

American Academy of Religion
Board of Directors
November 22, 2024
San Diego Hilton Bayfront

Draft minutes

Present: Jin Park, Leela Prasad, Nadine Pence, Kathleen Sands, Claudia Schippert, Angela Sims, Darla Schumm, Ristina Gooden, Ann Gleig, Keri Day, Patrick Reyes, Nikki Young, Heather White, Matthew Vaughn, Nikia Smith Robert.

Staff present: Nichol  Franklin (CFO).

The meeting was brought to order at 4:10 p.m. Pacific time

- I. Call to Order and Welcome (Pres. Jin Park)
- II. Agenda approved by acclamation (Park)
- III. Minutes from the June Board of Directors Meeting approved by acclamation (Park)
- IV. President's Report (Park) –
 - a. Our first annual online meeting took place on June 25-27. Thanks to Claudia Schippert and AAR staff for their excellent work.
 - b. Presidential plenaries on the theme of Violence, Non-Violence, and the Margins. One plenary session was offered at the June meeting. Two additional presidential plenaries will be presented during this San Diego meeting: Non-Violence, Social Justice and the Brain; and Non-Violence in Action.
 - c. How to support religious studies departments and promote the academic study of religion. Our informal board meeting online on September 21st generated productive discussion. President Park suggests that the board continue to have dialogue on this issue once or twice yearly.
 - d. The Hilton strike. On September 1, over 10,000 hotel workers went on strike. 700 workers at the Hilton San Diego Bayfront (where many of our sessions and meeting were scheduled to take place) continued until October 10th, when the union signed a contract. While the strike was ongoing, the AAR staff worked out a contingency plan. The Executive Committee posted a statement on AAR website indicating our support for a just resolution and our intention to implement contingency plans if needed.
 - e. Presidential appointments. Every year the AAR president appoints members for committees. President Park notes, with thanks, that over 50 members undertake leadership roles. This year's presidential appointments are posted in Basecamp.
 - f. Committees of the Board. The Executive Committee has created a slate of recommendations to fill vacancies, to be presented as a motion later in this meeting.

- V. Executive Director's Report (Schipper). The full written report is posted in Basecamp.
- a. Remembering the AAR's mission and values on its 60th birthday.
 - b. Year-round "webinAAR" programming begun in 2023. Encourage committees and program units to be involved.
 - c. Generally positive responses to the June meeting. Moving forward, we must increase number of participants and/or sponsors and find appropriate size of meeting in relation to member participation and AAR staff workload.
 - d. San Diego meeting – 7500 registered (AAR +SBL), highest number since pandemic.
 - e. San Antonio meeting – Claudia, Steed Davidson and Nikki Young will meet tomorrow with members who have petitioned for cancellation. The BOD will hear a report during our January 2025 meeting.
 - f. Issues of concern. AV and FnB costs; need for greater equity in registration costs, to decrease number of sessions and to eliminate competing sessions.
 - g. Membership. More reliable numbers are being developed along with more frequent member communications and stronger exclusion deadlines. Over 400 members are involved in program units, committees, and task forces.
 - h. Regions – regional reorganization is complete; regional elections are occurring through AAR system; regional grant system is being reviewed.
 - i. Grants and awards - \$230 K in 2024; Luce APS grant will close out next year.
 - j. Public Understanding of Religion – this AM has a track for public scholarship on religion and a networking event. The Taskforce on Valuing and Evaluating Public Scholarship will present its findings at the January 2025 board meeting.
 - k. Publications – JAAR's time to publication has decreased to 19 days. JAAR will go fully online as of January 2025, by decision of OUP. OUP textual studies series has a new editor. Reading Religion has had a great year (see report in Basecamp). RSN will be reconfigured in redesign of website and new CMS.
 - l. State of the field – Academic Relations Committee has created a toolbox for endangered programs/departments; Strategic Planning Taskforce will give interim report at January 2025 BOD meeting; we can anticipate increased need/opportunity for advocacy.
 - m. CMS/AMS. This transition has been costly, difficult, and taxing on staff, but will be complete in early 2025 and will be an improvement over prior systems.
 - n. Pause in awards. Because our systems transitions make administration of grants and awards impossible this year, and because these programs warrant review, the EC recommends a one-year pause (not applicable to travel and book awards). (Motion 1 below).

VI. Update on AMS/CMS and Pausing of Awards/Grants for 2025 (Schipper)

Motion 1:

To authorize AAR staff to implement, and to inform the membership about, a one-year pause in all award and grant programs during 2025. This pause shall not apply to book awards or Annual meeting travel grants. The purpose of this pause is to

transition to a **new** management system and to formally review and revise, as relevant, the AAR's Award and Grant Programs.

Motion 1 approved unanimously.

- VII. EC recommendation for appointments to committees of the board (Park)

Motion 2:

To appoint AAR member Kin Cheung to the Finance and Audit Committee.

To appoint AAR member Davina Lopez to the Finance and Audit Committee.

- To appoint AAR member Whitney Bauman to the Committee on Professional Conduct.

To appoint AAR member Shan Overton to the Governance and Leadership Development Committee.

Motion II approved unanimously

- VIII. Focused Conversation on religious studies matters (Pres. Elect Leela Prasad)

- a. Briefly recapped major points from our September 21st informal online board meeting. See Notes in Basecamp.
- b. National Humanities Council. Recent meeting was attended by Leela and Claudia, along with some AAR Luce grant winners. Leela describes the mood of this meeting as a blend of optimism and worries (e.g., about defunding). The need for coalitions among Humanities is widely recognized.
- c. What religious studies is/does – an underlying question. We have lots of resources among our members for making this information widely available.
- d. Leela recommends that we create more board time to talk about this and to identify what the role of the AAR board might be. These conversations, as we progress, should also be informed by the findings of our Strategic Planning Task Force, which is now underway.
- e. An AAR webinar on department closures was well-attended. Among the matters discussed: the value of archiving the histories of departments; suggestion that the AAR might provide forms of professional training (micro-credentials); departments that morph into centers.
- f. We recognize that the current crisis calls for increased activism and attention to the public understanding of religion and/or without relinquishing our scholarly mission (e.g., the historical study of religions).
- g. Other observations from board members:
 - To promote the academic study of religion, we need to focus not just on its contents but on the skills and capabilities it fosters.
 - We are constantly learning about RS departments and programs ending. Some predict that one liberal arts college a week will be closing.
 - The future of religion, the future of religious studies, and the future of our guild are distinct issues. Our focus should be the latter.
 - Different views on the relative importance of involvement in public conversations about religion. Some board members feel this is an urgent concern.

- Most of our members are under-employed or unemployed in the field of religious studies. We have to rethink the AAR in relation to this.

- IX. Incoming President's Theme (Prasad) – Freedom (see doc in Basecamp)
- X. AM events for BOD members (Schippert) (see doc. in Basecamp)
- XI. Preview of Annual Business Meeting (Schippert) (see doc. in Basecamp)
- XII. Recognition of Outgoing Board Members Dena Pence (Treasurer) Nikki Young (Status Committee Director), and Jin Park (President)
- XIII. Meeting adjourned at 6 p.m. Pacific time (Park)

Respectfully submitted
Kathleen Sands
Secretary to the Board of Directors