenue over expenses from the operating fund must be transferred to the Permanent Fund to make up the difference. If the interest/growth outpaces the COL increase, excess revenue can be transferred for research and development.
- Once a 1-year reserve has been accumulated, reserve dollars over that amount should go to a Research & Development (R&D) Fund for new projects. The Board of Trustees will approve the release of R&D dollars through the Board of Trustees to Committees, Task Forces, etc. for new programs provided a Committees/Task Force has presented a business plan for the use of the money. The Business Plan pro forma should include the following:
 - Name of Project/Proposal
 - Relation to Mission, Vision and Values, and Goal Areas
 - Pros and Cons: the reasons to undertake the project and an equal number of reasons the project could fail or be unsuccessful
 - Budget: the direct and indirect costs associated with the project; indirect costs should include estimates of additional staff time required
 - Timelines: the start-to-finish time for the work and specific benchmarks to evaluate the project
 - Point(s) of Accountability: the committee, staff, task force, or other who is responsible for all aspects of the project
 - ROI: if the project includes an opportunity for profit, a business plan, out to 5 years, will be requested
 - Approval: date

Operating Budget and Financial Reports: The annual budget for the SSAT must be approved at least 60 days prior to the start of the calendar/fiscal year. The Finance Committee with staff must prepare the document for approval. Quarterly financial reports are sent to the Chair of the Board, the President, and the Treasurer. Monthly statements will be reviewed by the Treasurer. More frequent review will ensure project accountability

- b. Work with appropriate SSAT Committees to increase SSAT net revenue by 25% by December 2012

Tactics

- With Committee input, staff should identify all potential revenue sources for SSAT by May 2011 with a priority ranking of where increases could be realized—e.g., member dues, ticketed SSAT course fees at DDW, new CME programs and course offerings outside of DDW, MOC, new publications (the SSAT's best from DDW in a monograph publication), publishing agreements, international meeting opportunities, etc. The white paper should develop revenue potential for each area and outline ways to make it happen
- Present findings at a meeting of the Executive Committee and prioritize all items from 1 (real) to 4 (fantasy), and then concentrate on realistic opportunities. Seek Executive Committee input on the creation of a Task Force to help finalize plans and an agenda. Present to the Board of Trustees by May 2011
- Charge the Committees with developing business plans for each realistic, high-priority opportunity, and task them to begin to achieve results within 1 year. These efforts will require significant (and potentially additional) staff support

3. ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE AND IDENTITY

Objective:

Assure that the organizational structure is effective, efficient and accountable

Initiatives:

- a. Revise the Bylaws and create policies and procedures to govern the operations of the SSAT

Tactics:

- Create a Policy Manual. Present to the Board of Trustees by May 2011. The Table of Contents for such a Policy Manual could include the following:
 - Mission Statement
 - Vision Statement
 - Values
 - Board of Trustees—Roles and Responsibilities
 - Board Priorities
 - Board Meetings—Schedule, Agenda, Protocols
 - Agenda Book Guidelines—Consent Agenda, Action Agenda and Information Agenda, and Board minutes
 - Parliamentary Procedure
 - Budget development and approval
 - Financial reporting

