

Association for the Sociology of Religion
Opening Council Meeting Minutes
August 19, 2023
Gerardo Marti, President, Presiding

Present:

Katie Corcoran, Council; Ruthie Braunstein, Incoming Program Chair; Sam Perry, Council; Conrad Hackett, Council; Damon Mayrl, Council; Grace Yukich, President-Elect; Rachel Kraus, Executive Officer; Maureen Day, Secretary; Gerardo Marti, President; Jim Spickard, PastPresident; Titus Hjelm, Editor – Sociology of Religion; Tricia Bruce, Council; Rebecca Catto, Outgoing Program Chair; Laurel Kearns, Council; Sarah Lovine, Oxford University Press; Afe Adogame, Council; Gary Adler, Council; Jaime Kucinskis, Council; Philip Schwadel, Council.

Gerardo Marti called meeting to order at 1:10pm.

Introductions

Invites approval for 2022 minutes.

Conrad moves, Ruthie seconds, passes unanimously.

President's remarks

Lots of exciting work within our conference and intersection of religion and sociology broadly.

Thanks to Jim for all his work for the academy and association.

Thanks to Grace for her scholarship and service.

Thanks to Rachel for her gracious and tireless service for many years to the association.

Thanks to Ruthie for all the work in scheduling and managing the themes.

2023 Conference (Program Chair, Executive Officer)

- Program chair
 - (missed some of this due to Zoom connection)
 - Symposia are an exciting offering this year
 - Trouble with submissions via the website
 - Two “Manuscript Meets Critics” and one “Before the Field” session
- Rachel gives an update on the conference
 - We're a little under registrations
 - We have hit our hotel room quota
- General comments
 - Positive repercussions of the symposia, such as networking and generating project ideas.
 - Knowing about the Gallagher grants earlier so that people can use these.

Committee Reports

- Nominating Committee
 - We knew we needed more diverse (on a number of demographic factors) leadership and membership.
 - We also realized we needed active members who could pull in people who have new ties that could pull in new membership.

- In response to a question on leadership and tenure: We tend to pull in “younger” scholars via the Council, but the President tends to be further along in their career.
- Nominating Committee should speak to other associations’ nominating committees so that the leadership is not duplicated across organizations.

Sociology of Religion and OUP

- Sarah Lovine from OUP
 - Appreciation of Titus and Joseph and their work on the journal
 - Major driver is open access
 - Costs from consumer to producer
 - Real serious look at quality (as some open access is of lower quality)
 - \$4000 is a rough estimate of an OA journal article; our cost is closer to \$3200
 - As a journal gets more open access articles, people start to wonder why they would pay to subscribe
 - Costs for subscriptions are shifting and new ways of looking at financial offsets/costs are being considered
 - We are going to be online only by 2028.
 - This will mean we’ll renegotiate with new proposal soon to pass the savings along.
 - Some open access-only journals are driving the market and traditional university journals are needing to adapt to no-cost competitors.
 - You want to have consistency between readers and authors; international libraries will drop their subscriptions if they do not see relevant articles in the journal.
 - We can discuss the possibility of becoming an association-funded journal, but that is very expensive
 - We have had some production lags this year, especially in two areas. We are working on it.
 - People don’t necessarily realize the quality of a journal that is reaching out for them to publish. Quality matters for tenure.
- Titus of SofR
 - He’s very thankful for the people who have on-boarded him. Evan, Eric and Esther have been especially key.
 - Slight drop in impact factor, still at top of field.
 - Response: There is now a different methodology, and so 2019 is a better comparison, and we are higher than that time.
 - Social media reach. Evan is covering this part, but the field is changing quite rapidly. It’s been hard to have a clear strategy, and unsure how much we would like to spend. We’d like to see impact (e.g., how does visibility lead to citation, rather than just presence/retweets). We’re going on with the podcast. It is not necessarily located in the most visible place. We don’t necessarily want it on spotify as it is not geared for the typical person.
 - We get submissions that are very far from our scope. Planning to provide clearer criteria.
 - We don’t have page constraints anymore.
 - Discussion:
 - We have a very impressive twitter following compared to peer organizations.
 - We could think about public forums like *The Conversation* as a way to get our work and organization more visible.

