Minutes
AAR Board of Directors Meeting
Atlanta, Georgia, February 2019

Present: (Board Members) José Cabezón, Kimberly Connor, Kerry Danner, Kathy Downey, Marla Frederick, Amir Hussain, Alice Hunt, Zayn Kassam, Kathryn McClymond, Laurie Patton, Leela Prasad, Randall Styers, Rachel Toombs; (AAR Staff Members), Elizabeth Hardcastle, Deborah Minor, Robert Puckett.

The Board meeting began at 9:02 with introductions and an agenda review led by President Laurie Patton.

Motion 1: Agenda approval. Unanimous.

November minutes approved electronically in advance of meeting.

President’s Report (Laurie Patton): Referring to the mission, values and long-range plan, the President announced two goals for the year – transition support and priority setting. She encouraged the board to continue to support the new executive director as she manages transitions. She set clear priorities for the year, particularly around the public understanding of religion (developing the academy study of religion, prioritizing media and marketing, and capitalizing on the Reading Religion opportunity) and the 24/7-365 vision (capitalize on technology for online community and a robust mentoring program) for the AAR.

With regard to particular projects, she discussed the ongoing work around professional conduct and the development of comprehensive guidelines around hiring and promotion – both will provide leadership for learned societies.

She discussed the role of the board – governance and stewardship.

Finance Report (Randall Styers, Deborah Minor):

Attention was drawn to December 31, 2018 revenue and expense statements. In comparison with previous years, the revenue line appears to indicate a short-fall. However, the revenue numbers are directly related to the new dues structure which allows for rolling membership. It will take a year or two before we have comparative data for the new structure.
The decline in market securities reflect primarily the market downturn in December. The numbers have already recovered given the performance of the stock market in January of 2019. Reserve practice is to have 3 years built up. A question was raised about replenishing investment funds when they are utilized for one-time expenses. A procedure needs to be put in place. Because of financial help, open to one-time expenditures that help AAR move forward.

**Strategies around public understanding of religion** conversation, including members of the Committee on the Public Understanding of Religion who joined us by Zoom: Erik Owens, Chair, and Simeon Ilesanmi, (Laurie Patton, Alice Hunt):

Goal of the conversation is to set public understanding of religion goals and set priorities for this year. The executive director gave background for the conversation before making her proposal and asking for input.

After a full discussion, the AAR board of directors endorses the following direction for the publics understandings of religions (PUR): In the first next two years, AAR staff will focus on: 1) creating inventory of current work being done by the AAR membership; 2) from that inventory and other research, mapping present action and future needs for publics understandings of religions; 3) creating more public interface for the content already developed by the AAR; and 4) working with AAR committees, working groups, and leadership to institutionalize, where appropriate, the development of membership capacities in the public understandings of religions. The board would like staff to pay particular attention to the career diversity and remunerative justice in pursuing these four goals.

**Ethics of Comparison (Laurie Patton)**

President Patton provided context for the piece on the ethics of comparison. It came as the result of an “Ethics of Comparison” roundtable at the 2018 Denver annual meeting. This group sent it to the board and suggested it become part of statement on research practices. Discussion ensued. The board decided to send it back to the presenting group and ask them, should they wish, to present a more concise statement for subsequent review.

**Committee Reports (Marla Frederick)**
Vice President Frederick presented her digest of committee recommendations. Staff and board leadership will take responsibility to communicate with committees and working groups.

**Summit report (Zayn Kassam and Alice Hunt)**

Status Committee Director Zayn Kassam and Executive Director Alice Hunt presented a report about the Status Committee (plus ALCF and Regions) Summit that happened in Atlanta in January of 2019. The ultimate goal for the summit participants and the AAR board is to centralize the concerns of status committees in to the life of the AAR as organizational goal as manifested in the AAR mission, values, and long-range plan. It is the work of status committees to bring forth the needs and concerns of most vulnerable members.

Staff and board leadership will take responsibility to communicate with the status committees.

**Program Committee report (Kathryn McClymond and Robert Puckett)**

In January, the Program Committee reviewed 69 program units. Policy issues to share with Board include an ongoing focus on best practices, drafting what is hoped will be policies to bring to the program unit chairs in a zoom meeting in April to be finalized at the September meeting.

Each January, the Program Committee reviews Related Scholarly Organizations (reviewed on a rolling basis). RSOs know they will be reviewed. The Program Committee recommends to the board to either approve continuing status for RSOs or to withdraw RSO status, as determined by the Program Committee review. For this year, the Program Committee recommended the renewal of six RSOs and raised concerns about one RSO. The President and the Executive Director will contact this particular RSO, offering possible solutions to the issues identified by the Program Committee. The board approved the RSO status of the Colloquium on Violence and Religion; the Int’l Society for Chinese Philosophy; the North American Association for the Study of Religion; the Public Religion Research Institute; the Society for Asian and Comparative Philosophy; and the Society for the Study of Christian Spirituality.

