

American Academy of Religion
AAR Board of Directors Meeting
September 10-11, 2022

MINUTES - DAY 1

Voting Members Present: Mayra Rivera, Amir Hussain, Jin Y. Park, Sabina Ali, Stacey Floyd-Thomas, Whitney Bauman, Brian Pennington, Nicole Kirk, Thelathia” Nikki” Young, Laurel Schneider, Alice Hunt

Staff Present: Nichol  Franklin, Amy Defibaugh, Elizabeth Hardcastle, Jacob Robinson

I. Call to Order 9:04 AM EST, Saturday, September 10, 2022

II. Approval of Agenda and Minutes of the June Meeting

MOTION 1

To approve the Agenda and June 2022 Minutes

Motion approved

III. President’s Report

President Rivera reported on three major emphases in the work of the AAR this year in addition to meeting planning, staff changes, and general administration.

1. Advocacy for Religious Studies: The staff is beginning work with the Academic Relations Committee on developing an advocacy toolkit intended to support Religious Studies departments in liberal arts academies. This project is in the exploratory phase and is comparable to similar efforts made by the AHA, APA, and MLA in support of the humanities. For now, the project is focused on religious studies rather than theology departments but may expand down the road to meet a variety of constituent needs.
2. Professional development for AAR members: Pending outcomes of the Futures Task Force, we expect a need to pivot from a primary focus on the college and university faculty market to professional development resources for members beyond the job market in colleges and universities. This employment and professional landscape shift is a growing concern for members on and off the Board of Directors.
3. Communications: The AAR Board and staff held a series of open conversations with members in May 2022. Close to 200 members participated. It became a very effective opportunity for members to gain better insight into the issues that face the organization regarding the cost of hybrid meetings, and to raise their

concerns about a changing humanities landscape. These conversations highlighted the sheer diversity of members and their needs.

IV. Executive Director's Report

1. Alice Hunt began her report with the AAR mission and values. As is the custom for the fall meeting, she presented the 2022 Memorial List:

James H. Evans (2021)
 Rahuldeep Singh Gill (2022)
 Debra Majeed (2022)
 Gene Reeves (2019)
 Rosemary R. Reuther (2022)
 J. Deotis Roberts (2022)

2. She then introduced two new senior staff members present at the meeting:
 - Amy Defibaugh, Director of Programs and Meetings
 - Jacob Robinson, Senior Program Coordinator
3. She reminded the Board members that Program Committee nominations are due and reviewed the parameters for nomination.
4. She announced a new grant program for undergraduate research, to provide support for an undergraduate student who is working on a research project in religion supervised by a faculty member who is a member of the AAR. The grant consists of \$5K (with stipulations) and a one-year student membership in the AAR. More information about the grant program is available on the AAR website.
5. She reviewed the Annual Meeting registration statistics for November in Denver, noting that registrations are at 78% of the same time for the pre-pandemic 2019 meeting in San Diego
6. Sexual harassment has been an important topic for the Board this past year, leading to revisions in the Professional Conduct policy as well as an AAR-sponsored webinar that was well-attended. The Program Committee is working on ramping up awareness in Annual Meeting programming.
7. Alice reminded Board members of presidential and board events at the Annual Meeting.
8. The AAR works with Maritz, a global company with established relationships with cities and visitor bureaus. The out-year contracts for future meetings involve significant financial obligations for the AAR, and she reminded the Board that future

planning must account for our existing contractual constraints even as we begin to think about changed structures and modalities for future meetings.

9. Regarding the 2023 Annual Meeting in San Antonio, she led a discussion on the political and religious complexities that now exist for members in their considerations about attendance. We are aware of and are supportive of members who decide not to attend for reasons of conscience regarding political and legal statutes that discriminate against women, sexual minorities, and non-Christian religious persons in that state. We are also aware of and are supportive of members who decide to attend for other reasons of conscience, for example in the case of San Antonio, to support the largely non-white workforce there that is directly affected by conference business or to provide a presence of alternative viewpoints in the downtown setting. The politics of meeting locations will continue to be an important aspect of member participation, and board communication will remain sensitive to the diversity of member views.
10. Alice provided a report on the findings of the communications consultant. People are reading less, and so communication efforts must find ways to convey critical information about the AAR in shorter forms with more visuals. The consultant affirmed the importance of shifting communication emphases to the organization as the sum of its volunteer members served by a small staff, away from a disembodied view of a corporate entity.
11. She closed the report by thanking the volunteer Board for its work, and the staff for their diligence and flexibility in these challenging times.

V. Futures Task Force Report

President Rivera began by thanking Katherine McClymond for her leadership and work on the Futures Task Force. The mandate of the task force was to investigate and imagine the basis of the AAR organization (structures, events, etc.) to reflect changes and trends in our present membership.

The report identifies three broad areas affected by changes in the membership. These are areas that the Board has been discussing and will continue to investigate for improvement and implementation of best practices.