- How can we help authors promote their own articles? OUP has a resource that might help. There is also a video author abstract option that can catch people's attention. *Social Problems* does this but there are some issues with cost as they have a professional team who creates these.
- What about global south, independent scholars, non-funded projects that cannot afford open access fees? This is the tension, there might be options in other journals.

Website

- There have been missed deadlines with our webmaster, some were very serious problems, and there are things that need fixing. Paypal has been available for some time.
 - This is elaborated in the report, such as security, paypal, etc.
- We want a much more active (e.g., it sends an automated confirmation) proposal system.
- We plan to host new things—like blogs, Gallagher Awards application and the meeting minutes—on the new site. Get these up sooner and get our different pieces running more smoothly
- I think we should stay with our webmaster. He gets things done after some prodding.
- Discussion
 - Mail Merge is not a work around. It is working with the plug-ins we have. And we should stick with the plug-ins we have. If we move to Google docs, we lose the ability to see whether people have paid.
 - There are holes in our current system on this, like a person could register, but pay with a check. But we need to reduce confusion, whatever that looks like.
 - I have a list of five items that can be done within the \$2000 budget allowance.
 - Maintaining the website's front end, including posting new information to the site and updating information currently there.
 - This includes editing existing webpages, repairing broken links, and adding new pages as needed.
 - Creating and editing submission forms for conferences, grant applications, etc.
 - Working with the Program Committee and the various grant committees to make sure that the forms contain the information that those committees need.
 - Downloading the submitted information and distributing it to the Program Chair, Chairs of grant committees, and EO.
 - Managing ASR email addresses (____@sociologyofreligion.org).
 - First-line problem solving as website issues arise.
 - Interface with Tom about harder issues, such as aesthetic and functional upgrades and solving problems with the more complicated plug-ins (e.g., the Membership system).
 - We need someone to do website and social media. Website is more specific, but social media is more ongoing.
 - Does forming a digital communications committee make sense? A committee to oversee this, not implement it, could make sense.
 - Making it more user-friendly, useful, and streamlined is important.
 - Does it make sense to form a committee?
 - Forming a committee means problems and solutions are identified, someone still needs to have the skills to do it.
 - Should we vote on this?

- It makes sense to postpone a vote and talk to members during the conference to hear thoughts.
- Can we place that on the Tuesday (closing) agenda? Yes.
- The pay is very low for technology pay.

Budget and finance

- Going based off of estimates that we have approved, so actual costs may be lower. We need to increase revenue and lower costs.
- We are relatively small but we meet in relatively expensive cities. So we have more expenses than the typical resources. Expensive cities is because we follow ASA.
- Saves a lot of money to do an online conference. Could we alternate?
- Raising registration costs is another option.
- We moved our investments into a more socially conscience service and now we are also withdrawing in our interest (4%, \$30,000), which gives us additional revenue. We don't touch the principal.
- Discussion:
 - Why go to SSSR vs. ASA? We aren't sure. We should have this conversation.
 - ASR/SSSR membership overlap is high and so such a move doesn't make sense.
 - RRA contributes \$10,000 to be a part of SSSR.
- Mayflower is a really great change.
- If we were to get a Treasurer or similar, they should have access to the Mayflower Dashboard.
- The ESG investment is doing well. Our funds are very healthy and are seeing the expected returns.
- We would suggest co-sponsorships for future conferences, perhaps, to help offset costs.
- Happy to hear we might be seeing money back from OUP.
- Discussion:
 - Can the finance committee continue to do the work it is doing and working through the issues?
 - What can the finance committee do as opposed to the Council here?
 - Are there changes we can make within our immediate capacity (e.g., increase membership fee)? If we are operating in a deficit, what are we thinking about with the EO role.
 - Should we have a treasurer?
 - There are a lot of questions here. Do you have suggestions?
 - We need to take more firm control of the finances through the committee. We need to be more careful about what we ask of the EO, it is irresponsible to ask for so much from the EO.
 - Budgetary items should go through the Finance Committee, but they don't always do?
 - Can they handle that? I think so.
 - RRA has an elected treasurer. Do they have a paid person who manages their money? Unknown.
 - There is turnover and each year the role of the committee changes. There needs to be a clearer role of the Committee if they are going to be given more tasks and responsibility.
 - Historically the finance committee acted more like fundraisers.