**Literacy Guidelines (Amir Hussain)**
In 2016, the Arthur Vining Davis Foundation (AVD) approached the AAR to submit a proposal to advance religious literacy. At-Large Director, Amir Hussain, served on the subsequent task force and presented the proposed guidelines to the board. After a robust discussion, the board asked the task force to make some revisions and present a new draft to the board for approval.

Climate issues (Laurie Patton)
In the fall of 2018, a member wrote to the president and executive director to ask the board to consider additional sustainability issues. The board did some brainstorming around environmental concerns and will see input from membership before coming up with a plan to be implemented over the next ten years.

Sunday, Feb 16th

Publications Task Force Promotion and Tenure Document (Laurie Patton)
The board reviewed the document first in September 2018 and then again in November 2018. After a brief discussion the board approved the AAR Statement on Publications in Tenure and Promotion, recognizing the president will incorporate the small changes discussed.

Motion 2: To approve the AAR Statement on Publications for Promotion and Tenure, as amended. Passed unanimously.

Hiring and Promotion Task Force (Laurie Patton)
President Patton recalled the desire of the board to provide leadership in the academy around hiring and promotion. This desire was sparked at the September 2018 board meeting as a result of the gratitude for the work of the Publications Task Force. The board provided input about what should be included in the charge for a comprehensive Hiring and Promotion Task Force. President Patton will draft a charge for board review. The board also discussed who should be appointed to the task force.

Change in Language around Careers; Practices that Promote Career Diversity (Laurie Patton)
The board had a broad discussion around career diversity. President Patton desires that we no longer use the phrase “alternative career” and will give a strong signal with her presidential plenary sessions, including her presidential address. The board came up with a wide variety of ideas around the topic.

2018 Annual Meeting Review (Robert Puckett)

The Director of Meetings, Robert Puckett, discussed the results of the 2018 Annual Meeting Survey and reflected on the results. The board discussed several ideas for improvement. Of particular note, 92% were satisfied with the annual meeting and found it a good investment and relevant to their work. The primary reason for attending is networking, by far. Survey participants indicated a preference for 2-hour and 90-minutes sessions.

Move into Executive Session (Board only)
Executive Director report (Alice Hunt)

The executive director reported on the move toward a new Association Management System (AMS) to replace our expensive, home-grown system. The new AMS is a cloud-based system and will function on most devices. It will reduce costs and allows for a variety of forms of engagement while also providing 24/7 technical support. A new website will follow.

The executive director reported on the status of the Governance and Leadership Development (formerly known as Nominations) Committee. The Committee hopes to have a slate to present to the board in the next few weeks. The executive director noted that, for the first time, there was an open call to the membership for nominations for all open positions.

The executive director reported on the search process for the new Director of Finance and Administration to replace Deborah Minor, who is retiring. Working with Emory HR, the executive director reviewed over 50 candidates; conducting eight initial interviews before interviewing three candidates on campus. These three also meet with a small group of staff. The final candidate also had an interview with the president and treasurer. The new Director of Finance and Administration will be Nicholé Jefferson. She has over 20 years of experience in administration and finance. Deborah Minor will stay on for a period of time to provide training and overlap.
The executive director reported on the continuing work to restructure the staff to align a functional org chart with mission, values, and the long-range plan. She provided some history of staffing and organizational culture and reviewed the restructure process (work force planning as outlined by Emory HR.) The board requested additional information about budgetary impact and will receive this information in a way that protects staff privacy.

**Brief Update on Professional Conduct Procedures (Laurie Patton)**

President Patton gave an update on the ambitious effort underway to develop professional conduct procedures that will lead the way for learned societies. The new procedures:

1. Will appoint an ethics committee with adjudicatory function over procedures and complaints.
2. Will appoint at least 2 ombudspeople who will receive reports to determine whether or not a complaint should be addressed. Not advocates but neutral in process.
3. Formal complaints will involve the appointment of an independent investigator
4. Provide definitions of terms
5. Clear statement about retaliation
6. Emergency removal provision
7. Variety of complaint procedures to follow; encourage reports and create mechanism; referral to law enforcement;
8. Informal and formal complaint procedures. Keeps from escalating and also brings more gravity to formal.
9. Can choose alternative methods of dispute resolution and hope to provide several options, e.g. Restorative practices; conflict resolution with experts

Once completed, the draft procedures will be circulated for vetting.

**Other business**

The Executive Committee will take up Parking Lot issues and develop as agenda items for next board meeting.

Adjourn at 12:05.