

**American Academy of Religion
AAR Board of Directors Meeting
Annual Meeting, San Antonio TX
Friday November 17, 2023**

M I N U T E S

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

Staff Present: Nichol  Franklin, Elizabeth Hardcastle

Guests Present: (newly elected Board members) Patrick Reyes, Kathleen Sands, Matt Vaughn

I. Call to Order 4:00 PM CST

II. Approval of Agenda

- a. The Agenda was approved by acclamation.

III. President’s Report (Amir Hussain)

- a. Welcome to Claudia Schippert as new Executive Director
- b. Thanks to Jin Park for chairing the successful search, conducted in a very short time.
- c. Review of presidential plenaries and address at this meeting.

IV. Executive Director’s Report (Claudia Schippert)

“As I noted in my recent 100-day-letter to our membership, I could not be happier to serve as the AAR’s Executive Director, as we collectively pursue our mission of fostering excellence in the academic study of religion and enhancing the public understanding of religion.

I have enjoyed getting to know the excellent AAR staff, the dedicated leaders on the Board of Directors, and the many tireless volunteer committee chairs and members who do so much to make the AAR work for all of us.

We do need all of us at this moment of sustained challenges to higher education and the new and ongoing local and geo-political struggles.

With much appreciation (and credit) to my predecessor, Alice Hunt, I can report some updates from the past year/since the last meeting:

- i Our member organization currently has appr. 5500 **members**, with an additional 2500 being late on dues, but receiving relevant information. We provide lapsed members with their own version of membership newsletters and have dedicated funds from a Luce grant to help students and contingent colleagues pay dues if their membership has lapsed.
- i Increased **member benefits** include newly added health insurance access for AAR members (enrollment started in November 2023). Member access to “**Beyond the Professoriate**” provides useful workshops and webinars providing professional training for careers outside traditional academic jobs.
- i 58 **grants** have been awarded to date this year, totaling over \$155,000. A robust annual **awards** program continues - with 12 awards ranging from book awards to teaching and service awards. We have also improved the application and jury processes.
- i Our **publications** programs are catching up from the post pandemic problems, gaps and backlogs. **JAAR** is now caught up with 2022 and is working on publishing the 2023 volumes. **Reading Religion** continues to publish relevant book reviews in our field; improved social media outreach has expanded its readership, including many readers who are not (yet) AAR members.
- i We continue to offer **webinars** on important issues, such as the webinar on Buddhist Theological Education in March 2023.
- i The series of webinars about **Inclusive Pedagogy** has been viewed by many and resulted in more than 140 certificates issued (to members), with many more colleagues watching some or all of the webinars.
- i The Wabash funded (2021-2023) project “**Disability Pedagogy: Mapping the Lay of the Land**” has concluded and resulted in several resource guides, book lists, SWOT analysis, and a final white paper, "Every Body is Valid and Valued: Current Challenges and Opportunities for Disability-Informed Pedagogy in the Religious and Theological Academy."
- i Continuing with Luce/ACLS “**Advancing Public Scholarship in Religion**” – we awarded 13 grants this year and have currently open applications for the next cycle. Also, in May 2023, the current grant recipients gathered in person in NYC for a workshop and networking opportunities. (There are also some related events at the AM.)
- i The AAR’s **Regions** are in the process of signing new operating agreements to enhance their internal cohesion, relationship with the main AAR, transparency of governance, and accessibility to regional members. 2 regions have merged and there may be some other local developments, but we hope that all new structures become finalized early in 2024.
- i Initial planning has commenced for newly added “**June Sessions of the Annual Meeting: Online**” scheduled for June 25-27, 2024. The Program Committee – with support from AAR staff- will offer three days fully online programming that

will also include some presidential theme-related events and professional development.

- ï AAR Staff have been involved in consulting about **new AMS/CMS**- a lengthy and complex process. The main decisions should be made by early January. We hope to have a new membership and website systems in place late next year.

Together we have so much to offer each other and the wider public - through our scholarship, teaching, networking, mentoring, and by advocating for all scholars of religion in diverse career paths.

Together, we continuously learn and grow, and we become even better positioned to take on the many challenges.

Together, we can recognize relevant scholarly activity in unforeseen places, respond wisely to the needs of existing and new constituencies, increase access, nurture relationships, and become an even stronger AAR. Thank you for doing this important work. Together.”

V. **Motions from the Executive Committee**

MOTION 1

To add the role of a “Vice Chair” for each Standing and Status Committee to improve leadership transition within the committees. The AAR President shall appoint the Vice Chair. The Vice Chair shall typically serve for 2 years in the role, after which they normally are appointed as chair of the committee for the remainder of their 7 year term as member of the committee.

The motion passed.

MOTION 2

To sunset the Theological Education Committee (TEC) as a result of the global review of self-evaluations of Standing Committees.

The motion passed.

MOTION 3

To change the name of the Graduate Student Awards Jury” to “Student Awards Jury” and to revise the jury’s charge by adding the selection of the undergraduate research grant winner, resulting in the following updated charge:

“The ~~Graduate~~ Student Awards Jury selects the winner of the International Dissertation Research Grant, ~~and~~ the Selva J. Raj Endowed International Dissertation Research Fellowship, and the Undergraduate Research Grant.”

The motion passed.

Note: The Executive Director shall pay attention to the workload/size of this jury as it reviews and awards the additional undergraduate applications.

MOTION 4

To appoint AAR member Randall Styers to the Finance and Audit Committee and to appoint AAR member Edwin David Aponte to the Governance and Leadership Development Committee.

The motion passed.

VI. Presidential Theme for Annual Meetings 2024

- a. President-Elect Jin Y. Park announced the presidential theme for the 2024 Annual Meetings: “Violence, Nonviolence, and the Margin”
- b. The presidential theme will be posted on the Annual Meeting website. Board members are encouraged to spread the word so that program units can be thinking about how to incorporate the theme in the 2024 meetings.

VII. Annual Business Meeting Agenda Review and Other Board matters at this meeting

- a. New Member Breakfast Sat 7:30-8:45
- b. Presidential Plenaries (Sat, Sun, Mon)
- c. Friends of the Academy Reception
- d. Presidential Address, 7pm ~~Sun~~ Sat.
- e. Presidential Reception 8:30pm ~~Sun~~ Sat.
- f. Program Unit Chairs Breakfast 7:30am, Mon

VIII. President Hussain adjourned the meeting at 5:18 CST.

Respectfully submitted,
Laurel C. Schneider, Secretary