American Academy of Religion  
Board of Directors Meeting  
Atlanta, Georgia  
November 20, 2015  
4:30 PM to 6:00 PM  

Minutes  
(Approved as Amended at February, 2016 BoD Meeting)

Present: Jack Fitzmier, Tom Tweed, Serene Jones, Eddie Glaude, Jr., Michael McNally, Greg Johnson, Susan Hill, Jin Park, Mayra Rivera, Melanie Harris, Asma Afsaruddin, Kristy Slominski, Deborah Minor, Steve Herrick

I. Call to Order and Approval of the Agenda (4:30 pm)

II. Approval of the Board Meeting Minutes of September 19 – 20, 2015

Motion 1: Minutes were approved as amended. 
Passed Unanimously

III. Report on readiness for the Annual Meeting and Business Meetings

Jack Fitzmier reported there were 9583 registered for meeting, [n.b. final registration with on-site registration exceeded 10,000] that there were no major glitches on the eve of the annual meeting’s commencement. The hard work of Robert Puckett and Greg Johnson was recognized. This meeting engaged a “trauma trained” group on hand behind the scenes that could be empaneled if needs arise such as the verbal harassment received last year by an AAR member by a non-member in one of the conference hotels.

IV. President’s Report

President Tom Tweed reported on the many accomplishments of the past year, especially the creation of a workable policy and procedure for considering and issuing public statements, the effects of which likely will be felt for some time. President Tweed also cited the drafts of a revised Academic Freedom Statement and a Responsible Research Practices Statement, each a subject for planned sessions at the Annual Meeting, and that will be forwarded to the Board for final approval at its winter meeting. Tweed cited important governance considerations in light of four years’ experience with the current structure [considerations that were later approved as changes to the by-laws at the Annual Business Meeting on Nov 22]. Finally, President Tweed announced that Jack Fitzmier has signed a contract for renewed leadership of the AAR for three years commencing July 1, 2016, which was roundly well received.

V. Treasurer’s Report

A) Revenue/Expense

Jack Fitzmier, together with CFO Deborah Minor presented the Treasurer’s report. Membership and Registration are lagging with respect to the past year and are unlikely to rise sufficiently to meet the budget forecast. This was an unusual pattern based on the past ten years: early on, Annual Meeting pre-registration fee revenue was considerably ahead of expectations, and there
was an expectation that later registration would keep pace with previous years and meet the forecast, but membership was lagging when we usually have an increase in membership at the same time. We are running slightly ahead of previous patterns for 2016 membership. Employment Center and Listings are lagging compared with last year, but not as much of a concern.

**B) Balance Sheet**
AAR has been paying down a line of credit over time to a little over $93,000, and estimated to be closed out in 10 more payments. AAR assets are running over $11m, which is a strong number, and suggests that near term revenue concerns do not present overwhelming concerns and offer resources for new initiatives tied to the strategic plan that can strengthen long term health. The finance committee recommends approval of the IRS form 990 which had been circulated

**Motion 2 to approve IRS Form 990.**
Passed Unanimously.

The AAR had planned in this year to put out an RFP for audits, a best practice in general, but because of significant changes in personnel at the current firm (audit mgr, audit staff and particularly the new person in charge of the details) the recommendation of the Audit Committee was to maintain a relationship with the current auditor (especially as AAR engages a new CFO) and to make a change several years down the road. There was discussion, but no objections and no need for a motion for keeping with the current trajectory.

**VIII. Initial Session with our Planning Consultant**

Terri Theisen, of Theisen Consulting, made a presentation about the planning process that her firm will support. Theisen is a nationwide consultant based in Atlanta who has worked organizations large and small, including the Centers for Disease Control, the Andrew Young School at Georgia State University, the Duke Endowment, and the Gates Foundation, among others.

