MINUTES
American Academy of Religion
Board of Directors Meeting
February 18-19, 2017
Atlanta, GA

Present: Eddie Glaude, Jr., David Gushee, Laurie Patton, Grace Ji Sun Kim, Leela Prasad, Kerry Danner, Michael McNally, Kathryn McClymond, Ardy Bass, Bhakti Mamtora, Asma Afsaruddin, Kecia Ali, Amy Yandell, Deborah Minor, Jack Fitzmier

I. Call to Order and Approval of the Agenda
President Eddie Glaude, Jr., called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m.

Motion 1: To approve the Agenda
Approved unanimously

II. Introduction of New Directors
- Leela Prasad, Duke, At Large Director
- Kathryn McClymond, Georgia State University, Program Director
- Kerry Danner, Georgetown University, Contingent Faculty Task Force, serving the BoD ex officio until a proposal to amend by laws creates a Contingent Faculty Director for representation of this constituency of the AAR Membership
- Laurie Patton, Middlebury College, Vice President
- Amy Yandell, Associate Director of Employment Services was introduced as the staff person who will be assisting Jack with the strategic plan implementation.

III. Approval of the Board Minutes of November 18, 2016

Motion 2 to approve the minutes of Nov 18, 2016
Approved Unanimously as amended

IV. President’s Report: Discussion of Executive Director Search Process
President Glaude gave an overview of the Executive Director Search Process, noting that it is the most important work the BoD will be doing. The planned timeline includes a public launch in July 2017 and an anticipated start date of July 1 2018.

There was discussion of the ambiguity of the November BoD action designating the Executive Committee as the search committee. David Gushee, as President at the time of the new Executive Director, would chair the process. And certainly the upcoming Vice President would be consulted, but because those newly elected officers (including a new Secretary) would come on board at the time of interviews, it was seen as important that the currently constituted Executive Committee, charged as it has been with serving as a planning committee at each step of the Strategic Plan process, see the process of the search through.
Motion 3: to approve the current Executive Committee to continue to serve as the Search Committee through the completion of the Executive Director search process
Approved Unanimously

The BoD also considered a draft search announcement: The AAR Looks to the Future

Motion 4: to approve the AAR Looks to the Future announcement as amended [final paragraph should read:
The Board of Directors is leading the search for the next Executive Director and intends to oversee a smooth transition during the next two years. The Board has engaged the services of a consulting firm to manage the search. The Board and the consultants will begin preliminary search work this Spring of 2017, and will formally launch the search in summer, 2017. AAR membership will be broadly consulted throughout the search process. We hope that our new Executive Director will be in place by Summer of 2018. Jack will be available for consultation with his successor through June 30, 2019.
Approved unanimously

V. Executive Director’s Report
A. Reading Religion
After a series of brief items Executive Director Jack Fitzmier explained for a number of reasons, he is bringing Reading Religion back to Atlanta. The move will entail finding an Atlanta graduate student to serve as a managing editor and will like involve a senior editor as well. There is consideration of housing the operation at an Atlanta academic library, which would equip it the space for the cycling of books.

B. Luce Fellows Program
The Luce Fellows Program at the U.S. Department of State is currently half way through the grant, with fellows in the security clearance pipeline, but a chaotic environment makes it unclear whether the State Department will continue the religion program. There have been fruitful discussions with stakeholders about alternative sites with State, or other federal agencies or NGOs.

C. Humanities Advocacy
Jack noted the very real concerns about indications (citing that day’s New York Times) that the Trump Administration is identifying the NEH and the NEA for major cuts, and mentioned his work and the the AAR’s work at the National Humanities Alliance and indicated the importance of AAR members’ actions on behalf of government support for the humanities

D. FBI Program
Jack Fitzmier reported on a very successful visit he and several AAR members had at the FBI Academy to discuss how AAR expertise might help in law enforcement training. The FBI academy is a training facility not only for FBI personnel, but for a wide range of chiefs of police and sheriffs around the nation.
E. AAR Public Statements
Jack presented several documents about recent public statement issued by the AAR, some responses received by AAR members, and Jack’s own response describing the AAR’s recently established process for evaluating member’s proposals for a statement. Indicators show that recent statements have received a great deal of traffic

VI. Bylaws Amendment
A By-laws amendment is necessary to properly seat the new Contingent Faculty representative on the board. Waiting until November at the Annual Business Meeting, as is the usual process, would not allow time for the new position to be filled in our fall elections. Hence, the Executive Director recommended that we propose and vote on the By-laws change via an electronic ballot (which is permitted by our By-laws) this spring.

