BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING

Hilton Bayside
San Diego, CA
Friday November 21, 2014

Present: Jack Fitzmier, Warren Frisina, Melanie Harris, Susan Hill, Serene Jones, Greg Johnson, Linda Moody, Jin Park, Mayra Rivera, Roberto Lint Sagarena, Kristy Slominski, Thomas Tweed, Laurie Zoloth

Absent: none

Staff: Deborah Minor, Steve Herrick

1. Call to Order – 5:10 PM Laurie Zoloth, President

President Zoloth opened the meeting by congratulating AAR meeting planners on a job well done. She noted that advanced press reports were positive and that the meeting’s thematic focus on Climate Change was well integrated into program unit sessions and gaining broad notice. She urged all Board Members to do their best to attend the plenary sessions noting that the Head of the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Planet Climate change would be Skyping in. Pointing ahead to the Presidential Report she would be giving at the Annual Business meeting, she congratulated the Board on the work it had accomplished during the 3 years she was a member. Specifically she pointed to the new policies involving labor and meeting security, as well as a newly implemented (and still developing) policy on socially responsible investing. In addition she cited more extensive efforts by the members of the presidential line to reach out to AAR committees and working groups through telephone contact and by meeting regularly with them or their chairs. She also noted positive results in the AAR’s efforts to reach sustainability goals. She ended by noting that there are difficult issues ahead, including Board-level discussions of the Salaita incident.

2. Executive Director’s Report – Jack Fitzmier

Executive Director Fitzmier began by congratulating President Zoloth on her term as president and offered a quick summary of the AM statistics. With over 9400 AAR and SBL members registered, he said it was likely that this meeting would include close to or better than 10,000 registrants. He offered his thanks to Program Committee Chair Gregg Johnson and the entire AAR Staff that had done so much to make this meeting a success. He noted that if you totaled up all scheduled events the number topped 1,300 over a 4 day period! He indicated that AAR leadership was watching with concern as reaction to the events in Ferguson built through the Fall, stating that the AAR was prepared to share information with members about potential protest sites should a decision regarding the potential indictment of the officer involved be rendered over our weekend. He ended by pointing to important
work that the AAR does at its meeting by providing a workshop for FBI Prison Chaplains, a THAT Camp and a Media Workshop.

3. Approval of Audit – Linda Moody, Deborah Minor

The Audit Committee, recommends that the Board accept the audit. Deborah Minor reported that the audit went well with no major findings or adjustments required.

Motion 1 – from the Audit Committee: To approve the Audit
Vote: Unanimous – approved

4. Finance Committee Report – Linda Moody, Deborah Minor

Deborah Minor reviewed the finance committee report indicating that compared to last year some Annual Meeting revenues were a bit lower than expected but that registration was generally holding strong and that there were some unexpected expenses (e.g. video-taping plenary speakers). To cover those costs, some funds from realized gains in the endowment were used, and the overall revenue/expense totals are positive. Investigations are underway regarding the screens that Sun Trust uses to implement the socially responsible investment policy adopted by the Board. Specifically, there is interest in whether we are invested in coal and other fossil fuels. Jack Fitzmier suggested that in addition to negative screening, the Board may want to adopt some positive screens that would give our investment advisors guidance on the kinds of things the AAR wants to be invested in.

The Board’s plans to meet in late January (24/25) will complicate the budgeting schedule. That meeting is too early to have the data necessary to construct next year’s budget. Since the budget year begins July 1, it will be necessary to schedule a conference call to review a proposed budget sometime after the January meeting and before the end of March.

Task 1: Schedule a full board conference call to review proposed budget.

Membership Development expenses: Jack Fitzmier noted that there may be a need to build some support for expenses associated with the Membership Task Force into next year’s budget. There is another decline in membership this year, so it is clear we need to plan for additional outreach.

