



Program Unit Chair Handbook

Introduction.....	2
Program Unit Chairs and the Program Committee.....	2
Program Units Defined.....	3
Program Unit Leadership.....	4
Program Unit Chair's Responsibilities: An Overview.....	4
Starting a program unit.....	4
Organizing program unit sessions.....	5
Reporting on program unit activities.....	5
Applying for renewal.....	5
Communication.....	5
Organizing Annual Meeting Sessions.....	5
The Annual Meeting Cycle: An overview.....	5
Preparing your Call for Papers Copy.....	7
Evaluating, Accepting, and Rejecting Proposals.....	8
Dealing with Multiple Submissions.....	9
Conducting Cosponsored Sessions.....	9
Policies concerning Participation in the Annual Meeting.....	10
Preparing Program Session Materials.....	11
Preparing Session Requests in PAPERS.....	12
Submitting Annual Program Unit Reports.....	13
Describing a Year's Activities.....	13
Making Changes in Leadership.....	14
Applying for Renewal.....	14
Rationale.....	14
Assumptions.....	15
Procedures.....	15
Self-Review.....	15
Reviewers.....	16
Program Unit Chair's Responsibilities.....	16
Previewing the Reviewer's Report.....	17
The Program Committee Meeting.....	17
Reimbursement Policy.....	17
Suggested Best Practices.....	17
A Word of Thanks.....	19

Introduction

Program unit chairs provide the leadership needed to conduct the AAR's Annual Meeting. Without you, there simply would not be an Annual Meeting. We in the executive office are grateful for your service on behalf of the AAR and the field. This handbook is designed to bring together the information you need to fulfill your responsibilities. It offers general guidelines and information on how the process works. We hope it will help you fulfill your critical role within the AAR. Please let us know how we might improve this handbook in anyway.

Program Unit Chairs and the Program Committee

Program Committee Charge

The Program Committee, a standing committee of the Board of Directors, oversees the AAR Annual Meeting.

Charge: The Program Committee oversees the Annual Meeting Program. In addition to setting program policies, this work entails designing and reviewing the overall program structure; establishing types, categories, and regulations governing program units; approving the formation and renewal of program units; and advising the [Director of Meetings](#) on important programmatic aspects of the meeting.

Composition: Program Unit Director (Chair), Vice President, one At-Large Director, and ten AAR non-board Members, all of whom have significant program unit experience.

Terms of Office: Ex officio in the case of elected officers; four years for non-board Members.

Program Committee Goals

Although the committee's main responsibility is preserving the quality of the Annual Meeting by evaluating and selecting program unit proposals, its regular review of the whole program allows it to act in other ways that enhance the meeting's quality. In its role as a facilitator of quality scholarship, the committee's goals include

1. seeking out important discourses that are missing from the current program;
2. watching for lines of inquiry that have reached a natural end;
3. nurturing new conversations;
4. supporting ongoing discourses; and finally,
5. keeping the "kaleidoscope" turning by promoting interaction among different units.

The committee reviews the annual program unit reports submitted by program unit chairs and confirms new unit chairs. (Steering committee members are appointed by the program unit chairs and their appointments reported to the Program Committee. Even so, all individuals on steering committees must be current AAR members). Because the reports provide the basis for the Program Committee's assessment of the Annual Meeting, they should give the committee a good description of the program unit (e.g. how many came and how good the presentations were) and an account of where that unit fits in the wider discourse. In making a case for a program unit, chairs should articulate how the work of their unit contributes to the field and where it is likely to go in the future.

The committee meets in mid-September to discuss policy changes and initiatives for the next Annual meeting. The committee meets in early January to review the previous Annual Meeting, program unit reports, and calls for papers; and to consider proposals for new program.

Program Units Defined

There are two types of program units. The role for each type is defined relative to the others, so that taken together they provide a coherent framework. For this reason, program unit chairs ought always to view their unit and its activities in relation to the other program units and activities that take place at the Annual Meeting.

