

American Academy of Religion
Board of Directors
June 15 and 16, 2024
Online/Zoom

Present: Jin Park, Leela Prasad, Laurel Schneider, Dena Pence, Kathleen Sands, Claudia Schippert, Thelathia Nikki Young, Darla Schumm; Ann Gleig; Keri Day; Patrick Reyes, Matthew Vaughn; Ristina Gooden (1:05 pm).

Staff Present: Nichol  Franklin (CFO/COO), Sunday only: Amy Defibaugh (Director of Programs and Publications).

Saturday June 15, 2024

Meeting commenced at 12 noon (EDT)

- I. Welcome and call to order. President Jin Park.
- II. Agenda approved by acclamation.
- III. **MOTION 1.** Approval of the minutes of January 2024 Board of Directors Meeting. Seconded and unanimously approved.
- IV. **President's Report** (Jin Park).
 - a) Plenary sessions. The plenary session of our June online meeting will feature S n Master Pomnyun on Violence, Nonviolence, and Social Justice. At our November meeting in San Diego, we will have two plenary sessions. One will feature two scholars of Buddhism and a neuroscientist, in the other session, political scientist Maria Stephan will discuss nonviolence in action, including the role of religion.
 - b) Judith Plaskow's induction into the National Women's Hall of Fame (March), the first scholar of religion to receive this honor. Judith was introduced by Rita Brock.

Governor
Kathy Hochul and Attorney General Letitia gave talks. President Park, who also attended,

notes that this was a celebratory moment for the AAR and an inspiration for young women scholars.
 - c) Letters of support for endangered religious studies programs. At the January BoD meeting, we discussed the threat to the Religious Studies major at University of North Carolina at Greensboro. The Executive Committee sent a letter of support. The university has since agreed to set up a Religious Studies concentration. In May, Shenandoah University sent an SOS about the closure of religious studies program. We also have learned that Albion College plans to cut majors, including religious studies. These closings have a financial impact on the AAR, because fewer people have the funding to come to an AAR meeting. For all these reasons, the board should

- have more further discussion of how to respond to the ongoing threat of program closings.
- d) Statements about Israel/Palestine. We have been invited to join several statements from collections of scholars, including one that specifically requested action from the AAR. The Executive Committee discussed the proper scope of AAR action and decided to sign the ACLS statement on 2024 campus protests because it focused on freedom of academic speech, which is key to the AAR's mission.
 - e) Evaluation of Executive Director. The Executive Committee finalized and implemented a procedure for evaluating the ED. Later this afternoon, President Elect Leela Prasad will lead us in a review of these materials.
- V. **Treasurer's Report and first reading of proposed budget for 2025.** (Treasurer Dena Pence and CFO/COO Nichol  Franklin). The Treasurer's Report is available in Basecamp. Note that the numbers for fiscal 2024 are not yet complete, because the FY does not end until June 30.
- a) Meeting figures. Denver 2022 was our first post-pandemic meeting. For planning purposes, we project 80% of attendance at last meeting in the particular locale, although we did better than that in San Antonio (2023). It will take some time to determine our post-pandemic normal. Attendance and revenue figures for San Antonio (2023) were similar to 2022. San Diego and Boston are attractive venues for our members, so we can hope for good numbers in this year's meeting (San Diego) and the meeting in 2025 (Boston).
 - b) Investment drawdown. Due to market fluctuations, the value of our investment portfolio has declined since the end of 2023. In addition, the FY 2025 budget will have to draw down 21% (about \$1.5 million) to cover expenses. This is far in excess of the limit set by AAR policy (1994; 2002), which is 5% of the rolling 3-year portfolio average. Much of this is due to the new Association Management (AMS) and Content Management (CMS) software (about \$637k). Although the cost is high, the systems were chosen after careful consultation. These are one-time costs; once in place, they will not cost more than the prior systems. Even taking the one-time AMS and CMS costs out of consideration, we still must draw down 12% in FY 25 to cover expenses. In previous years, the drawdown has been closer to 7%. Projecting into the future, the drawdowns might be less than 12%, but that is still far too high.
 - c) Implications. This is a critical issue for the AAR. Although we continue to seek new revenue, we must simultaneously recalibrate the AAR's spending priorities in light of its values and fiscal reality. This discussion will begin in tomorrow's meeting, after which we will vote on the proposed budget for FY 2025.
- VI. **Program Committee Report** (Program Unit Director Ann Gleig). The committee met yesterday; report is in Basecamp.
- a) June 25-27, inaugural online meeting. 60 sessions are planned. Registration is now at 330; hoping for 350. The program committee will generate post

conference data to ascertain whether the online meeting is helping the constituencies we hoped to reach.