Summit Meeting Planning: Tom Tweed relayed a request from the Status of Committees for a decision on planning for another Summit meeting in 2016. In the ensuing discussion it was pointed out that we do not yet have a handle on the financial picture for 2016 and thus are not in a position to commit to such a plan just yet. This question will be taken up as part of a larger discussion of funding for committees that the Board is already pursuing. It was noted that it would behoove us to consider the ways each of our committees support our membership development objectives.
5. **Joint AAR Board and SBL Council Reception – Jack Fitzmier**

Jack reminded everyone that this new event is designed to help us build bridges between the leadership of both organizations. There was a time when 30% of AAR’s membership was joint with SBL. Given our overlapping missions and commitment to a shared AM, it behooves everyone to continue to cultivate good relations with our colleagues in SBL.

6. **Public Outreach: FBI Workshops; Prison Chaplains; and State Department Religion Fellows – Steve Herrick**

Steve Herrick reported on programs at the Annual Meeting that are designed to extend the public understanding of religion by engaging with government agencies that have a need for expertise in religious beliefs and practices.

*FBI Program:* Three representatives from the FBI (a chief of behavioral analysis, a supervisory agent, and a liaison to the academic community) will attend the AM and sit in on sessions that provide academically based information on New Religious Movements, religiously motivated violence, clergy and sexual abuse, and Christian identity movements.

*Prison Chaplains Program:* Eight prison chaplains will participate in a series of sessions designed to provide academically based information on religious traditions other than their own, with the aim of preparing them to better minister to the broad range of prisoners under their care. It is anticipated that the AAR will be approaching foundations to support this work in the future.

*State Department Religion Scholar Fellowships:* There is preliminary talk of seeking funding to create State Department Fellowships that would support the presence of religion scholars as fellows within the State Department. Scholars in such positions would provide academically based information that could inform State Department decisions, negotiations, and outreach.

7. **National Humanities Alliance – Jack Fitzmier**

The AAR is continuing discussions with the NHA executive director about potential partnership opportunities.

8. **Committee evaluations – Jack Fitzmier**

Discussion of a plan for regular review and evaluation of AAR Committees and Working Groups is ongoing and will be presented to the Board shortly.

9. **Salaita event – Jack Fitzmier**
The AAR has received requests from groups of members asking that the Board take a position regarding the Salaita controversy. Requests have come on both sides of the issue. As the AAR does not have a policy regarding how it determines when to weigh in on public issues like this, the Executive Committee recommends that such a policy be established before responding to these requests in a formal way. The policy will be discussed at the next full Board meeting. This information was communicated by Jack Fitzmier to those who had written.

10. Membership Task Force – Warren Frisina

The Membership Task Force has initiated its work, meeting once in person and several times as sub-committees via telephone conferencing. It has reached out to Program Unit Chairs requesting their input as it begins to define core membership benefits to imagine additional benefits that might help us attract and retain more members. Questionnaires have also been distributed at the AM so members can weigh in informally on these questions. The task force is in an information gathering stage in its discussions.

11. Vulnerability of Perkins Loans – Jack Fitzmier

Recent threats to the Perkins Loan program has many academics nervous because of the ways that ending the program would negatively impact students from underrepresented groups that have fewer resources for pursuing higher education. This is the kind of issue where the AAR could play a leadership role rallying other ACLS organizations into a coordinated response.

Issues like this point again to the need for the AAR to have a general policy directing Board decisions around when and how to engage in public advocacy. Since only the AAR Board is empowered to speak for the AAR we must have structures in place that enable us to receive and channel input from committees and working groups. Not having a policy hasn’t kept us from addressing the commonly held issues (e.g. defending departments that are under attack, or our right to invite a scholar from Iran to speak at the meeting), but there are other issues like the recent attacks on the Perkins loan which fall into a grayer area and which the Board may or may not want to weigh in on.

12. Motion to adjourn. – Approved

MOTIONS AND TASKS

Motion 1 – from the Audit Committee: To approve the Audit
Vote: Unanimous – approved

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