- Investment guidelines (see above for policy)
 - SSAT Travel and Reimbursement guidelines
 - Insurance
 - Conflict of Interest Policy
 - Committee Appointment Policy
 - Disciplinary Hearing Policy
 - Legal Activity Guidelines
 - Endorsement Policy/Guidelines
 - SSAT Crisis Communication Plan
 - Use of SSAT letterhead and logo
 - SSAT Liaison Program
 - SSAT staff
- b. Appoint a Task Force to revise the Bylaws with staff assistance. Present to the Board of Trustees by May 2011. Disseminate amended Bylaws to membership by April 2011. Vote to affirm at Annual Meeting in May 2011
- c. Create a Committee Handbook for all Committee work. Present to the Board of Trustees by June 2011. The Table of Contents for such a Committee Handbook could include the following:
- SSAT Committees and their Roles
 - Committee Overview
 - Appointment and Tenure Policy
 - Committee Work Groups
 - Types of Committees defined—Standing, Ad hoc, Task forces, etc.
 - Committee and Board organizations chart
 - Work Group objectives and listing of Committees and their charges
 - Committee business plans and reporting format on projects, etc.
- d. Restructure the Board of Trustees Meeting and the Committees to be consistent with the mission
- Tactics:
- The revision of the bylaws and creation of policies and procedures to govern the operations of the SSAT should take into account the SSAT's mission statement, "Advancing the science and practice of surgery in the treatment of digestive disease"
 - Add dedicated time for Committees to meet at DDW, prior to the Board of Trustees meeting and request that committee chairs present a report at each board meeting
- e. Identify strategic alliances that will effectively serve the needs of members
- Tactics:
- Develop criteria for identifying alliances and partnerships that offer value to SSAT members and leaders
- f. Generate a list of potential areas for collaboration, including MOC, advanced training, advocacy, scientific programming, and patient care guidelines
- g. Approach other DDW and surgical societies regarding the possibility of providing updates on each other's initiatives to assist with identifying collaborative areas
- h. Create a program that identifies and develops future leaders in SSAT activities. The SSAT should be a meritocracy where accomplished Committee members can rise to higher leadership positions
- Tactics:
- Allow open, self-nomination for each committee's open slots
 - Committee Chairs will evaluate members for attendance, participation, and utility, and recommend to the Executive Committee those whose terms should be extended
- i. Explore the opportunity to develop an advanced GI training strategy
- Tactics:
- Appoint an Ad Hoc Committee to study and make recommendations on the training of the advanced GI surgeon. Work with the Fellowship Council (FC), the American Board of Surgery (ABS), and other GI specialty societies (e.g., SAGES, AHPBA, ASBMS, ASCRS) to be inclusive of their educational interests
 - Increase the SSAT's profile and recognition as the leader in designing and implementing the "next generation" in advanced GI surgery training programs from residency through mentored practice
- j. Explore opportunities to increase collaboration with the Foundation
- Tactics:
- Work with the Foundation Board to develop a strategic plan similar to the SSAT's

Appendix 1: SSAT Committee Structure and Tasks (Reflects the Initiatives and Tactics in the Strategic Plan)

1. Administrative working group
 - Board of Trustees
 - Executive Committee
 - Nominating Committee
 - Finance Committee

GOAL: Ensure the financial processes are defined and resources appropriately allocated to meet the needs of the membership and the society

TASKS:

- a. Assist other committees in creation of business plans when funds are needed to accomplish committee tasks and programs
- b. Define the role, structure, policies, and procedures of the Finance Committee in managing the fiscal resources of the SSAT (Reserve Policy, Investment Guidelines, Business Plan templates, etc.)—Write the White Paper as proposed in the Strategic Plan
- c. Work with appropriate SSAT Committees to increase SSAT net revenue by 25% by December 2012

2. Education Working Group

Program Committee

GOAL: The Program Committee will develop the highest quality program for the annual meeting

TASKS

- a. Define appropriate subcommittees for abstract review and selection
- b. Develop program for annual meeting based on current environment and feedback from prior meetings
- c. Coordinate program with other DDW Societies

Continuing Education Committee

GOAL: The Continuing Education Committee will play a pivotal role in all of the Society's educational activities

TASKS

- a. Work with Program Committee to coordinate Joint Symposia with other Societies both at DDW and other meetings (AHPBA, ASCRS, ISDS, SAGES, SSO, etc.)
- b. Identify new CME opportunities
- c. Develop content for MOC committee—especially Part II
- d. Advise Board and program committee re ACCME guidelines
- e. Create NEW non-meeting Learning Moments
»Podcasts with Experts, Specialty Blogs
- f. Recommend the recipients of the annual Fischer International and DeMeester US/Canada travelling fellowship awards to the Board of Trustees

Resident Education

GOAL: To Facilitate resident participation in SSAT and DDW activities

TASKS

- a. Enhance Friday Resident and Fellows Research Conference
- b. Develop sessions at meeting that are targeted at residents such as “How to Assess a Job/Fellowship”
- c. Seek out Resident members (two) to serve on the committee
»Work with members services to enhance resident member category of SSAT
- d. Work closely with Communications committee to ensure that appropriate media are used to enhance access to SSAT by surgical residents

Maintenance of Certification

- Task the MOC Committee with outlining a plan to address MOC issues that includes an overall objective, lines of activity, and key needs in the MOC project(s), as well as timelines for achievement and points of accountability. Identify what other competing MOC products exist and at what price points, and examine alternate, more cost-effective platforms for delivering MOC as well as potential collaborative and cost-sharing efforts with sister societies
- Further task the MOC Committee with determining the feasibility of joint CME sponsorship for internet enduring materials versus pursuing self-accreditation
- Report to the Board of Trustees with a preliminary outline and benchmarks by February 2011
- Flesh out the SSAT road show concept that would address MOC Part IV via case reviews by expert panels.
- Advise re MOC course cycle for Part II MOC
- Develop product for Part IV MOC