- b) Program unit participation. About a third of program units are participating in the online meeting (voluntarily this year) and were awarded an additional session for this purpose. Participating units were given an extra session to do so. The program committee will ask other units why they did not participate. Going forward, the program committee may ask tier 4 and 5 units to transfer one allocated session to June or, alternatively, give the session up that year. The goal is to sustain the June meeting in future years while also addressing the proliferation problem (too many sessions in relation to number of attendees at the November meeting).
- c) November meeting. Over 530 sessions have been planned. There now are 75 requests for other events (receptions, etc.) and we anticipate up to 200 event requests altogether.
- d) Public scholarship in the post annual meeting survey. In response to a request by the task force on Valuing and Evaluating Public Scholarship, the Program Committee has agreed to include a question about public scholarship.
- e) PUC handbook. Will be reviewed and revised with respect to program unit governance, expectations and labor, with particular concern for protecting the committee's most vulnerable members.
- f) Sexual Harassment subcommittee. In April, Ann Gleig and Nikki Young met to discuss possible collaboration between this subcommittee and the Status Committee caucus. The subcommittee will meet in August to decide concrete actions, such as signs and announcements, to implement at the November meeting.
- g) Eight special sessions are planned for the November annual meeting, including a roundtable on the US presidential election.

VIII. **Executive Director's Report** (Claudia Schippert). Based on 10.5 months in the job; full report is available in basecamp.

- a) Accomplishments. Membership is higher than any time since the pandemic, partly due to increased frequency and variety of programming – e.g., June online meeting, monthly webinars. Book award backlog has been resolved and JAAR backlog will soon be resolved also. Reading Religion publishes 30-40 reviews per month. New association management and content managements systems are being implemented. Regions have been reconfigured and their governance standardized. ED Schippert has sustained the AAR's close connection with the SBL and built relationships with other scholarly organizations, including ACLS and NHA. Fundraising and development accomplishments include the establishment of the Judith Plaskow travel award and the creation of multi-tiered institutional memberships.
- b) Concerns. While the AAR has only half as many members as 20 years ago, it continues to need the same number of volunteers (about 200) to do its

committee work. We need to make member involvement feasible and rewarding, while also reassessing our governance structures. Another major concern is the AAR budget (see Section V above), which will be the topic of further discussion tomorrow. Protecting academic programs in religious studies will continue to be a challenge and should be met in solidarity with the efforts of other organizations to protect the humanities generally.

- c) Plans. In the coming year, ED Schippert will focus on governance, programming, membership, staff/operations, and fundraising.

IX. Governance and Leadership Development Committee (Chair Nikki Young).

This 5-member committee has generated a slate for open positions of VP, treasurer, and status committee director. The slate will be announced in the mid-fall and the names are strictly confidential until then. Chair Nikki Young observes that it is hard to find people to do this important volunteer work for the AAR. To create a deeper bench is part of this committee's work. Also suggests that the AAR spotlight could have a section called "how I got involved with the AAR."

X. Status Committee Summit Report and Proposals to the Board. (Status Committee Director

Nikki Young). Status Committees held a January summit in Atlanta. Full report is in basecamp.

- a) Best Practices for job postings. The Summit requests that the Board create "a guiding document for institutions that wish to post positions on the AAR's employment opportunities website." This would also include an accountability mechanism. The AAR had created such a document when job interviews were still being sponsored by the annual meeting. The goal is not to change the job ads created by institutions, but to ask advertisers to commit to AAR values and abide by standards of conduct. Discussion ensued about how such a document would be framed, how and by whom it could be enforced, and whether it might present legal or financial liabilities for the AAR. Nikki Young notes that such concerns (e.g., how to sanction policy violations) were also present at the beginning of DEI initiatives and that threat of punishment is not the only means to foster ethical action.

Board affirms of the spirit of the request and will consider formulating something like an honor code. However, accountability mechanisms may be infeasible and/or incur liabilities.

Motion 2: to table the request for new best practices for job postings as submitted by the status committees and to revisit the topic at the next opportunity. Seconded and unanimously approved.

- b) Long Legacies. The Status Committees request that the AAR "initiate a legacies task force to reflect on its historical role in discriminatory/exclusionary practices related to minoritized persons in the profession and to consider reparative work that those

legacies necessitate.” This proposal is akin to former president Jose Cabezon’s work on the history of our guild; it also would amplify the findings of our Futures Task Force. In discussion, there was broad agreement about the value of grappling with this history, but uncertainty about what histories would be examined and what reparations might be called for. Creating a new task force does not seem feasible at this time.

MOTION 3: to table this proposal for reconsideration following further input from the status committees. Seconded and unanimously approved.

c) Changes in committee names and charges.