- What do we want from a treasurer? An investment person? Do we want them to take things off of the EO's plate? Does this person look over the budget? Does it actually save time to have a second person write checks?
 - Rachel: It would. Treasurer is really built into the EO position, I'd like a second set of eyes to look at the checking account, Fichter awards and others. And it would save time to have another person writing checks.
 - Having someone to help the EO should be at the forefront of our minds.
- Creating a position that does not oversee investments (Mayflower does this) but does help with EO's financial duties this makes sense.
- We definitely need someone who will be around for a while as there is a big learning curve on this.
- The finance committee could evaluate the budget and also recommend whether we need a treasurer and outline what sorts of duties this person would do. Have a report by October.
- We should defer to Rachel in what the job description should look like.
- We need to have a more serious discussion on this. We cannot finish this today. Tuesday?
- Tricia is no longer going to be the chair, but will be on the committee. It would be good to have a charge and know what needs to be done during these transitions.
- We should point out what needs to be discussed.
- We aren't finalizing a decision, but we are creating a process. Grace (as Pres.) and Rachel (as EO) should also be included in the conversation.
- Tricia moves: Finance committee examine budgetary needs of organization and look into potential need for a treasurer (hired or elected); report by October. Damon seconds. Motion passes unanimously.

Role of EO

- The role becomes more and more of a time commitment. When the search for a new EO was opened, no one was seriously interested.
 - Rachel's proposal from \$13K to \$16.5K, course release (\$3500), student worker.
 - Rachel is asked to leave the room.
 - We sent out a call for a new EO and no one was interested. Once Rachel saw that ASR was willing to increase funds, she offered a proposal to stay. Her requested increase is modest. This will also be reasonable in the context of greater website and finance support than she currently enjoys. Our finances are not amazing, but we need a functioning EO for the health of the association. Rachel is not pushing for the EO position, she is willing to do this. I don't know if we could even get someone else at a higher stipend. Our membership is down.
 - Part of why our membership is down is a non-functioning membership committee.
 - Not sure if membership committee is really "at fault" as there are limits to what this committee can accomplish.
 - Not include "course release" in compensation in general as this amount varies considerably across institutions. Maybe a pool of money that can be allocated for stipend or course release.
 - This is equivalent to asking for a raise from an experienced person. Having her at this pay rate until a new person at a lower rate is found could work. This could be an interim position.
 - I'd like to see the course release money distinguished from the salary and not a general compensation pool. I think that is what we do.
 - I'm not hearing opposition, but we're not sure how to structure it.

- I think the job description should stay the same so we are not setting a precedent for a future EO.
- Do we vote now or delay until closing meeting?
- So increase stipend and is this lumped with course release, student assistant and web assistance.
- This is rushed. But we lose people at the second meeting. Could we draft a motion now for Tuesday?
- Jim moves to raise stipend to 16.5K + 3.5K course release. Conrad seconds. Motion passes unanimously.

Adjourn at 5:05pm

Respectfully submitted,
Maureen K. Day

Association for the Sociology of Religion
Business Meeting Minutes
August 18, 2023
Gerardo Marti, President, Presiding

President's Remarks (Gerardo)

- Welcome and overview of meeting
- COVID, adaptations to online, but we missed the informal moments
- Gerardo discusses membership numbers challenges, declines broadly, international outreach, cost of attending conference, etc.
- Overview and gratitude for new types of sessions (symposia, manuscript meets critics)
- Furfey lecture
- Healthy number of registrations, presentations compared to pre-COVID numbers
- Serious look at expenses, including relationship with ASA, OUP
- Journal makes money and is also top in religion field

Journal Editor's Remarks

- Nice to see so many familiar names
- Invitation to approach him to join editorial board
- Acknowledges his team
- International profile of journal, most (70%) submissions come from North America, but we are getting more from Europe and want to push this, including beyond Europe.
- Wanting to be clearer about what is expected from submissions. Wanting to have more global questions also to use more global citations.

