MINUTES
AAR Board of Directors Meeting
November 17, 2017
4-6 p.m.
Boston, Massachusetts

Present: Eddie Glaude, Jonathan Sarna, Leela Prasad, Grace Ji Sun Kim, Asma Afsaruddin, Laurie Patton, Kecia Ali, Kerry Danner, Bhakti Mamtora, Kathryn McClymond, David Gushee, Michael McNally, Jack Fitzmier, Deborah Minor, Terri Theisen

President Glaude called the meeting to order at 4p.m.

I. Approval of September Minutes
Motion 1: to approve the minutes of September meeting.
Unanimously Approved

II. Financial Updates Deborah Minor
The Annual Meeting is far exceeding expectations for registrants. Membership numbers are still declining, but the decline is appreciably slowing. Turning to the audit, the numbers from the audit which the Board had considered at its September meeting have not changed. The audit firm, on a call and in a letter, concluded AAR had a clean audit with no comments save that AAR had several unpaid outstanding checks. The audit committee, comprised of the presidential line, then convened on the phone with the auditing firm, and this message was echoed. Treasurer Sarna pointed out that such a clean audit and books is not altogether common, and that the question of the outstanding checks was a procedural question about how the AAR will pursue such checks going forward. Deborah Minor was praised for her leadership on the books.

III. Executive Director’s Report Jack Fitzmier

F.B.I. Update
To commemorate the 20th anniversary of the tragic Branch Davidian standoff, which led to a collaboration between the AAR and the F.B.I. program to prevent such tragedies in the future, the original players had assembled at a panel and lunch at Harvard Divinity School: the head of the FBI Academy and the F.B.I. Critical Incidence Response Group. AAR senior staff member Steve Herrick was recognized for his work tending this collaboration with a prominent gift.

Staff
Jack reported how helpful has been the Board approved Transition Plan. An unexpected recent retirement by Susan Snider, who had served as webmaster as well supporting the publication programs, has presented a challenge, since the Transition Plan calls for no significant new hires until the hiring of a new Executive Director. Michelle Hall has been retained on a 1 year contract to cover the webmaster duties; it remains unclear how to support the publications piece. C.F.O. Deborah Minor has renegotiated and will stay with AAR through the summer in order to aid with the transition. Jack reported he is on track to deliver the “Book of Knowledge” on the timeline called for in the transition plan; He has drawn up the table of contents and is soliciting the content for sections from relevant staff members.
Regions
Jack indicated that it is time for AAR to think about optimizing our regions, and that the SBL Executive Director, John Kutsko agrees, and that we consider creating a joint AAR/SBL Task Force to make recommendations. It was added that the Regions should be thought of in terms of the Strategic Plan’s emphasis on the AAR as a 365 day organization.

Nominations
The Board will attend to improving the nominations process at its February Meeting and staff will scan the nominations processes of other ACLS organizations after the Annual Meeting.

Task: JF: someone at Luce Center does a scan of nominating processes at other ACLS orgs

Professional Conduct Task Force
Kecia Ali and Jack Fitzmier spoke briefly about the circulated draft document on Professional Conduct. The document sets an aspirational tone grounded in our values, but also grounded in ways it will inform practices in teaching, scholarship, advising, mentoring, etc. The status committees each offered extensive comments on the draft, which has been posted on the website since mid-October. An annual meeting session is dedicated to a discussion of the draft, and taking all comments into account, the Task Force will meet on Monday of the Annual Meeting to finalize it. There will be a hand-off from the Task Force for the next steps of deliberations of policies and procedures to implement the work of the task force. Some documents of policies and practices will need to be incorporated. Get it right, not fast. Stay in touch with the Program Committee as we go forward.

Task: David and Laurie think through how to operationalize list of problematic behavior.