Every status committee requests that the word “profession” in its name be changed to “professions,” in recognition of the plurality of professions engaged in by scholars of religion. “The Status of LGBTIQ Persons in the Profession Committee” also requests that its acronym be changed to LGBTIQ+. SWP requests that it be retitled “The Status of Women and Gender Minoritized Persons in the Professions Committee.” CREM requests to be renamed “The Status of Racial and Ethnic Minoritized People in the Professions Committee.”

Every status committee requests that its charge be modified by adding the word “belonging” (“full access, *belonging*, and academic freedom”).

MOTION 4: To accept the committee name and charge modifications detailed above. Seconded and approved unanimously.

XI. Board review of ED Claudia Schippert (in camera, led by President Elect Leela Prasad).

Based on the evaluation categories of Emory University, the Board must assess the ED’s performance as satisfactory or unsatisfactory. The Board approved the ED’s performance as satisfactory for purposes of this evaluation. President Elect Prasad will frame an evaluation letter conveying details of the ED’s performance and our deep appreciation for Claudia’s work. This letter will be shared with the Executive Committee prior to being sent to Claudia.

MOTION 5: To rate the job performance of ED Claudia Schippert as superior. Seconded and unanimously approved.

Adjourned for the day at 5:00 pm EDT.

Sunday, June 16

Present – Jin Park, Leela Prasad, Laurel Schneider, Dena Pence, Kathleen Sands, Claudia Schippert, Darla Schumm, Ann Gleig, Keri Day, Ristina Gooden; Patrick Reyes, Matthew Vaughn, Thelathia Nikki Young (present via zoom, departed at 2 p.m.)
AAR staff present - Amy Defibaugh (Director of Programs and Publications) and Nichol  Franklin (CFO/COO)

Meeting commenced at 12:30 p.m. eastern time

I. Welcome and call to order. (Jin Park)

II. **Update from Regions and Proposed Committee Name Change.** (Regions Director Matthew Vaughan).

- a) Regional news. Regions have been reconfigured so that there are now 9 (previously 10). All regions except the new Northeastern region had a well-attended regional conference this year. Operating agreement. (Document available in Basecamp). All regions have signed a new operating agreement with the AAR. It provides that each region must elect five officers, including a Chief Regional officer (CRO) who will serve a 3-year term, renewable once. Each CRO will file an annual financial statement with the ED via the CFO/COO.
- b) Alignment of regions. Some have institutional structures and additional documents alongside this agreement. Some regions resist giving up in-person elections, but the AAR requires that they use the AAR's electronic election system. Regions are also being asked to do payments online; Matthew is assisting in this transition. Aligning the regions will require ongoing effort.
- c) SBL members. Although the SBL no longer has regions, the CRO's would like to retain their regions connection with SBL people. Most regions don't ask for membership info when people register for the meeting and the AAR has no objection to SBL members' participation in regional conferences. However, under the operating agreement, only AAR members can hold regional offices. In order to more accurately name the existing collaborative and its governance function, a proposal was presented to rename the Regions Committee as the Regional Council, so named also to reflect its character as a business collaborative. The council will be chaired by the Regions Director, who also serves on the AAR Board of Directors and whose term is three years, nonrenewable.
- d) Website adjustments. The ED will ensure that the AAR website page on Regions is revised to reflect these changes as adopted.

MOTION 6: the AAR will implement a new "AAR Regional Council" to replace the current "Regions Committee," charged to support and promote the work of the Academy's regional groups, and to recommend regional policies to the board. Motion seconded and unanimously approved.

III. **Bylaws Review** (ED Claudia Schippert)

Update on proposed revisions; see document in basecamp. Bylaws need occasional revision to reflect organizational changes. Presently, changes are needed to provisions concerning the Regions Committee and the Finance and Audit committee. The revisions will be presented to the membership in October and will be voted on at the Annual Business meeting at the November Annual Meeting.

IV. **Response to Petition about 2029 San Antonio Meeting** (ED Schippert).

In protest against Texas laws restricting reproductive rights, a group of scholars had petitioned the Board of Directors to cancel the 2023 meeting in San Antonio. This letter was sent in December 2022. The Board issued a response in January 2023.

<https://aarweb.org/AARMBR/About-AAR-/Board-of-Directors-/Board-Statements->

[and-Endorsements-/AAR-Statement-on-2023-Annual-Meeting.aspx.](#)

On November 15, 2023, another group of scholars petitioned for the cancelation of the 2029 meeting planned for San Antonio. This letter was submitted to the then-preseidential line (Amir Hussein, Jin Y. Park, Leela Prasad) and the ED. Since it was submitted only two days before the November board meeting, the discussion of item was tabled for January 2024 board meeting. At that meeting, the BoD concluded although it would be unwise to cancel the 2029 meeting, we want to communicate with the petitioners about our shared concerns. At that time, the Board also requested that our ED communicate with the SBL about how they want to respond.