Units are established to encourage the exploration of an area of study or methodology, to cultivate the relation between the study of religion and a cognate discipline, or to pursue a long-range and broad research project. Less restricted in participation than Seminars, Units are expected to experiment with the format of sessions at the Annual Meeting. Units are approved for five-year terms. Renewals are contingent on making the case that the Unit's work needs to continue. Some Units may complete their work in five years; others may continue indefinitely. Groups meet for one to five two-and-one-half-hour sessions, as determined by the Program Committee for each term.

Seminars are highly specific projects driven by a collaborative research agenda leading toward publication. The main role of this unit is to foster such collaborations and to do so, where possible, in a public setting that allows auditors to gain insight into the project, the process, and the people involved. Seminars continue working throughout the year, via exchange of papers, bibliographies and correspondence. Seminars meet for one session at each Annual Meeting for a period of five years. Seminar participants (up to twenty) pre-circulate papers and come to the seminar's Annual Meeting session ready to discuss them, papers should not be read during the session. Auditors who are not among the seminar's participants are welcome. Seminars are not renewable.

Program Unit Leadership

Each ongoing program unit has a chair or co-chairs and a steering committee who oversee the program unit's activities.

All program units have program unit chairs and steering committee members who are confirmed in their appointment by the Program Committee.

Each unit nominates and selects its own leaders. Units should describe briefly to the Program Committee the process by which the selection was made. This policy is meant to foster a broadly participatory process.

Like program unit chairs, all steering committee members must be current AAR members before proposal evaluations begin in the spring.

Any current AAR member may serve on the steering committee of a program unit, but no more than two in any given year. Any current AAR member may not serve as chair of more than one unit at a time.

Ordinarily, students may not chair program units. If a program unit wishes to nominate a student, a compelling written rationale must accompany the nomination, further the student must have completed their qualifying exams and be ABD. Similarly, students may serve on steering committees only if they have met the above qualifications.

Structures

What follows is the typical pattern. Program units may request exceptions:

Units: chair or co-chairs and up to seven steering committee members who serve three-year terms, renewable once.

Seminars: chair or co-chairs and up to five steering committee members who serve a term concurrent with the term of the seminar.

Program Unit Chair's Responsibilities: An Overview

This section contains an overview of the program unit chair's responsibilities. Sections 6, 7, and 8 provide more details to help program unit chairs fulfill their duties.

1. **Starting a program unit.** Typically, the person who assumes the leadership in submitting the original proposal to institute a new program unit becomes the unit's chair if the unit is approved. This typically entails conversations with members interested in the topic, the formation of a proposed steering committee, and the writing of the proposal, which is then submitted to the

Program Committee. (See Section 12, Proposing a New Program Unit.)

2. **Organizing program unit sessions.** The program unit chair oversees the whole process, from submitting the unit's call for papers to evaluation of proposals and final selection of presenters. The AAR encourages all units to use anonymous review of proposals. Program unit chairs, with their steering committees, play a leadership role by highlighting special topics, setting up sessions of invited guests, or experimenting with the format of sessions. (See Section 6, Organizing Annual Meeting Sessions).
3. **Reporting on program unit activities.** The program unit chair reports annually to the Program Committee about the unit's activities. This report should provide detailed information including names of new steering committee members and proposed program unit chairs. The [Director of Meetings](#) provides an online form for this report in late November. (See Section 7, Submitting Program Unit Chair Annual Reports).
4. **Application for renewal of program unit.** Units seeking renewal must undergo a rigorous review process. This review occurs automatically every five years and includes a self-review by the unit, including a clear rationale, defined analytic focus, articulated methodology, set of goals, documentation of the unit's activities, an assessment of the unit's effectiveness and importance, and needed improvements. If additional sessions are requested, an external review is required.