**A) Proposed Process and Timetable**
The proposed plan will produce a final strategic plan by Winter of 2017, punctuated by the following proposed steps

- **Dec. 2015:** a Conference Call in late December with the Executive Committee to firm up the specifics of the next steps,
- **Dec. 2015-Feb 2016** “Environmental Scan and Landscape Analysis,” including:
  - a potential membership survey,
  - targeted information gathering from identified smaller groups of stakeholders,
  - studies of the financials, membership dues, and membership benefits of comparable institutions
  - staff survey
- **Apr., 2016** Board of Directors Meeting focused on strategic planning
- **Aug., 2016,** Executive Committee Considers Draft Strategic Plan Documents
- **Oct. 2016:** Board of Directors Meeting considers Draft Plan with Financial Implications
- **Nov. 2016:** Board of Directors approval of Final Strategic Plan
- **Dec. 2016** Final Strategic Plan, including the following:
Long term vision: short, memorable statements
Mission Statement;
Goals with Measures
Strategies with Timeframes
Objectives (Metrics)
Actions
Dashboard Tool to Track Progress
Financial Projection
Accountability Assigned for Implementation

B) **Every Successful Plan Engages Four Questions:**
1. What are the results we’re trying to get in this organization? What is it that we are trying to do?
2. How will we get those results and how will we know we have succeeded?
3. How are we structured? Are we structured appropriately to reach those goals? The right board and staff structure and the right membership feed in to get that?
4. How will we finance our results? This is deliberately last: figure out what you want to accomplish and then address it. Price Tag is the number. Here’s how much we need to do what we want to do.

C. **Discussion**
The BoD was struck with the refreshing pace of the proposed timetable, and encouraged with such clear expectations. It was suggested that Ms. Theisen conduce focus group stakeholder interviews with various underrepresented groups planning on meeting in February in Newark NJ. A question arose that was informed by university strategic plan processes about the wisdom waiting for the discussion of financial implications until the end of the process, to which Ms. Theisen responded AAR has considerable relative freedom, and that AAR has a lot of maneuverability and is limited only by its ability and willingness to find new sources of support. She also affirmed that “hope is not a strategy” and that there would be ample time in her proposed process for the reality test that happens towards the end. It was suggested that AAR actually has considerable assets to work with in unrestricted funds, to which Ms. Theisen responded that in her experience even groups that don’t have cash in the bank after a process like this have changed the landscape.

D. **Planning Exercise**
Terri Theisen led an initial discussion exercise for the Strategic Plan prompted by the following questions: What are top three opportunities for AAR in the next several years? What do we need to know in order to effectively plan?

VI. **Report from the Subcommittee on Face-to-Face Meetings**
The Executive Committee commended adoption of the recommendations in *The Report on the Subcommittee on Face to Face Meetings*, circulated prior to the meeting, and acknowledged the important work of Steve Herrick in its development. The report addresses a fair procedure for face to face meeting of AAR working groups, given the fact that the cost of all working groups regularly meeting face to face would be about $120,000. AAR has budgeted $30,000 annually for these meetings, and established a process for “application” and providing a rationale. There would be some exceptions to the process in the case of groups (a) whose mission focuses on—
and whose members are also impecunious as a result of— their non-faculty or untenured status, such as the Graduate Student Working Group and the Contingent Faculty Task Force; or (b) are created or tasked by the Board to engage in substantial strategic planning.

**Motion 3:** to adopt the recommendations of the Report from the Subcommittee on Face-to-Face Meetings.
Passed Unanimously

**VII. New Business**
There was no new business.

**IX. Introduction of newly elected Board Members**
The Board formally and congenially welcomed four new elected members:
- Grace Ji-Sun Kim (Earlham), At Large Director
- David Gushee (Mercer University), Vice President
- Bhakti Mamtora (University of Florida), Student Director
- Ardy Bass (Gonzaga University), Regions Director

**X. Thanks to departing Board Members**
Kristy Slominsky, Jin Park, Melanie Harris, Susan Hill, Linda Moody, and particularly to President Tom Tweed, were recognized for outstanding service on the Board and thanked by Jack Fitzmier with gifts.

**XI. Adjournment**
The meeting adjourned at 6pm and repaired to a joint reception with the SBL Council.