IV. New Business

A) Feb 16-18 Atlanta
David Gushee spoke to the elements of the February Meeting. Need to have the
Book of Knowledge
Performance Objectives of Staff
Strategic/Tactical Plans
Tech Audit
Nominating Committee,
Professional Conduct Task Force

B) Executive Committee’s Motion to Postpone Session on BDS at AAR.
President Glaude then related the difficult decision made by the Executive Committee at its regularly scheduled meeting the night before to postpone a session on BDS. Board members, along with Program Committee members, and all registered attendees of the meeting had received the statement of the decision earlier that morning.

Although it was noted that the panel as originally proposed was a courageous and good faith effort to have a productive discussion of the Boycott, Divest, and Sanction movement in the
context of religions and religious studies – a conversation that the AAR could engender in a way that other academic societies torn by the issue have not, President Glaude discussed how the decision was forced in the first place by changes in the constitution of the panel in the past week.

What follows come from the minutes of the Executive Committee meeting.

> Other agenda items were postponed to enable a fuller discussion of program session A19-277 Theme: Arguing Boycott, Divest, and Sanction (BDS) and Religion after two panelists and the moderator withdrew, and after AAR leadership was made aware of deep concerns from AAR members on both sides of the issue about whether the panel would continue or be cancelled.

> Having consulted the Chair of the Program Committee prior to the meeting and consulting via speakerphone an organizer of the session, and after considerable discussion about how best to proceed in light of the values of the AAR and the “big tent” constituency of the AAR membership, the Executive Committee identified a number of alternatives, and unanimously chose to postpone, not cancel, the session at this Annual Meeting and to affirm the opportunity for the airing of ideas by keeping the room available at the planned time for informal conversation and conveying this in the following message to conference registrants.

> E.C. Motion 1. Since the originally stated aims of the session are no longer viable, the AAR Executive Committee has unanimously voted to postpone the session. The room will be available for informal conversation.

> Unanimously Approved

V. Introduction of Newly Elected Directors

Jack Fitzmier introduced the newly elected members of the Board, the first two of whom were able to join the meeting at this time.

- Kerry Danner, Contingent Faculty Director
- Rachel Toombs, Student Director
- Jose Cabezón, Vice President
- Kimberly Rae Connor, Secretary
- Katherine Downey, Regions Director

V. Recognition of Departing Directors:

The following were recognized as they depart the Board.

- Eddie Glaude, Jr., President
- Michael McNally, Secretary
- Bhakti Mamtora, Student Director
- Asma Afsaruddin, At Large Director

VII. Executive Director Search Update David Gushee and Terri Theisen

Staff were excused (though new members were invited to remain) for an update on the search. Vice President David Gushee related that the Board’s most important task in the next year will be the selection of a new Executive Director, to lead the organization in light of the aspirations of
the Strategic Plan. The Search Committee as approved by the Board last year, is chaired by David Gushee and includes Laurie Patton, Jonathan Sarna, Kecia Ali, Eddie Glaude, Jr. and Michael McNally. In light of AAR’s value of transparency, the search process includes a communications plan with stakeholders and membership. Upon every meeting or a milestone, the plan calls for the sharing of an update, first to the Board, the chairs of committees, and then the next day to the membership.

Terri Theisen presented a recirculated June 24, 2017 summary of her stakeholder feedback. She indicated that much of the feedback could be encapsulated in terms of change management, bringing the organization in line with many of the aspirations and adjustments of the Strategic Plan. Terri reported she is still deep in the sourcing of candidates, having spoken with several dozen and meeting an additional number at the Annual Meeting. She encouraged all to reach out to her with nominations and to spread the word. Two contemplated rounds of interviews in March and April will lead to a finalists’ visit with staff and presentation to the Board for a decision with an eye toward a late June 2019 start date.

VIII. New Business

The Board then discussed the need to establish a policy on cancellations, postponements, and modifications of approved session, and agreed the process should begin with the Program Committee.

**Motion 2:** the Board asks the Program Committee to review the relevant policy considerations that can be derived from the issues raised by the postponed session of 2017, and to draft a policy on cancellation/postponement/modification of sessions and bring to the Board for consideration by its February 2018 meeting.

Unanimously Approved

The meeting was adjourned at 6pm

Respectfully Submitted,

Michael McNally, Secretary