GI Surgery Training Committee (Ad Hoc)

GOAL: To explore the opportunities for GI surgical training through the flexible curriculum recently endorsed by the ABS as well as the feasibility of establishing advanced GI Surgical Fellowships or other ways to provide training in advanced GI surgery

TASKS

- a. Create detailed curriculum for advanced GI fellowship

- b. Identify criteria to select sites that could sponsor an advanced GI fellowship
- c. Work with FC and ABS—prepare for future (death of MIS fellowship or tracking)

3. Research Working Group

Research

GOAL: To foster the development of new knowledge and techniques that will improve the understanding and treatment of Digestive Disease

TASKS

- a. Select recipient of Career Development Award
- b. Run resident research seminar
- c. Monitor progress of funded research awards
- d. Identify ways to leverage SSAT funding for research
- e. Work to find SSAT members who can be on NIH Study Sections

Health Care Quality and Outcomes

GOAL: To use the best available knowledge to define meaningful standards and oversee their dissemination in the public domain

TASKS

- a. Develop and update Guidelines for treatment of digestive disease
- b. Define Quality metrics for treatment of digestive disease
- c. Work with other DDW societies to derive consensus and create consensus conferences and publications
- d. Identify members who belong to multiple societies (ASCRS, SSO, SAGES, etc.) and offer membership to reps of other DDW societies (AGA, ASGE, AASLD)
- e. Contribute ideas and content for a Quality and Outcomes session as part of the annual program

4. Member Services/Policy Working Group

Member Services

GOAL: To serve as the premier member resource center for Digestive Diseases

TASKS

- a. Conduct a comprehensive member needs assessment to drive SSAT programs and services
 - Identify names of consultants who could advise the SSAT, help establish protocols, coordinate question development and mailings/emails, tabulate/analyze responses, and prepare a report. Request proposals from consultants; interview

no more than three consultants and hire one by March 2011.

- Identify a major Task Force comprised of a diverse and representative group of members to participate in the development of the assessment project. Identify a strong Chair of the Task Force who will help drive the agenda and get it done. Appoint the Chair by the end of 2010 and finalize the Task Force by January 2011
- First report to the Board of Trustees on preliminary work and final timeline by February 2011
- Explore various data collection methodologies, including conducting a baseline survey followed by personal interviews by leadership of members who do not participate/attend DDW
- Present survey results to Board of Trustees by May 2011
- Create/build/strengthen new services in part based on needs assessment
- Inform other committees such as Education and program committees on needs
- b. Explore the opportunities for SSAT at the “DDW Oasis”
 - With the Program Committee, work with DDW-Administration to identify new interdisciplinary programs and communication opportunities that the SSAT could offer within the Oasis—and whether those opportunities are something on which the SSAT could take the lead
 - Prepare an outline of ideas and a white paper detailing the pros and cons of—and a budget for—any SSAT offerings
- c. Recruitment of new members
 - Explore options such as Women’s needs, Military needs, etc. for subgroups
- d. Set dues policies/member retention
- e. Develop mentoring program for young surgeons
 - Communications Committee

GOAL: To connect the membership to the activities of the society, providing accurate useful information in real time

TASKS

 - a. Update the Webpage making it a major unifying educational resource not only for our members but for all professional and lay people interested in the current art and science of GI surgical practice
 - Write RFP for Webpage update
 - Develop Facebook page
 - Provide Twitter feed during DDW

- b. Oversee the Journal (takes over publications committee)
- c. Manage enduring Materials

Public Policy & Advocacy

GOAL: To advocate for patients and Society members to advance treatment of Digestive Diseases, and to nurture the development of SSAT members with expertise in the legislative and political arena

TASKS

- a. Advocacy within “the house of medicine”
- b. Work with ACSPAC and other Surgical Societies in areas of common interest

- c. Coordinate/Be informed by work of the HCQ&O committee

International Relations Committee

GOAL: To help the SSAT interface with societies and members outside the USA and Canada

TASKS

- a. Outreach to surgeons and surgical societies outside of the USA and Canada
- b. Advise Member Services Committee on benefits structure for international members
- c. Develop and asses opportunities to hold joint conferences in other countries
- d. Develop and assess medical mission/service opportunities