Motion 5: To approve the circulated by-law change, amended to change “he / she” to “they.”
Approved unanimously

VII. Job Posting Policy
Amy Yandell Associate Director for Employment Services, presented a proposal to develop, in conjunction with the SBL Council, a statement on the value of scholarly skills outside academia that included some potential rethinking of criteria we have for job advertisement and other aspects of the Employment Services Center. There was considerable discussion about the need for guidelines that can help change the culture around the job search, and some concern that while reasserting our values, that we also support members by admitting a wide range of different employment listings and different employers, consistent with our stated values.

Motion 6: To develop a statement jointly with SBL Council on the value of scholarly skills outside academia and to charge SBL and AAR staff with developing a plan and policies to cultivate and widen a new employee base for its employment services site. Approved unanimously

VIII. Applied Religious Studies Committee Request
There was discussion of forming an Applied Religious Studies Committee to open up discussion of the diversity of career opportunities for scholars of religion, together with a draft charge.

Motion 7: to form an Applied Religious Studies Committee, to adopt the charge as drafted and circulated, and to encourage robust consultation with the relevant committees (especially the Status committees, Graduate Student, Program, Contingent Faculty, and to ask the new Committee to bring a plan to the BoD at its September meeting. Approved unanimously

IX. Approval of Professional Conduct Task Force Charge & Roster
Pursuant to the November 2016 BoD direction, a Professional Conduct Task Force, to be chaired by Su Yon Pak, staffed by Jack Fitzmier with BoD input from Kecia Ali.
Motion 8: to adopt the Professional Conduct Task Force Charge and Roster as circulated. Approved unanimously

X. Treasurer’s Report / Audit Report
Because Treasurer Jonathan Sarna was traveling internationally, CFO Deborah Minor presented the Audit and Treasurer’s reports, which had been circulated to the BoD. It was noted that we had a successful and clean audit: Financially we’re in a comparable position to a year ago, though memberships are off slightly. With wise budgeting, we finished 2016 with a 200,000 net operating surplus. It was noted that the statements showed a conservative spending pattern, which has had the effect of offering resources to implement the strategic plan at a high level. It was noted that the strategic plan will involve considerable new staff inputs. Deborah Minor was recognized for her excellence in wise budgeting and financial leadership on the staff.

XI. Program Director’s Report
Kathryn McClymond, gave an abbreviated report of the Program Committee, reminding the BoD that all Program Committee proceedings are posted on the website. Highlights included:

- The committee is exploring ways of expanding what “Program” means, including beyond the Annual Meeting.
- A much needed policy will go into effect that people need to be AAR members at the time of proposals. This will prevent staff from having to make hundreds of follow up calls.
- Program Units are now uniformly called “Program Units”. There is no implicit hierarchy. The Program Committee is looking at units by reference to comparable sessions, rather than Section, Group, etc. Units will be more in a position of making the case for more program time. Some will get additional sessions; some will lose sessions.
- The Committee is reviewing RSOs renewals for the first time, and working through a range of issues concerning overlap between RSOs and Program Units
- The Committee is working to standardize and elaboration of best practices for Program Unit leadership, especially in the fostering of diversity on the program.

XII. Committee Reports Summary
Vice President Laurie Patton presented a digest of the committee reports and related the recommendations that emerged from those committees. The BoD had received the summary of the reports prior to the meeting, and the minutes are not exhaustive of the extensive conversation that ensued.

Academic Relations
- Academic Freedom Committee Proposal: still want to advance it.
  There was discussion of the desire on BoD part for letting our current process play through and reevaluate with the committee’s proposal in mind.
- Religious Literacy Guidelines: there is concern that some departments will be cancelled because religious literacy can be imagined as being taken care of elsewhere

American Lectures in the History of Religion Committee
Contingent Faculty Task Force
Two recommendations of statements seeking BoD adoption were briefly discussed and put on the BoD agenda for the following day.

The committee seeks funding for a face to face meeting of the CFTF in Spring 2017.
  - It was noted that the LRP Tactical Plan had included this possibility

The committee recommends making changes to membership dues structure, increasing travel grants by 20%, AAR staff to scrutinize programs/initiatives that may directly or indirectly exclude contingent faculty.