So that the Program Committee can respond to the request during its annual January meeting, it is the program unit chair's responsibility to see that all of the forms, procedures, and deadlines in this process are followed. (See Section 8, Applying for Renewal or a Change in Status.)

5. **Communication.** Increasingly, communication amongst program unit chairs, participants, and the executive office is conducted via email. Regular use of email and the Internet will be assumed and necessary for all program unit chairs.
6. **Organizing Annual Meeting Sessions**

The Annual Meeting Cycle: An Overview

This section provides an overview of the steps involved in the Annual Meeting cycle. Detailed instructions about the steps pertinent to a program unit chair's responsibilities appear in subsequent sections.

1. **Preparing Your Copy for the Call for Papers**
Immediately after the Annual Meeting, program unit chairs write reports to the

Program Committee. Reports are due in the executive office the first week of December. These online reports must include copy for the next Call for Papers. This copy is usually drawn from conversations with the steering committee and from the business meeting at the previous Annual Meeting. It should begin with a statement of the unit's objectives and include an outline of the themes or topics the unit is most interested in for the upcoming meeting.

2. **Director of Meetings Produces and Sends out the Call for Papers**

The executive office posts the Call for Papers at www.aarweb.org by mid-January.

3. **Director of Meetings sends Planning Information to Program Unit Chairs**

This information includes practice forms and instructions you need to organize your sessions and prepare your Program Book copy. The information is sent and posted online by mid-February.

4. **Proposals are Submitted by Individual Members or as Pre-Arranged Sessions**

Proposals are due to program unit chairs by March 1, and may be submitted in one of three ways: e-mail; e-mail with attachments; or via PAPERS. A complete proposal includes

- a. a description of the proposed paper or session;
- b. a program participant form for each person; presiders (required) and respondents (if any) included; or a Pre-Arranged Session participant form; and
- c. an abstract of the proposal for the Online Program Book.

5. **Evaluating Proposals**

Each program unit has its own process for evaluating proposals; some use PAPERS while others circulate proposals via e-mail. The AAR strongly urges that program units use some form of anonymous review. While it may sometimes happen that anonymous review processes result in conflict with the AAR's inclusiveness policy, the Program Committee's opinion is that usually this is not the case. The committee is also comfortable with a variety of ways of "correcting" for the happenstance of anonymous review. Some unit chairs, for example, take the initiative in inviting members to participate; some send with the proposals a separate sheet of proposers; some review the results of the anonymous review and then hold a conference call or live online chat with their steering committee to make some adjustments for the sake of broadening the range of presenters.

To allow adequate time for program units to evaluate proposals, there will be a proposal review period until March 15. No proposals may be accepted or rejected during this time. In instances where an identical proposal was sent to two separate units, program unit chairs are

encouraged to consult with one another on the unit's plans to accept or reject it. People are permitted to state the preference of which unit accepts the proposal when the proposal is submitted. After March 15, acceptance and rejection notices may be sent. The Program Committee encourages you to work in partnership with other program unit chairs.

6. **Notification**

By April 1, program unit chairs must notify members who submitted proposals whether or not they are on the program. This is especially important because members sometimes must decide between more than one invitation. To speed the process and ensure that program unit chairs can establish their program efficiently, it is imperative that invitations and rejections go out on time. PAPERS largely automates this process. If your program unit does not use PAPERS, we urge the use of e-mail.

7. **Program Unit Chairs Send Program Book Copy to the [Director of Meetings](#)**

Program Book copy, participants' abstracts, and room setup requirements are due from the program unit chair to the executive office by April 1 through PAPERS.

Materials due by the April deadline include:

- a. Program Book copy describing each session
- b. room set up and equipment needs
- c. program participant information for each person including presiders and respondents
- d. paper and panel abstracts, if any

9. **Producing the Annual Meeting Program Book**

The [Director of Meetings](#) organizes the program. The Program Book is mailed to all registered members in late September. Room locations are listed in the online and print Program Book.

