

AAR/WR BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING
8 July – 18 July, 2020: Action Without a Meeting and Board Vote

Prepared by: 2020-20201 AAR/WR President Anna Hennessey

Present: Souad Ali (Arizona Regional Rep), James Berry (Southern California & Western Region Student Director), Marie Cartier (Southern California Regional Rep), Yuria Celidwen (Women's Caucus Liaison), John Erickson (Vice President Elect), Anna Hennessey (President), Anjeanette LeBoeuf (Queer Advocate), Susan Maloney (Honorary Board Member, Advisor, and Facilitator, non-voting), Thien-Huong Ninh (Northern California Regional Rep), Hester Oberman (2020-2021 Interim Regional Coordinator), Joseph Paxton (Conference Manager, non-voting), Jacob Perez (Northern California Student Rep), Emily Silverman (2020-2021 Interim Vice President and Program Chair), Sakena Young-Scaggs (Diversity and Inclusion Advocate)

Notes: Minutes prepared based on email correspondences of July 8, 2020 and July 16, 2020

1. AAR/WR President Anna Hennessey notifies the AAR/WR Board that on July 1, 2020, she attended an online zoom meeting with AAR/WR's Interim Vice President and Program Chair, Emily Silverman; AAR/WR Conference Manager, Joseph Paxton; and two members from the host institution for AAR/WR's 2021 conference at the Graduate Theological Union (GTU) in Berkeley. The members from GTU were Dr. Rita Sherma, an Associate Professor who is AAR/WR's primary academic contact at GTU, and Sephora Markson, GTU's Vice President for Marketing.
2. Hennessey states that the main topic of the meeting was a discussion of the modality for AAR/WR's 2021 conference since COVID-19 has again begun to spike in California and the likelihood of a vaccine and dissemination of the vaccine in time for the conference is not high. Sephora Markson is part of a committee formed in the wake of COVID-19 that works closely on regulations for events at the GTU. Hennessey states that Markson is very knowledgeable about the situation and had explained to Hennessey, Silverman, and Paxton that an "in-person conference" will look very different from the in-person conferences of the past. Markson advises that all attendees will need to maintain social distancing; thus, there will be regulations in 2021 as to how many people can fit into a room for talks or events, people will be required to maintain a distance of six feet from one another at all times, including during receptions, masks will be required, etc. Such regulations will have an impact on the logistics of AAR/WR's 2021 conference because AAR/WR will not be able to guarantee all attendees room seating in cases of well-attended sessions.
2. During the meeting, Rita Sherma and Sephora Markson suggested that the AAR/WR Board consider moving into early planning of either a virtual or a hybrid conference. Hennessey explains that Markson and Sherma have wonderful ideas about promoting the conference in conjunction with the Sustainability Initiative at GTU. However, they will need to know the type of conference the AAR/WR intends on having March 19-21, 2021 before moving into promotion, which they hope to start by August or September 2020.

3. Based on her discussion with the members of GTU, Hennessey explains to the board that a "hybrid conference" is not the type of hybrid conference that the board had previously discussed. The board had previously envisioned a hybrid conference as entailing many attendees in person and then some attendees patching in remotely. Rather, "hybrid" in this sense would mainly entail having several of the larger talks, such as the keynote, take place on campus and live-streamed or recorded, while regular unit sessions would be held virtually. With a "virtual conference," everything would be held remotely. All members at the July 1, 2020 online meeting agreed that the AAR/WR and GTU would also want to come up with creative ways for members to socialize if the AAR/WR were to go the virtual route with its 2021 conference.

4. Hennessey states that the board needs to discuss the issue. She is prepared to communicate to Dr. Rita Sherma and Sephora Markson that the AAR/WR can move forward and plan the 2021 conference as either a hybrid or virtual event. However, this depends on the board's decision. Utilizing the Operating Agreement's clause on Action Without a Meeting (Operating Agreement 4.4), Hennessey proposes that board members discuss and vote through email to let the Board know which direction board members would like to go in for the 2021 conference. Hennessey states that choices for the vote are:

A. Maintain an in-person conference at GTU in March 2021, which will necessitate strong social distancing measures, including: smaller room capacities at talks, 6 feet distancing regulations for participants, regulations for receptions, and mask wearing.

B. Collaborate with GTU to hold either a virtual or hybrid conference, the latter of which will still involve all units holding their sessions virtually and not in person.

5. Hennessey advises board members to send their votes either reply-all to the entire group or as a private response to her. She encourages them to express their opinion about the matter before sending in a vote or while trying to make a decision on how to vote.

6. Once the board has discussed the issue and all votes are in, Hennessey states that she will tally the votes and send the results to the board.

7. Hennessey states that non-voting members should also feel free to express their opinions either to the group as a whole or privately to her.

8. Hennessey notes that the board will have time later in the year to figure out the issue of registration costs for the 2021 conference.

9. Hennessey advises the board to send votes in by Wednesday, July 15, 2020.

Notes on correspondences before finalization of votes: on July 8, 2020, Northern California Student Representative Jacob Perez seconds President Anna Hennessey's motion to vote on the modality for the 2021 conference. He heartily supports a virtual/hybrid modality for the 2021 conference, emphasizing also the need to consider international students, especially those under serious threat by the recent ICE announcement on international student deportation in the United States. On July 10, 2020, Interim VP and Program Chair Emily Silverman writes in support of a

virtual/hybrid modality for the 2021 conference, expressing concern about the spread of COVID-19 in 2020 and the lack of confirmation that there will be a vaccine by March 2021. On July 14, 2020, Queer Advocate Anjeanette Le Boeuf writes in support of a virtual/hybrid modality for the 2021 conference. However, she also states that the board needs to pay close attention to accessibility and zoom fatigue when preparing for the conference. She also wants to prioritize the creation of programming and resources for the 2021 conference that truly support members who are international students, members (both students and faculty) who are BIPOC, LGBTQ+. She emphasizes that the Western Region is a bastion for progression and innovation, which is needed now more than ever. On July 14, 2020, Interim VP and Program Chair Emily Silverman agrees with Anjeanette LeBoeuf and states that as Program Chair, she will pay attention to the problem of Zoom fatigue and also hopes to work with the board and GTU to create a warm and welcoming conference for all.

10. On July 16, 2020, Anna Hennessey sends a follow-up email to her July 8, 2020 email. She states that she has heard from all of our board members on how to proceed with the modality for the 2021 conference and has tallied the votes. The results are:

Option 1 (social distancing conference): 0

Option 2 (virtual/hybrid conference): 12

11. Hennessey states that over the next few months, she will be working closely with AAR/WR's VP/Program Chair, Emily Silverman, and Conference Manager, Joseph Paxton, to determine the exact format that the 2021 conference will take. She states that she will update the board on this during our November board meeting.

12. Hennessey advises the board that AAR National decided (week of July 16, 2020) to go online for its 2020 conference (Boston in-person conference has been canceled). The AAR/WR board meeting will therefore be held through Zoom. A time and date for that will be sent to the board in the early fall.