Graduate Student Committee

There was discussion of the recommendation to create a document that details how and when the regional boards will communicate with the regional student directors

International Connections Committee

Public Understanding of Religion

Publications Committee

Regions Committee

- Create an annual panel at national AM that would give regional presence at AM: with selected regional papers directed towards AAR with response from President of AAR
- There was discussion regarding a proposed review of the regions.
  - The BoD affirmed the spirit of recommendations in the Regions report, and asked that the staff include their recommendations in consideration of a review of the regions in light of various elements of the Strategic Plan, including consideration of a more substantive subvention

Religion and Arts

Status of LGBTQ in the Professions

- Report included 3 recommendations that aren’t specific BoD action items but that encourage the AAR to continue our work, and to consider in particular transgender members
- There was some discussion about reviewing, for example, the next round of AM contracts: to consider escape clauses in the event of a discriminatory bathroom bill

Status of People with Disabilities in the Profession

Status of Racial and Ethnic Minorities in the Profession

Status of Women in the Profession

Teaching and Learning Committee

Theological Education Committee

After a lunch break, the BoD reconvened 1:45pm

XIII.  Demographic Analysis of Membership and Leadership Groups

Jack Fitzmier presented *Demographic Analysis of Membership and Leadership Groups*, a report culled from data from the new member profile. The BoD was pleased to have more than anecdotal data in hand and to think about who our members are and how we are doing with regard to diversity and inclusion. Here were some highlights discussed.

Gender:
We discussed a comparison of a 60/40 proportion of the membership (n=8321) compared to a 51/48.5 proportion among the 875 steering committee members in 2016. We discussed whether
the latter included “service” or “leadership” and demonstrated concern about the “housekeeping’ nature of steering committee leadership.

Race/Ethnicity:
Less compelling, but noteworthy, the demographic make-up of the Steering Committees (n=875) figures are more proportionately diverse than the self-reported membership as a whole. White, not Hispanic is either 65.8% (12.4% Null) or 75.1% of membership (n=8321//n=7291). Steering Committee members (n=875) involves 66.1% White, Not Hispanic.

Sexual Orientation
The self-reported data from the membership profile was less directive in the case of sexual orientation. 50.3% left the prompting question blank. Another 42.7% self-identified as heterosexual, 2.2% identified as gay, 1.7% as queer, 1.3% as lesbian, 1.1% as bisexual. (n=8321)

The BoD had a hearty discussion of the results, and considered how the member profile data could be put to a variety of institutional research uses in future, including by professional status.

**Motion 10:** As part of an overall commitment to strengthening institutional research, the BoD directs staff to compile a thorough annual report of national and, if possible, regional AAR participation and leadership statistics related to such demographic measures as race & ethnicity, gender, and sexuality, and faculty/professional status, in order to inform the work of the Board and its committees in pursuit of AAR’s values of diversity and inclusion.
Approved unanimously

**XIV. Technology Audit and Responses**
Jack Fitzmier presented on a strategic plan related tech audit by Techbridge, an external consultant brought in to evaluate. There were many finding discussed, but the key findings of the report were that expenses on technology are relatively high for similarly aligned organizations and that AAR technology needed to be better aligned with strategic goals of the organization as a matter of governance and decision making structures

Jack described several of the steps taken or contemplated

- Redesign the staff tech leadership by moving Steve Herrick out of the CIO role
- Governance 1: Board level strategic group like the Finance Committee to create a Technology Committee, and could help set strategy and clarify priorities
- Governance 2: who gets to decide what gets done in the Luce Center: control of what gets done has largely been ceded to others on the staff: the decisions are made by committees; it’s a reflection of PAPERS (complicated program)
- Have tech staff go through every Techbridge recommendation and identify low hanging fruit, middle term, long term stuff
- Membership Software off the shelf would have been too expensive earlier on; used highly customized open source material now
- PAPERS is a complicated Drupal customization; audit recommends keeping it for some period of time for AAR functionality
• Even with off the shelf software purchases, we still have to hire people to integrate various systems; AAR data in five places
• New communications director will need to be in on some of these decisions

**Motion 11:** to create a board level IT Task Force made up of AAR members and other individuals with relevant technical experience whose charge will be to align the documented AAR strategic goals and IT functionality within the organization
Approved unanimously

**XV. Communications Audit and Responses**
Jack Fitzmier presented on the audit by the Golin Firm, which was received as quite straightforward: Get a communications expert. Learn and then develop a communications plan This person will tell us lots about technology; it will also tell us a lot about how to better connect with members. There was some discussion of retaining an external contractor to cover the bases in an interim capacity and make the key hire a new Executive Director’s hire. But it was also argued that there is such an immediate need to develop a communications plan, and that such a plan integrates with so many other aspects of the strategic plan that it is prudent to hire, and soon. Deborah Minor, with Golin, is currently drafted a job description for a Director of Communications (or a Manager of Communications to be more in line with the Emory payscale). While the position will be advertised through Emory H.R., the Golin firm will help source quality candidates. The BoD discussed the importance of hiring people who are hungry, who have initiative and energy for a challenge, and who have the intellectual and “soul-perceiving” mettle to lead the rebranding and website overhaul. The BoD was keen to ensure that the key hires in communications, technology, and Executive Director have buy in with the strategic plan.

