

Material Secularisms: MAR-AAR Workshop Proposal

Persons Responsible

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Project Overview

We seek up to \$3,000 to support a half-day workshop on Material Secularisms. The *tentative* date for this workshop will be Sunday, March 8, 2020 - i.e., in anticipation of the MAR-AAR/SBL 2020 Conference. We plan to host this workshop on the campus of the University of Pennsylvania. Hosting *Material Secularisms* will create a convergence point for these conversations and establish the Mid-Atlantic Region of the AAR as a hub for this research.

The funds we are requesting from the AAR will cover the following:

- A working lunch in San Diego in anticipation of the workshop
- Travel reimbursement for up to six (6) panelists from the Mid-Atlantic region
- A \$250 honorarium for up to six (6) panelists from the Mid-Atlantic region
- A lunch for workshop participants from the Mid-Atlantic region

Unused funds will be returned to the AAR, accompanied by an expense report.

Any supplemental expenses (such as administrative support, lodging for the panelists, and other food) will come from the Boardman Fund at the University of Pennsylvania, departmental research funds, and other Penn resources. Holding the event at Penn will allow a number of cost-saving measures, including:

- taking advantage of the graduate assistant provided by the departmental Boardman fund,
- taking advantage of other administrative resources, and
- using Penn facilities to save on room rental costs.

Outcomes Resulting from the Grant

1. A working lunch in November 2019 at AAR national in San Diego with key constituents to explore workshop aims, topics, and deliverables
2. A funded half-day workshop for approximately 30 people in March 2020, including panelists, respondents, and participants from the Mid-Atlantic Region
3. A series of blog posts summarizing the workshop and discussions, posted on the Nonreligion and Secularity Research Network (NSRN) Blog
4. We remain open to other potential media as per recommendation by AAR - such as a podcast or scholarly project
5. We plan to add a new, experimental section to the MAR-AAR on Secularism for our 2021 Conference, continuing on the momentum of this workshop

Proposed Budget and Timeline

| Expense | Recipient | Timeline for Use of the Funds | Itemized Costs | Totals |
|--------------------------------|--|--|---|----------------|
| Travel | <p>A. MAR-AAR will reimburse all panelist train travel from within the region</p> <p>B. MAR-AAR will provide gas, IRS mileage, and toll reimbursement for all panelists for those traveling by car</p> <p><i>In both cases we will present receipts in our expense report.</i></p> | March 2020, following the event | <p>A. Up to \$34 per panelist</p> <p>B. Up to \$100 per panelist</p> | \$600 |
| Honoraria @ \$250 per panelist | <p>A. Terrence Johnson (Georgetown)</p> <p>B. Ann Pellegrini (New York University)</p> <p>C. Courtney Bender (Columbia)</p> <p>D. John Modern (Franklin & Marshall)</p> <p>E. Josef Sorett (Columbia)</p> <p>F. Jodi Eichler-Levine (Lehigh)</p> | March 2020, following the event | <p>A. \$250</p> <p>B. \$250</p> <p>C. \$250</p> <p>D. \$250</p> <p>E. \$250</p> <p>F. \$250</p> | \$1,500 |
| Food (<i>no alcohol</i>) | <p>A. Working lunch in San Diego</p> <p>B. Catered lunch</p> <p>C. Coffee and bagels</p> | <p>November 2019</p> <p>March 2020</p> | <p>A. Up to \$200 total</p> <p>B. Up to \$500 total (@ \$17 per person, x 30)</p> <p>C. Up to \$100 total</p> | \$800 |
| Total | | | | \$2,900 |

In the event that the AAR is unable to fund the full ~\$3,000, we are prepared to cut the panelists to three (3), as opposed to six, thereby making the budget ~\$1,900.

Narrative Description of Project

The study of what Talal Asad calls “formations of the secular” is advancing across the humanities, creating an interdisciplinary subfield referred to as *secularism studies* or *critical secularism studies*. Within religious studies, a “materialist shift” (Vasquez 2011, Chidester 2018) calls attention to the way that religion is made not just by frames of belief, but by bodies, practices, objects, places, and other material things. This means that the secular, in its many historically and geographically local iterations, is made, rather than found. A new trend in this area has been to study how these formations can be understood as material. Secularism is also, as Ann Pellegrini writes, a “structure of feeling” that organizes our bodily reactions and dispositions. And secularism is a full-fledged material culture encompassing objects, clothing, urban space, architecture, monuments, and media. These projects have, to date, been scattered across subfields and institutions.

The proposed workshop will explore how this can be applied to the study of secularism, suggesting that formations of the secular, too, can be understood not just as belief or disbelief, but by attending to their material components. The critical study of these dynamics is inherently interdisciplinary, and it is this interdisciplinarity that will shape this panel. The Mid-Atlantic Region is the ideal stage to launch this project owing to a high number of religious studies scholars working in this area.

The workshop will take place immediately before the MAR-AAR/SBL 2020 conference. As a workshop, the goals of the event will be to

- (a) Present a model for other regions to follow in crafting a workshop related to specific, regionally-relevant tasks
- (b) convene scholars with similar interests in the Mid-Atlantic Region for exploration of ideas
- (c) develop a series of public facing blog posts and/or podcasts related to the themes of the conference

Statement, re: Replication in Other Regions

The workshop will be based on a well-received format used at the recent Lehigh University (also within the MAR-AAR) conference “Religion and Its Many American Publics.” The Lehigh conference brought participants in 3-person panels, with a mix of formal paper presentation and unstructured conversation. This format allowed for a rich exchange of ideas. We believe this structure will be effective at cultivating a regional network, and can be adapted for other regions.

Here is the format:

- Planning meeting(s) in anticipation of the event
- A half-day workshop, advertised by AAR National, the MAR-AAR, and the Department of Religion at the University of Pennsylvania
 - A series of three-person panels, centered on a central idea - moderated by Professor Donovan Schaefer
 - 10 minute presentations per panelist.
 - 60 mins of moderated discussion.
 - Papers will be presented in advance via the moderator(s).

- Interactivity and active engagement will be promoted.

Draft Workshop Schedule

- 9:30 AM – Coffee and Welcome
- 9:45 AM-11:15 PM – Panel 1 (3 speakers)
- 11:30-1:00 PM – Catered Lunch
- 1:00-2:30 – Panel 2 (3 speakers)
- 2:30-2:45 – Break
- 2:45-4:15 – Panel 3 (3 speakers)