Questions and comments

- Once in a while having an article that does not need to be in English.
 - Publications committee can have more deliberate conversations about this. Moving to fully electronic could facilitate this (having English side by side).
- We could hold a pre-conference for grad students with mentors who volunteer to read and comment on papers, with an eye toward supporting research with potential for publication in Sociology of Religion.
- We could co-sponsor a session with the European Association for the Sociology of Religion, also held in August. Perhaps with "Part I" in U.S. and "Part II" in Europe (or vice versa).
- Suggestion to incorporate more "affiliate groups" -- a successful model used at SSSR.
- We could pair a grad student with a mentor who meets with them early in the meeting, prior to their presentation. Someone did this for me years ago.
- We could introduce a "buddy system" for new attendees—pairing them with an experienced attendee to connect early in the meeting. This way you are not lost in the mix of being new or unsure what to do during downtime.
- Connection with other associations, especially international.
- Great mentoring session. How to we make sure this is not a one-moment thing? SSSR has created a formal mentoring relationship. Could we do this? This could help us meet our goal of mentoring younger scholars.
 - We can think about this.
 - If you can think of something you want to see, organize it.

- SofR doesn't do research notes, so be sure it is written as an article. We get a lot of things that don't belong in the journal, especially things that are beyond sociology

Acknowledgement of Present Council-Members

- Tricia, Jim, and Rachel

President-Elect's Remarks (Grace)

- Passing of gavel
- Invitation to reach out if you have any ideas for ASR
- Religion and Intersectionality is next year's theme, reach out if you have ideas
- Acknowledgement of Gerardo's service
- Let me know if you want to get more involved

Adjourn at 12:56pm

Respectfully submitted,
Maureen Day
Secretary

Association for the Sociology of Religion
Closing Council Meeting Minutes
August 22, 2023
Grace Yukich, President, Presiding

Meeting is called to order at 8:04am

Grace Yukich, President; Gerardo Marti, Past-President; Conrad Hackett, Council; Rachel Krause, Executive Officer; Ruthie Braunstein, Program Chair; Jaime Kucinkas, Council; Tricia Bruce, President-Elect; Philip Schwadel, Council; Titus Hjelm, Editor – Sociology of Religion; Rebecca Catto, Outgoing Program Chair.

Over Zoom:

Gary Adler, Council; Aida Islea Ramos, Incoming Program Chair; Samuel Perry, Council; Laurel Kearns, Council; Maureen Day, Secretary

I. Introductions

II. Highlights of first council meeting (Gerardo Marti, immediate past president)

- New types of sessions that was also intended to attract new types of people
- Budget and finance concerns, potential for treasurer
- Discussion about journal with Titus and OUP
 - Revenue and open access
 - Becoming more international
 - Increasing EO stipend
 - Discussion:
 - Members can be angry about hybrid model, paying twice (open access and for subscription).
 - Having the mentoring session earlier so new people have someone to talk to.
 - What are our grad student numbers? We can look that up. About 40.
 - Cost is hard for grad students.
 - The symposia generated cohesion. Hotel did not do this well. Can get funding potentially.
 - Think about organizing these for next year.

III. 2024 Annual Meeting Plans

A. Introduction of 2024 Program Chair, Aida Ramos

- Will be working with the new types of program offerings

B. Theme/Call for Papers: “Religion and Intersectionality”

- Overlap with ASA theme
- Given meeting’s locale in Quebec, indigenous religion is a good theme, as is religion and immigration.
 - Indigenous religion, there might be leads in RRA program from two years ago. Aida can look at this and start from there.
- Can we do a special issue highlighting symposia papers?

- Timeline and number of publications makes this difficult.
- Blog could be a resource for this.
- We could explore a collaboration with sociology of religion colleagues in Europe.
 - Part one in US and part two in Europe with a Zoom option.

C. Hotel and other logistics (Rachel Kraus, Executive Officer)

- We'll be at the end of ASA rather than beginning.
- Hotel only has king beds, but will have cots.
- We'll be close to ASA (that and cost are two main factors).

