

American Academy of Religion
AAR Board of Directors Meeting
January 28, 2023

M I N U T E S

Session I: 11am-1pm EST

Board Members Present: Amir Hussain, Jin Y. Park, Leela Prasad, Sabina Ali, Thelathia Nikki Young, Whitney Bauman, Brian Pennington, Dena Pence, Nicole Kirk, Keri Day, Laurel Schneider, Alice Hunt

Staff Present: Nichol  Franklin, Amy Defibaugh

I. Call to Order 11:06 AM EST, Saturday, January 28, 2023

II. Approval of Minutes of the November Meeting

The November 2022 Minutes were approved electronically prior to the meeting.

III. President's Report

President Hussain reported on his plans for the November meeting plenaries.

He discussed the need for an overall review of the AAR awards and announced the formation of a subcommittee made up of board members Leela Prasad, Nicole Kirk, and Dena Pence, with assistance from Amir Hussain as needed. The staff member assigned to the subcommittee is Elizabeth Hardcastle. The subcommittee will determine the timeline for the study.

IV. Treasurer's Report

Dena Pence reviewed the financial reports. Fiscal year 2022 shows lower expenses, so budget is in better state overall, but investment losses were incurred as well. AM 2022 costs are not all in, so the status of Fiscal 2023 is only preliminary. However, the AM had 78% attendance, a significant improvement over the prior year and almost made the 80% goal. This encouraging result occurred despite the many challenges now facing members.

Although expenses from AM are still too preliminary to report, Nichol  Franklin thinks that they will come in close to budget.

The executive director search now underway may change some of the budgetary projections for 2023, but depending on timing of the search conclusion, may be accommodated in next year's budget.

Revenues are close to budget projections for this point in the year.

V. Executive Director's Report

Alice Hunt began her report with the AAR mission and values and reminded the board of outstanding membership benefits that accrue to community of scholars in the organization.

She reviewed the membership numbers, noting that membership is beginning to recover from pandemic low in 2020. The largest demographic group is students (29%), followed by tenure/tenure-track faculty (24%). With the latter at only 24%, it is clear that the overall focus of the organization needs to adjust to the professional realities of the membership.

The endowment remains healthy.

Regarding issues for new Executive Director, Hunt named leadership and management as the primary tasks. She suggested that leadership is art, management in science and the position itself is complex.

She was asked to identify her view of the primary issues facing the AAR:

1. The business model of higher education in general is broken. It is built for the tenure system, which is now only 24% of members.
2. There is a mounting tax on education from the political right
3. The history of the AAR, like other scholarly guilds in the U.S. is predominantly white, male, and Christian. Equity issues, entangled with the business model and external political pressures, will continue to challenge the leadership.

VI. Governance and Leadership Development Committee Report

Executive Director Hunt reported a large number of open slots this year, which means that the Governance and Leadership Development Committee is still working on generating sufficient appropriate candidates for the slate.

A finalized slate will come to the board for confidential discussion before the election opens in September.

The committee is concerned about the requirement that the contingent faculty board position must be filled by a contingent faculty member. Because of the overall precarity of contingent faculty situations, board obligations might be difficult to fulfill, and so further board discussion is recommended. Also, there is some thought that the name of

the position may need to be reassessed, given the ever broadening range of academic labor.

Session II: 2:30pm-EST

Board Members Present: Amir Hussain, Jin Y. Park, Leela Prasad, Sabina Ali, Thelathia Nikki Young, Whitney Bauman, Brian Pennington, Dena Pence, Nicole Kirk, Laurel Schneider, Alice Hunt

Staff Present: Nichol  Franklin, Amy Defibaugh

Invited Guests Present: Ernest Brooks (Partner), Melanie Shiree (Senior Search Coordinator), and Rachel Brown (Senior Associate) from Isaacson, Miller Search Firm

VII. Program Committee Report

Whitney Bauman gave the Program Committee report and noted that Amy Defibaugh joined as the staff person this year. They have been working to adjust to the staff transition, which always entails the need to rebuild a great deal of institutional and programmatic memory.

In addition, the work of the committee this year has focused on:

- 1) The Proliferation Subcommittee: looking at the overall number of units and sessions at the annual meeting.
- 2) The Grievance and Governance Subcommittee: looking at issues internal to units that need addressing outside of regular PC meetings.
- 3) The Exploratory and Special Sessions Subcommittee: making decisions about special sessions (and final decision on exploratory sessions) as they arise after the January meeting; Exploratory sessions are prerequisite to becoming program units
- 4) The Program Committee and Program Unit Committee handbook revision committee: revising the handbook for the PUC and creating a PC member guide.
- 5) Addressing Sexual Harassment sub-committee: to think of ways to address and deal with the ongoing problem at the annual meeting.

The Program Committee is in the process of reviewing the AM questionnaires. Also, planning is going forward to build an annual virtual meeting in addition to the traditional in-person meeting. Amy Defibaugh reported concerns from program unit chairs regarding the role of units in an additional meeting, and what effects on workloads would occur. She plans to hold listening sessions this spring with unit and steering committee chairs and will also begin researching appropriate platforms.

Safety and sexual harassment at annual meetings continue to be an issue for members. There are limited organizational resources for handling these concerns outside of the

convention centers and hotels, but the board needs to continue to explore options to identify ways of increasing awareness and safety.

The Program Committee recommends the following 5-year RSO renewals:

- Association of Pastoral Theology
- International Society for Science and Religion
- International Society for the Study of Religion, Nature, and Culture
- Karl Barth Society of North America
- La Comunidad of Hispanic Scholars of Religion
- Niebuhr Society
- North American Paul Tillich Society
- Society for the Study of Chinese Religions
- Society for the Study of Japanese Religions
- Soren Kierkegaard Society

The Program Committee recommends denying renewal of the following RSO's. In neither case were renewal materials received by the Program Committee despite multiple reminders:

- Association of Social Scientists of Religion of MERCOSUR
- Religious Education Association

MOTION I

To accept the recommendations of the Program Committee regarding renewals and revocations of RSOs.

The motion passed unanimously.

VIII. Futures Discussion with Isaacson, Miller Executive Search Firm

The search plan for Executive Director was discussed.

IX. The meeting adjourned at 4:48pm EST

Respectfully submitted,
Laurel C. Schneider, Secretary