Both the AAR Executive Board and the SBL Council have concluded that canceling or moving the location of the 2029 November meeting would be fiscally prohibitive. However, both organizations want to meet with some of the petitioners and strategize about constructive responses to the situation in Texas. This might include engaging with grassroots organizations that are concerned with reproductive rights and may have stakes in the conferences coming to San Antonio. Claudia Schippert and Steed Davidson have been charged to create a letter of response to the petitioners. The proposed meeting might take place after the Friday Board meeting in San Diego (Nov. 22), a time when it is customary for AAR and SBL leadership to share a brief joint celebration.

V. Updates from taskforces.

- a) Strategic Planning (Vice President Laurel Schneider). This Task force now consists of Laurel Schneider, Emilie Townes, Brian Pennington, Angela Sims, and AAR staff Amy Defibaugh and Claudia Schippert. The starting point of this task force is the report of the Futures Task Force. The existing group would like to add an emerging scholar of religion – not necessarily a graduate student, but an early career scholar with some experience. Board members are invited to forward possible candidates and their contact information to Laurel.
- b) Task Force on Valuing and Evaluating Public Scholarship. (Amy Defibaugh, AAR Director of Programs and Publications, gave this report in her capacity as staff liaison). Rachel Mikva chairs this task force, which has been meeting regularly despite turnover in its membership. They have conducted multiple interviews and meetings with program chairs about the use of public scholarship. They also have begun a draft document that provides definitions, identifies stakeholders, sets out objectives and guidelines, and offers models of evaluation. They hope to have the draft ready to share with constituent groups by August 1, and to produce their final document by January 25.

VI. Second reading of 2025 budget, preceded by deliberation on expenditures relative to values. (Dena Pence). The Finance/Audit Committee, with assistance from Nichol  Franklin, provided the Board with a document outlining some key areas of AAR

spending, along with information about the groups and interests served. This confidential document prompts the Board to begin weighing AAR expenditures in relation to our organizational values and constituencies. The areas described in the document are meant as exemplars, not as an exhaustive account, and not as areas for proposed cuts.

- a) In person board and committee meetings. A range of values and perspectives were expressed. Some felt that in-person board/committee meetings can build professional networks, incentivize people to join committees, and facilitate AAR work. In the post-pandemic period, many of us especially appreciate the opportunity to be face-to-face with colleagues. On the other hand, doubts were raised as to whether in-person meetings really increase productivity. Several board members also noted that online meetings can be more accessible to those who have childcare and other family responsibilities. In assessing these and other expenditures, we need to weigh the external as well as internal costs/benefits.
- b) Grants and awards. The Board has charged our Strategic Planning task force with reconsideration of our grants and awards. For purposes of this discussion, the Board recognizes that although providing grants and awards is at the heart of our mission, many of our awards are unfunded and some may be redundant. Various aspects of our awards might be reassessed – e.g., the number of awards in given areas, the necessity (or not) of financial awards, the dollar amounts of financial awards, and the travel expenses associated with various awards. In addition to the economy and rationality of our awards and grants, we also might consider whether certain constituencies – for instance, scholars who do public-facing work – should be better supported by AAR grants and awards.
- c) Reading Religion. This online publication produces 30-40 reviews a month. It currently generates no revenue and carries significant costs. On the other hand, Reading Religion is an excellent resource for scholars of religion. And, because it is available to everyone (not just AAR members), it enhances public awareness of the AAR and the academic study of religion. It is also a venue for emerging scholars to begin to publish and receive mentoring from the more experienced scholars who edit the publication.
- d) The 2025 budget. The Board and ED recognize the critical and ongoing need to increase revenue and to reduce the yearly drawdown on our investments toward the 5% limit.

Motion 7: To approve the 2025 budget proposed by the Finance/Audit Committee. Seconded and approved unanimously.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:10 p.m.

Respectfully submitted
Kathleen Sands
Secretary to the Board of Directors

Addendum of July 15, 2024

Subsequent to the meeting of June 15-16, 2024 the BoD voted unanimously by email to approve the increase in membership fees proposed below.

Increase of Membership Fees	since 2018	raised 7/1/2024
Students	\$ 45.00	\$ 50.00
under 20K	\$ 55.00	\$ 60.00
under 40K	\$ 79.00	\$ 85.00
under 60 K	\$ 110.00	\$ 120.00
under 80K	\$ 165.00	\$ 175.00
under 100K	\$ 179.00	\$ 190.00
under 120K	\$ 220.00	\$ 235.00
under 150K	\$ 239.00	\$ 255.00
150K+	\$ 250.00	\$ 270.00
special international	\$ 15.00	\$ 15.00
supporting	\$ 500.00	\$ 500.00
sustaining	\$ 1,000.00	\$ 1,000.00