IV. Items for the coming year

A. Budget Approval

- Raising dues conversation last year, but this is not the time to do it. We should revisit this. This is the easiest way to raise revenues. Raise non-student and non-low-income membership fee by \$20, which would raise \$5000-7000.
- Dues are going up everywhere, so this is okay. We should raise across the board. Agreement voiced by several, higher-tier memberships should go up more. Some pieces of finance report (specifically grants) is a little fuzzy.
 - Fewer Gallagher applications, so less was distributed. What about \$2000 jump? Is there a typo? We are talking about getting a treasurer.
- What about raising top tier \$60? That might be a bit much.
- Is there an option to donate? Yes. "Cover a student's membership" button could be added. Internal funding to cover memberships makes a difference.
- Raise dues 5, 10, 20 and 60 for the four categories. Maybe 40 rather than 60. What about also considering category A or B country of residence of scholar?
- We help people when they ask for this. Is there a mechanism to ask for funds? No. Room block discounts? We get some free nights, but we don't typically give those out.
- Do we charge people to publish in our journal? Members publish for free.
- SSSR has a higher membership fee for those who don't attend the meeting.
 - People are asking what their membership is really for. Conference is a separate fee. Now some people attend conferences just to present and go. First time attendees, good to have symposia, but we need to know why we have a membership.
- Conrad moves that we raise membership fees by 5, 10, 20 and 40. Jaime seconds. Motion passes unanimously.
 - Concern that multi-year memberships are charged every year rather than just one large up-front cost.
- Invitation from Grace to look a little more closely at the budget in a shared Zoom meeting in the near future. 2024 budget will be approved today, but future years' consideration and longer-term thinking.
- Jim offered to work on the website as Website Assistant for the specific items (maintaining front end, creating and editing forms for conference papers and others, managing ASR emails, solving any simple problems, interfacing with webmaster for more complex issues) for \$2000.
 - Maintaining the website's front end, including posting new information to the site and updating information currently there.
 - This includes editing existing webpages, repairing broken links, and adding new pages as needed.

- Creating and editing submission forms for conferences, grant applications, etc.
 - Working with the Program Committee and the various grant committees to make sure that the forms contain the information that those committees need.
 - Downloading the submitted information and distributing it to the Program Chair, Chairs of grant committees, and EO.
- Managing ASR email addresses (____@sociologyofreligion.org).
- First-line problem solving as website issues arise.
- Interface with Tom about harder issues, such as aesthetic and functional upgrades and solving problems with the more complicated plug-ins (e.g., the Membership system).
- This is a really great bargain and ensures that our needs are taken care of in a timely way.
- Does Jim have the capacity to do this? Jim is great at this and is dedicated.
- We need to be constantly updating the website. Is it good to put all of this on one person?
- We talked about the possibility of a communications committee, including digital, this could fall under them. We do need to build more capacity.
- It is good to specify that this goes to Jim this year and then revisit?
- Conrad moves that we approve the \$2000 for Web Assistant this calendar year. Tricia seconds. Motion passes unanimously

B. Search for Executive Officer

- Rachel recaps the busyness of the EO position that she shared at the opening meeting for those who were not present and then leaves room.
- Search for EO began because Rachel wanted to step down. When we started thinking about a re-organization of the position, she said she offered a proposal so that she could do this. Raise stipend, keep course release, website assistance, and student assistant.
- We need to consider whether we are closing the search and what the full compensation will look like.
- We don't have an evaluation process. Whether there was a particular term EOs served? No.
- Hopefully the new website will fix the areas in that are taking the most of her time. We want to make sure we have streamlined our knowledge systems.
- Search for EO is closed.
- Vote on \$1000 student assistant.
- Tricia moves for \$1000 student assistant. Jaime seconds. Unanimously approved.
- We want create a system for review and feedback.
- There was a typo in the budget that will be amended. EO compensation will be edited, as well (it is currently not for the coming year). Should we institute this sooner?
- Add line to budget to 2024 for EO bonus for \$3500.
- \$45,000 deficit. Cap the Gallagher budget?
- Phil moves to approve budget. Tricia seconds. Unanimously passes.

C. Membership

1. Foster Diversity

- Ad hoc DEI committee. Thinking especially about structural changes to the association.

2. Programming

- Buddy program for new attendees, grad students, etc.

Adjourn at 10am

Respectfully submitted,

Maureen Day

Secretary