The BoD adjourned for the day at 4pm.

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President Glaude called the meeting to order at 8:30 Sunday morning.

**XVI. Discussion of the Long Range Plan Tactical Plan**
Jack, together with Amy Yandell and Deborah Minor, presented the Tactical Plan from the Strategic Planning process. Jack described it as the most detailed plan, unprecedented actually, the AAR has seen. The Tactical Plan is the management’s plan, distinguished from the Strategic Plan, as the Tactical Plan includes actions and timelines and metrics. In addition to the document we considered, there are also schedules – money, staff lines.

Although the entire document was presented and received with considerable plum, the minutes will attend to particular discussion on particular provisions of the plan.

1Aa.Merge Teaching and Learning Committee and Employment Services Advisory Committee as a Professional Development Committee.
• There was some concern expressed about folding Teaching and Learning into anything else, given its crucial importance to AAR members.
• Not just getting hired, getting tenure, but promotion, Grant writing, Chair,
1Bb. Foster year round Program Units activities through websites, listserves, etc, software for easy passing of documents.
   - To help sustain conversations between AM. Stretching of the calendar
   - Maybe Regions could be sites for Book awards
   - Make it easier to have book clubs

1Be Publishing Task Force has been empaneled
   - Real energy around this way of organizing a conversation for departments and programs
   - Question of who makes first move -- Guild or Departments – regarding tenure/promotion standards. Laurie: a good leadership oppy to lead as the AAR with the digital publishing criteria for tenure and promotion.

1.C.a Year round virtual member engagement on social media platforms
   - Again the BoD is very keen on this: we are a content treasure trove; we could be pushing all kinds of great content to different publics and we can build publics through these very efforts.
   - Podcast need not be video; can be audio
   - An example about how mobile enabled step supports other priorities like this
   - Audio interview with awardwinners
   - Bring the Program Units into this discussion to help imagine content to push
   - Presidential Address:
     - Concerns about the length of time of editing the content from Facebook Live/Youtube
     - Take Accessibility into account: podcasts can contribute transcripts
     - Difference between a phone book where subscriber goes to “website” for content and creating publics through communications strategies
   - By definition, we already have 8000 people who we should be engaging with every single day, week, month, and they have a cluster of people to whom they have. “Distribution of distribution.”
   - Our asset is that we have ongoing content that is fabulous. Build publics; have influence

1Db Mentoring 12 months of the year:
   - social media office hours for mentoring
   - Consider not just mentorship but sponsorship: young underrepresented folks: you don’t just have a mentor; but you actively go out and place in spaces.

Goal 2 Public Understanding of Religion
   - Big P not just little p
   - Pluralize public(s) understanding(s) of religion? Citing Dewey, “Public and its Problems” just keep the article out of there
   - Ensure descriptive paragraphs about PUR clarify the plural nature
   - Laurie reiterated concern about religious literacy stuff and concerns about closure of religious studies departments
• IDEA for Program Committee: in Program Unit review ask them:
  How Does your program units advance the public understanding of religion?

Targeted web pages with content framing history/context of public issues, e.g. Islamaphobia

• Excitement about this idea
• Concern about Staff writing up the content in Tactical plan; draw on members’ expertise and energy; program units?
• Kecia: what if we worked with Wabash: lesson plan for study of Islamophobia
• Provide a Flash Drive downloaded with a lesson plan and resources to members
• Even almost came to a motion to produce such a resource kit for members at 2017 AM for teaching about Islamophobia
• There was considerable discussion about possibilities of harvesting content already out there: Tanenbaum Foundation, Anti-Defamation League, etc.
• We don’t need to own this; we can ally with other organizations that do this
• Question about difference between interfaith resources and religious studies sensibilities that can be legible to different publics (like govt officials)
• AAR can serve an important curatorial function: not just about listing but purposeful curation.
• Aggregation of material; but also curation
• Resource Packet for various religious traditions, not just high school teachers

2De training to corporate nonprofit and govt entities: fee structure plan
• Note: Michael McNally and Shana Sippy at Carleton have a pluralism project related effort in Minnesota that aims toward trainings with community partners with cases

Departmental Directory
• Language of PORTAL, Hub, not directory
• Shared excitement over different ways this work could be useful:
  o Students looking for graduate school
  o Faculty comparing programs
  o Genl public about the field
• Will inform jobs report
• Incentivize departments and programs
• Online database that’s searchable; aggregate the data

President Glaude concluded the discussion by thanking the staff for its stellar work on the tactical plan and encouraged staff to be bold, imaginative, and creative. Don’t fall back into the familiar as we work this out.