1. The Annual Meeting involves fiscal responsibilities and looking forward should reflect the trend in smaller membership, changing, and shifting resources that characterize pressures on learned societies generally.
2. Professional development is critical as the membership becomes more diverse in professional profile
3. Publications and awards: AAR publications and awards should respond to the present and adapt to new forms of excellence in scholarship and public information about religion.

VI. Treasurer Report

Nicholé Franklin presented the Treasurer's Report on behalf of Dena Pence. The report contains two motions.

MOTION 3

Dissolve separate investment committee, fold its work back into the Finance Committee

Seconded, voted on, and approved.

MOTION 4

Create Finance and Audit Committee with the following charge and composition:

Charge to the Finance & Audit Committee: The Finance & Audit Committee oversees the financial aspects of the AAR including fiscal planning, annual budgeting, investments and the review and acceptance of the annual audit and tax filings.

Composition:

Treasurer (Chair)

President Elect

At-Large Director

Three (3) non-board members, one of whom could be a non-AAR member, with experience in business management, financial and/or investment oversight

Chief Financial Officer/Chief Operating Officer (staff liaison)

The motion was seconded, voted on, and approved.

VII. Board Sub-Committees Report

President Rivera updated the board on its vote in June 2022 to form a sub-committee to transform employment and career development to be more inclusive of alternate paths and to establish a subcommittee on virtual meetings.

Because the Futures Task Force had not yet completed its work, the Executive Committee decided to wait for implementation until receipt of that report. In the meantime, the staff have been directed to develop ideas that they are already working on, to bring back to a future board meeting. The Executive Committee therefore brought the following motion to the board:

MOTION 5

To table the decision made in the Feb 2022 board meeting to establish a board subcommittee on professional development. The Executive Director shall direct AAR staff to identify areas of potential development and intervention in alternative

career professional development, and bring proposals back to board for strategic planning.

The motion was voted on and approved.

VIII. Report of the Subcommittee on Programming

Brian Pennington, who chaired the subcommittee, reported on the work of the Subcommittee on Programming, including goals for virtual meeting development. Principally, the subcommittee recommends that any virtual meeting plan must alleviate pressure on the Annual Meeting and not add to it, or overly burden staff, and be revenue neutral. Several ideas for this are being discussed.

The subcommittee brought the following motion to the board:

MOTION 6

The ED shall direct AAR staff to explore the operational feasibility of various potential components of a virtual meeting and features with the aim of launching a virtual meeting pilot in 2024.

He also reported on the subcommittee's conversations about the ten regions, which are wholly owned subsidiaries of the AAR, but very diverse in size and activity. Each region currently has its own governmental structure, and approximately 20% of AAR members participate in regions/regional meetings. Staff involvement with regions is heavy and in need of clarification, as are operating agreements. The subcommittee brought the following motion forward to the board:

MOTION 7

The Executive Director shall direct staff to consult with the Regions Committee, identify guidelines that will structure regions going forward, and redraft regional Operating Agreements in alignment with those guidelines.

The motion was voted on and approved.

[Day 2 Minutes begin on the next page]

MINUTES - DAY 2

Sunday September 11, 2022

Voting Members Present: Mayra Rivera, Amir Hussain, Jin Y. Park, Sabina Ali, Stacey Floyd-Thomas, Whitney Bauman, Brian Pennington, Nicole Kirk, Thelathia” Nikki” Young, Laurel Schneider, Alice Hunt

Staff Present: Nichol  Franklin, Amy Defibaugh, Elizabeth Hardcastle, Jacob Robinson

IX. Call to Order 9:05 AM EST, Sunday, September 11, 2022

X. Executive Committee Recommendations

MOTION 8

To appoint Janet Jakobsen to the Governance and Leadership Development Committee

The motion was voted on and approved.

MOTION 9

To allow current members and lapsed members to propose papers without current membership (but membership will be required for presentation of accepted papers in the Annual Meeting).

The motion was voted on and approved.

XI. Program Committee Report

Whitney Bauman reported on progress toward developing a program committee handbook, developing and implementing standards for RSO applications and renewals, and a plan to suggest redressing balance issues in programs, to alleviate pressure on the Annual Meeting schedule.

X. Professional Conduct Procedures

Stephen Schaeffer, the AAR General Counsel, met via remote connection with the Board to discuss the proposed revisions to the Professional Conduct Procedures of the AAR and to answer any questions.

MOTION 10

To adopt the proposed revisions to the AAR Professional Conduct Procedures, to go into effect immediately.

The motion was voted on and approved.

XII. Other Business

Whitney Bauman discussed the Florida HB7 “Stop Woke Act” that restricts academic freedom in teaching about racism in American history and the “Don’t Say Gay” bill that does the same regarding discrimination against LGBTQ persons. The discussion led to the following motion:

MOTION 11

To vote in principle to issue a statement or letter of advocacy on academic freedom in light of HB7 to the Board of Governors in Florida that will be requested through the AAR existing process for statements and letters. re HB7

The motion was voted on and approved.

XIII. The meeting adjourned at 10:40am

Respectfully submitted,
Laurel C. Schneider, Secretary