

Executive Committee of the AAR/WR Board
1/26/13 Meeting (via phone conference call)
Notes (drafted by PBR)

In attendance: Souad Ali (President), Franz Metcalf (Past President), Philip Boo Riley (Vice President/Program Chair), Dirk Von der Host (Regional Coordinator), Sara Frykenberg (Conference Manager, ex officio).

The meeting was convened by Souad and ran from 10:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. (CA time). Sara's husband kindly arranged for us to use his company's conferencing service free of charge. There were four items on the agenda.

1. Conference update

Sara led a discussion with the executive committee on four topics related to preparations for the 2013 conference. Highlights and actions are included below.

Registration

Sara reported that registration was up and running. At present it can be accessed through the national AAR website; Boo and Sara are working on materials for Tim Helton to add to the AAR/WR website—essentially the same as in the past, the conference program, registration forms, and a link for online registration.

Sara will be the AAR/WR administrator for the registration process, and will be the contact for members experiencing difficulty. She is already in dialogue with Susan Snider, AAR/national, and expects to continue consulting with her. Franz indicated he would serve as an additional administrator, but only as another set of eyes to double check as necessary. He also will contact Sara off line about issues that came up last year.

Schedule

Sara referred us to the spreadsheet she had circulated last week, including the draft conference schedule. The schedule included 11 sessions over the two days to accommodate the 31 different panels developed by the units as well as programs for the entire membership programs (plenary, reception, President's address). She noted that most sessions had four panels. Sara summarized the e-mail exchanges the executive committee had the past week regarding the draft schedule and related information, and described some of the challenges faced in adhering to the variety of principles or desirables for constructing a schedule: e.g. maintain a variety of panels across each session time slot; schedule units with only one panel on Sunday and for those with two panels, on different days; honor requests from some units for specific days to accommodate presenter schedules.

Sara presented an option to the executive committee that would reduce the challenges: Drop the final, 11th session on the second day/Monday, and revise the first day/Sunday schedule to include five panels across most of the sessions. In our discussion we observed that the tradition of extending the 2nd day of the conference to late afternoon came from the need to synch our schedule with SBL's, and that need is now gone. We speculated about the impact of the change

on attendance at panels—e.g. attendance would probably increase for the panels moved from the final session, but may decrease for individual panels in sessions with five slots. Another advantage that we should discuss with the full board: this option frees up a time on the second day for, e.g. interest groups, caucus meetings, informal dialogues, could minimize conflict w/ standing unit chair meetings, etc.

The executive board voted unanimously to adopt the option to eliminate the 11th session, with the addendum proposed by Franz, that the sessions on day two/Monday start one hour later.

Next Steps and Conference Logistics

Sara mentioned what she will be doing next, including work with Dirk on an e-blast to the membership, work with Boo on contacting unit chairs to proofread text, AAR/WR regional website text, her February 22 site visit, developing the hotel and food information, and picking up the catering information from Souad. Sara said she would circulate a list of questions for input from the board.

Souad walked us through some of the estimates that had been prepared by ASU catering after meeting with her. Based on attendance at the reception in Santa Clara in 2012 (60), Franz and Boo suggested we reduce the estimated attendance at the reception from 120 to no more than 90, noting that Sara would be able to increase that number if registration numbers are higher than usual. Souad also raised issues for Sara to address during her site visit—e.g. whether to have coffee service throughout the whole conference or leave attendees to seek caffeine on their own at the campus Starbucks.

Souad indicated that she will be meeting with Anne Feldhaus, acting chair of religious studies, re their assistance with the conference along the lines by which the department had previously supported it--e.g. paying for student workers, paying for program printing, etc. She will report back.

Regarding student help: Franz observed that paying students adds up (in 2012 the cost at SCU came to \$600), but it is effective in persuading them to show up and carry out their duties.

Dirk notes that any contracts with ASU (e.g. catering) must be signed by the regional coordinator, per our operating agreement.

The executive committee is appreciative of the ASU support Souad has garnered so far—e.g. the reception, Dr. Wadud's expenses and stipend, in addition to the usual classroom use at no charge—and agreed that this should be included in the conference program and featured on the website. Sara will send Souad the acknowledgements she has drafted to make sure the relevant parties are included.

Detailed Conference Budget

Sara indicated that she needs to work with a detailed budget to determine how much she could spend on food, our main expenditure. She has information on the 2012 conference from Franz, and will review those numbers with him and Dirk (see next item) to make sure she has them all. Souad has already provided information about ASU's considerable support for the conference.

Sara will also review this material and the catering services material Souad e-mailed us along with information submitted by the caucuses (including steps they have taken to reduce their costs) in order to draft a detailed budget for the conference, which would then be approved by the executive board. Boo suggested we could use the calculations in the fee increase proposal from our November AAR/WR Board meeting to get a figure for anticipated attendance and corresponding revenue from registration fees.

Boo and Sara commented briefly on the wild card “panel”: based on Dirk’s confirmation that Religion and Arts was going to use the two proposals it initially had sent to the pool, it appears that all the paper proposals from last fall have found homes in the standing units and we do not need to pilot a wild card panel this year.

2. Financial Issues

Dirk reviewed the financial activity since July 2013 for the executive committee. AAR/WR has on hand \$12,104 at present. Dirk projected expenses (e.g. conference calls) of \$8,930 for the conference. Franz noted that ASU’s generous subsidies offset most of it this year, but expressed a concern that our projected expenses and projected revenues from fees for the conference mean we may have a built-in deficit of as much as \$3,000 each year. Dirk said he would send a financial report to the executive committee.

3. Visa letters

Dirk reviewed the visa question issue that had been addressed in a series of e-mails over the past few months—e.g. experience other executive committee members have had with this issue, how much work it can be with very little return, our inability to properly vet individuals who request formal invitations to the conference from us, how the audience for regional conferences is primarily regional and to an extent national, but not international.

The executive committee approved his recommendation that the AAR/WR formalize the course of action we took in the two visa inquiries received this year: We do not do visas. In addition, since the AAR National has provisions for assisting with visas for international scholars for the annual conference, we should make this regional policy clear on our regional website (e.g. in our call for proposals).

Boo added that he had already cut/paste relevant portions of the e-mail exchange on visas for the draft policy and procedures manual he is pulling together with Franz.

4. AAR/WR Website

Souad and Sara updated us on the discussion they had with Susan Snider regarding the addition of the the AAR Logo to our website. We have their permission to do it; but for now Tim Helton does not have the time to revise the site. Susan also suggested to Souad and Sara that the AAR/WR board should review websites from the other regions that appear less complicated and easier to maintain and update. Sara will circulate the url for the website Susan identified as models.

Boo reported that he is drafting a list of revisions to Tim for the website, mostly updating the items associated with the tabs on the left side of the website. Franz indicated he would send Tim information on some links that appear to no longer work.

Among the changes Boo is sending along, the most important is to post the final version of the AAR/WR operating agreement. Dirk indicated he has a signed hard copy. Instead of scanning that, the executive committee recommended he contact Deborah Minor re a soft copy appropriate for posting on our website.

5. Other

Sara will be circulating a draft of the program to review next week to the unit chairs. Souad agreed to send the room #'s to Sara once she verifies capacity.

Souad will have her department a/a investigate ASU's parking policy for spring break and send the information to Sara for inclusion in the program. Sara will also add this to her list of items for her site visit.

The executive committee extended their thanks to Sara's husband for arranging for the conference call.