XVII. Discussion of the Jobs Report
Amy Yandell was thanked for her work in assembling a jobs report based on Employment Services data. Key findings were as follows:
• Positions advertised in AY 16 declined 10.2%.
• Research institutions have been the most stable, while baccalaureate institutions have seen the greatest declines
• Fewer than 300 faculty jobs were posted, the lowest number since AY 02
• Course loads declined markedly from AY 15
• Percentage of Employers requiring or desiring interdisciplinary teaching or research abilities declined significantly.
• Publishing a journal article and publishing a book/monograph are now more important than interdisciplinary teaching or research abilities.
• Online course instruction experience continues to rise, up from 10.4% last year from 13.0% this year.

Robust discussion ensued, noting the intersection of a number of trends of deep concern to the vitality of the AAR and its members: the casualization of labor; the reduced funding, including closure and contraction, of religion departments, the continued effect of the 2008 recession on choices to defer retirement, and the continued pace by which many institutions are producing Ph.D.s, often incentivized by institutional concerns and often at the expense of the graduates’ career opportunities. There was discussion that the proposed department directory, or portal/hub, of the LRT Tactical Plan can serve as an important resource in this data collection. There was also concern that the AAR needs to take seriously as a membership organization the ethical concerns raised by this state of affairs and help institutions think and act more responsibly.

Motion 12: In light of recent decline in job placements in religion and in the humanities more broadly, and in keeping with the priorities of the AAR’s strategic plan, the AAR board calls for an inquiry into the ethics of training and hiring professionals in the study of religion. As preliminary preparation for ethical reflection, we will be working with the newly constructed Professional Conduct Task Force and the Academic Labor and Contingent Faculty Task Force to actively collect data on five issues:
1) the number of PhD students admitted into programs and the creation of new PhD programs;
2) the numbers of contingent faculty in the study of religion;
3) the new ways in which academic freedom becomes precarious in our current political and economic situation;
4) the role of the tenured professoriate in creating or hindering equity in the workplace;
5) the role that department chairs, deans, provosts, and presidents can play in creating or hindering equity in the workplace
Approved unanimously

XVIII. Academic Labor and Contingent Faculty Task Force Recommendations
Kerry Danner elaborated on several recommendation from the Academic Labor and Contingent Faculty Task Force that were found in its committee report, for BoD consideration.

A. Academic Freedom in Perilous Times

The first proposal concerned a draft statement on Academic Freedom in Perilous Times. President Glaude noted that the established process for AAR statements kicks in and that the Executive Committee will consider the proposed statement per the process.
B. Mutual Respect among AAR Members

The BoD then considered a second document, “Mutual Respect among AAR Members,” that helps members understand appropriate conduct in AAR settings, particularly as that conduct impacts contingent faculty members. Noting the work of the recently empaneled Professional Conduct Task Force, the BoD commended the integration of this statement into that body’s work, but also to take steps to commend the document to membership in the near term, especially given the concerns that relate specifically to contingent faculty members.

**Motion 13: to commend the document “Mutual Respect among AAR Members” submitted by the Academic Labor and Contingent Faculty Task Force and to post it on relevant platforms (including Religious Studies News)**  
Approved unanimously

B. Religious Studies Companion Document for the C3 Framework

Diane L. Moore (Harvard Divinity School) circulated a document for endorsement by the BoD that would serve, if approved by the National Council for the Social Studies board, as an appendix to the College, Career ad Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards: Guidance for Enhancing the Rigor of K-12 Civics, Economics, Geography and History a 2013 report that equips states and school districts in their K-12 standard setting work. The document, which was draft by a team of K-12 teachers, and which included Prof. Moore, applies the AAR’s 2013 Guidelines for Teaching about Religion in K-12 Public Schools in the United States

**Motion 14: to endorse the Religious Studies Companion Document for the C3 Framework.**  
Approved unanimously.

The BoD went into Executive Session to briefly discuss the executive search process.

XIX. Adjournment

President Glaude adjourned the meeting at 11:05 a.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Michael D. McNally, Carleton College  
Secretary