

Vice President

Serves a one-year term. The current Vice President will automatically become President-Elect next year and President the following year without additional elections. During their tenure, the Vice President will have the opportunity to affect AAR policy in powerful ways; in particular, during the presidential year, the incumbent makes many of the appointments of members to openings on working groups. In addition to serving on the Board of Directors, the Vice President also serves on the Executive, Audit, and Program Committees.

José Cabezón

José Cabezón is Dalai Lama Professor of Tibetan Buddhism and Cultural Studies and Distinguished Professor of Religious Studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara. He chaired the UCSB department from 2010 to 2013.

A scholar of Buddhism specializing in India and Tibet, he has published sixteen books and many scholarly articles. Most of his writings—*Buddhism and Language* (SUNY Press, 1994), *The Buddha's Doctrine* (Oxford University Press, 2013), etc.—focus on philosophy. His edited volume *Scholasticism: Cross-Cultural and Comparative Perspectives* (SUNY Press, 1998) explores the phenomenon of scholasticism in various premodern religions. He has also published books on Tibetan ritual and Buddhist political ethics. His latest monograph, *Sexuality in Classical South Asian Buddhism* (Wisdom Publications, 2017), is a broad-ranging study of sexuality in ancient Indian Buddhist literature.

A recipient of many fellowships (Fulbright, Humboldt, Rockefeller, etc.), his current research—funded by Guggenheim and ACLS grants—is a historical study of Sera Monastery, one of Tibet's premier monastic academies.

Cabezón has served on the AAR Program Committee (1999–2001) and on the JAAR board (2001–2016). He was a founding member of four groups—Gay Men and Religion, Buddhist Constructive Reflection, Comparative Theology, and Tibetan/Himalayan Religions. He has served on their steering committees and cochaired the last of these.

Statement

I have taught at two small liberal arts colleges, at two large public universities, and at a Christian theological school. My experience at these institutions and involvement in different aspects of department governance have given me an understanding of the diverse departments that make up the field, and of the needs of students, faculty, and adjuncts. Here are some areas that I would prioritize if I were elected:

(1) Over the years, the AAR has worked to insure representation of people who are often marginalized in the academy by creating committees that respond to emergent needs—the Committees on Women, Persons with Disabilities, Racial and Ethnic Minorities, Contingent Faculty, Graduate Students, and LGBTIQ Persons. I would spend a year attending their meetings, listening to their concerns, and making sure that we are being responsive to their needs.

(2) The work the AAR does in providing the raw data for lobbying is important, but I think we could do more. In the face of a crass utilitarian mindset in higher education, we need to advocate more vigorously for the centrality of religious studies to the humanities and of the humanities to the holistic formation of the person. The AAR has been a member of the National Humanities Alliance for many years, and our executive director sits on its board. I would like to see us showcase the work of the NHA and other humanities advocacy groups as part of the annual meeting. And I would like to see the AAR create materials, specific to religious studies, for effective advocacy. Moreover, at a time when only a narrow range of religious voices are being heard on public policy issues nationally, the AAR should work to bring more diversity and sophistication to these discussions.

(3) We are living in a transitional period between print and digital media. The AAR's Publishing Task Force has done us yeoman's service by providing us with guidelines for evaluating digital publications. How can we now move forward and create new publication venues and proactively promote digital scholarship. This is a pressing need—especially for younger scholars—in an environment where scholarly presses are increasingly judging print monographs not in terms of their scholarly excellence, but of their commercial viability.

(4) What can we *tangibly* do for contingent faculty, graduate students, and those who are just entering the job market? Here are three concrete suggestions: (a) I would like to see us increase travel support to the annual meeting for those whose financial situation makes attendance a hardship, fund-raising to this end if necessary. (b) While the professional development of graduate students is principally the responsibility of their home institutions, the AAR can contribute to this by providing additional online resources, and by creating online platforms for peer-to-peer mentoring. (c) It can also expand the job placement service to include non academic positions.

(5) Finally, I believe that we can and should use the power of the AAR—the largest professional association of religion scholars in the world—to effect social change, both nationally and internationally. I understand that our membership is heterogeneous and that we don't all share the same political or ideological views. But surely, there is enough consensus among us to be able to speak out against discrimination and violence perpetrated in the name of religion.

Jacob K. Olupona

Jacob K. Olupona is professor of African and African American studies, Harvard University, and professor of African religion, Harvard Divinity School. In addition to serving on the editorial boards of several influential journals, Olupona was the president of the African Association for the Study of Religion and served on the Board of Directors and Executive Committee of the American Academy of Religion. Also within the AAR, he cochaired the African Religions and Indigenous Religions Groups and chaired the International Connections Committee.

Olupona was on the Executive Committee for the International Association for the History of Religions and the principal organizer of six international conferences. He has authored or edited fourteen books, including *Kingship, Religion and Rituals in a Nigerian Community* (Stockholm University Press, 1991); *The City of 201 Gods* (University of California Press, 2013); and *African Religions: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2014). Olupona is the recipient of major awards from the Guggenheim Foundation, the American Philosophical Society, the Ford Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, the Wenner-Gren Foundation, the Getty Foundation, the Japan Science Foundation and the Humboldt Foundation. His honors include: the Nigerian National Order of Merit, the Harvard Cabot Fellowship for distinguished scholarship, and three honorary degrees.

Statement

We are at a critical juncture in the history of our nation and in the world, where religious themes are at the center of the human condition. As members of the academy, we are uniquely placed to contribute to both public and academic debate about the significance of religion in cultural conversations both here and abroad, and through our work, offer practical demonstrations of the possibility of change.

In the past few decades, the study of religion has evolved to include voices and approaches previously neglected in the academy. This epistemological transformation has led to new emphases within the religious studies community on fostering deeper engagement, free inquiry, and critical examination in their most unencumbered form. The AAR as a guild, then, has a vital role to play in forging partnerships and encouraging inclusivity among religious scholars across the globe. Significantly, our pursuit of knowledge has yielded plurality of thought, insight, and experience that is infusing the academy with new verve. In my scholarship and teaching, I explore the ways in which Christianity and Islam (Africa's two "world religions") encounter and interact with traditional religious life and practices in African societies. In this context, my work is keenly engaged with the important question of religious accommodation, tolerance, and reconciliation in a post-9/11 world. I hope to bring a deeper awareness of this pressing issue in religious studies to the work of the Academy.

Should I be elected vice president, I would like to pursue the following initiatives:

- Nothing gives me more joy than seeing the students and junior colleagues I have mentored succeed in the academy. For this reason, I will encourage the AAR to put in place formal programs and initiatives for mentorship beyond those that are currently available.
- I will use my experience with international fundraising to assist the secretariat in creating opportunities for partnership and exchange programs between other religious studies organizations, such as IAHR.
- Like many of my colleagues, we are alarmed at the rate at which theological institutions and religious studies programs are closing their doors. I would challenge the AAR to create a taskforce to critically examine how best we can respond to this unfortunate development and care for the students and teachers affected.
- In keeping with this, I will establish working groups to review and articulate the continued relevance of religious studies scholarship. We need to work together with our members to rebrand creative teaching practices and new innovations in scholarship and to communicate the important role religious studies can play in public life.
- I will also explore additional opportunities for collaborative work among religious studies scholars, in an effort to improve the connections among the members, programs, and spiritual traditions represented within the AAR.
- Finally, I am committed to helping the AAR benefit from the great advancements of our digital age by providing even more opportunities for members, committees, and groups within the AAR to digitize scholarly resources and professional databases.

As the AAR explores its future, religious studies must be well positioned to imaginatively engage the challenges and opportunities in our nation and around the globe.