

## Student Director

Serves a two-year term. The Student Director is a member of the Board of Directors, representing the particular concerns and issues of AAR student members at large. The Student Director serves as Chair of the Graduate Student Committee.

### Dan Christy Randazzo

Dan Christy Randazzo is the Chester Reagan Chair of Quaker and Religious Studies at Moorestown Friends School in Moorestown, NJ. A PhD candidate at the University of Birmingham (UK), the better part of Randazzo's past six years have been dedicated to writing a dissertation, titled *The Interdependent 'Light': Quaker Models of God in Reconciliation Theology*, which explores the intersections between Liberal Quaker, postcolonial, and atonement theologies. Randazzo's other research interests include Quaker theology and history, reconciliation theology/practice, and the study of ethnic conflict. As a part-time student for the past ten years, Randazzo is well versed in the challenges faced by those who need to balance full- or part-time employment, family responsibilities, and the rigors of research and school. Randazzo is an active participant in AAR, having completed a three-year term as student director of the Mid-Atlantic Region of AAR this past year and currently serving as cochair of the Quaker Theological Discussion Group. Before entering the field of K-12 education, they taught at several colleges in the Baltimore area, served as a youth minister for many years, worked in direct social services, and even learned how to support a family while pulling the perfect espresso shot.

### Statement

The Academy is in the midst of a profound shift in how it understands the role of students, from issues of employment to training. The world of religious scholarship can't assume that students are moving along any assumed path anymore, because they don't exist anymore. This not only applies to the rise of adjunctification and the gradual loss of tenure lines, however. Schools are beginning to consider alternative paths to training, including part-time and hybrid online courses. The AAR has taken significant strides in adapting to these new realities, especially in recent years with a significant focus on the concerns of contingent faculty. I feel that my experience and background not only provide me with a unique perspective on how these shifts effect students, but my current career outside of higher education as a middle and high school teacher grants me a welcome perspective on the opportunities outside of academia and ways to aid students in pursuing those opportunities while still retaining active scholarly lives.

I entered graduate school initially as a way of further developing my skills as a youth minister. I was quickly bitten by the bug for research and scholarship, and decided to continue my education as far as I felt my interests would lead. I attended a Master's program in Theology at St. Mary's Seminary and University in Baltimore, in the Ecumenical Institute for Theology. This is a program which draws students from around Maryland to classes taught at night by adjuncts, who do this work for the love of it. At the EI I saw the possibility of combining the worlds of scholarship and career, through the experiences of my fellow students and my teachers. I am convinced that the future of the Academy lies in these types of creative re-imaginings of the role of scholar, teacher, and student.

I attended a second Masters program through Trinity College Dublin in a program that was actually based in Belfast, Northern Ireland. As we were a small community studying far from the main campus, the students in this program were forced to re-imagine how to develop scholarly community and build ties with scholars from other schools in Belfast. These types of re-imaginings are actually the current reality in scholarship, from online communities to cross-divisional research. The assumption that one's main community will be the other students and faculty in their particular program or school simply doesn't apply anymore, and if chosen for the position of Student Director I intend on continuously re-imagining how the Academy fosters and supports academic community amongst students.

Finally, I enrolled in a part-time doctoral program through the University of Birmingham, despite being based in the United States. I was pursuing the research, for this was the only program where I could engage in this level of Quaker scholarship, yet I also needed to maintain at least part-time employment to support my family. As a result, I have done research alongside work, caring for children, and developing a career. These awkward balancing acts are the reality for a significant number of student members of the AAR, a reality which I feel I am uniquely capable of speaking to. If elected, I intend on continuing the creative and imaginative work building an AAR for our current reality that the AAR has already begun.

### Rachel Toombs

Rachel Toombs is a doctoral candidate in religion at Baylor University (Waco, TX) where she is writing a theology and literature dissertation on the theological impact of twentieth-century southern writer Flannery O'Connor's spare narrative style. Toombs has a keen interest in an interdisciplinary approach to her scholarship, spanning biblical studies, theology, and literary theory both in her dissertation and classroom.

While diligently working on her dissertation, she also serves as professor of theology and Old Testament in a new graduate school, Yellowstone Theological Institute, in Bozeman, Montana. Toomb's interdisciplinary interests are evidenced in the diversity of papers she has presented from deuteronomistic redaction of 2 Samuel to Hildegard of Bingen's reading of Eve. She currently serves as the AAR student director for the Southwest Region.

### Statement

It is a difficult time to be in the nascent stages of an academic career, particularly in the humanities, and even more within the study of religion. Not only are the "traditional" academic positions rare, they are getting all the more infrequent and, thus, incredibly competitive. When I began my term as Southwest Student Director, I watched the upperclassmen in my department and recently-minted doctorates struggle in their search for teaching positions where their expertise would be valued and, further, compete sometimes with hundreds of other competent and gifted applicants. I saw my position as the student representative to the Southwest AAR region as the advocate and mouthpiece for the multiplicity of struggles that face the graduate students within my region as they pursue their degrees, alongside the daunting task at the end of their studies to find fulfilling and stimulating work. Graduate students are also sometimes mothers and fathers, spouses and partners, responsible for staying financially afloat and maintaining emotional and mental equilibrium amidst the challenging and vulnerable station of the graduate student. Not only in my position within the Southwest region, but serving on the AAR Graduate Student Committee (GSC) has confirmed the challenges for graduate students and questioned any assumption that there is a simple remedy for these struggles.

Just as the AAR graduate student members represent a diversity of backgrounds, ages, geographical demographics, religious convictions, and individual struggles, so does the GSC need to creatively address the needs of those it represents. One major issue that I have seen voiced both on the regional and national level is the assumption of the "traditional" academic track as the only means for successful work with a degree in religion. This path is becoming increasingly narrow and difficult to achieve. As the AAR envisions the future of the academic guild of religion, we need to continually seek out opportunities that extend outside the box of the traditional tenure track model. In our current political climate in North America, we have seen the importance of the voice of those like our current AAR President, Eddie S. Glaude, Jr., within broader national and international conversations pertaining to the place of the marginalized other within society, the means of naming and addressing injustice, and intelligently talking about many of the "hot button" issues that often divide among partisan lines.

As AAR Student Director, I would encourage dialogue on the many ways to think outside the box of the traditional academic track model in order for the next generation of academics of religion to serve not only in the classroom, but also in policy debate, corporate ethics, religious institutions, ecumenical conversations, and other avenues, some of which we have not yet foreseen. On the national level, this dialogue is and will continue to be fostered within graduate roundtable discussions and special topic forums, and my hope is that the vision casting that occurs on the national level can both offer and receive insight from the struggles and success of the AAR regions.