10. **Annual Meeting**

At the Annual Meeting, program units conduct regular sessions, hold business meetings within the time frame of a session, review goals, and set an agenda for the next year's Call for Papers.

Preparing Your Portion of the Call for Papers

Copy for the Call for Papers must be submitted in the online Program Unit Report.

The following two examples should help you in preparing your copy:

Study of Islam. Nelly Van Doorn-Harder, Department of Theology, Valparaiso University, Valparaiso, IN 46383-7493, USA; pieternella.hardervandoorn@valpo.edu. Omid Safi,

Department of Philosophy & Religion, Colgate University, 13 Oak DR, Hamilton, NY 13346, USA; osafi@mail.colgate.edu. The Study of Islam Section encourages paper proposals in all areas of Islamic studies, but successful proposals will reflect theoretical and methodological sophistication and self-awareness, as well as innovative examination of Islamic societies and texts. As in all years, we welcome submissions dealing with the Qur'an, Islamic law, Sufism, gender and sexuality constructions, engagement with modernity, and other areas of general interest. When submitting your proposals online to the PAPERS system, prearranged paper sessions (with separate abstracts for each individual paper) are generally preferable to prearranged roundtables. All prearranged sessions should take gender and seniority diversity into account when organizing presenters; respondents are essential. Innovative, interactive formats and multimedia presentations are welcome. Although we look forward to prearranged paper sessions in the areas outlined below, individual scholars are also encouraged to submit their proposals. This year we are especially interested in papers or panels on the following: moving beyond the "Clash of Civilizations" theory; comparisons between Judaism and Islam, especially law; the pedagogy of teaching the Qur'an (this can include topics from the classical tradition, educational approaches, teaching of the Qur'an in a specific geographical area, or trends of learning); African-American Islam; the prophet Muhammad (historical approaches, textual sources, poetry, Sufi expressions, modern developments); the creation of Muslim identity through learning processes; religions in South Asia.

Anthropology of Religion. Rebecca Norris, Department of Religious Studies, Merrimack College, 315 Turnpike ST N, Andover, MA 01845, USA; W: 978-837-5000, ext. 4521; rebecca.norris.1999@alum.bu.edu. We encourage submissions from scholars of diverse traditions, regions, and eras which use anthropological theory or method. This year, we particularly invite papers on the intersection of cognition, culture, and cosmology as well as proposals that draw on psychological anthropology. We also plan to co-sponsor two sessions focusing on Latin America: 1) with the Native American Traditions in the Americas Group and the Religion, Medicines, and Healing Consultation, we invite proposals that include ethnographic approaches to healing practices, medicines, and Native religious traditions in Latin America (especially papers on peyote and other plants used for ceremonies and healing); 2) with the Mysticism Group, we invite proposals on mysticism, trance, and possession in the Americas.

Call for Papers copy must be received by the Program Unit Report deadline each year. The chairs of the unit should be listed as the contacts. If there are others a potential proposer should contact, note them in parentheses following the topic.

Evaluating, Accepting and Rejecting Proposals

There is no single procedure or guideline for evaluating, accepting or rejecting proposals. In most instances, program units design processes to fit their specific needs, locations, and goals. Typically program unit chairs share copies of proposals with steering committee members who suggest rankings and groupings. It is usually the chair's responsibility to respond to applicants, put the package together into a coherent program, and submit the results to the [Director of Meetings](#) through the online session entry form.

It is imperative that all applicants be notified about the status of their proposal by the April 1 notification deadline. To facilitate the notification process, we urge the use of e-mail.

The AAR encourages program units to use some type of anonymous review process. Many program units follow procedures similar to those used by journals and book publishers. Since access to the program can be a political and economic issue as well as an academic one, it is very important that members trust that all proposals are treated impartially.

Organizing a Prearranged Session

It is also appropriate for a program unit's leaders to arrange an Annual Meeting session with invited speakers or panelists. Some units accept session proposals from members that have been prearranged in their entirety. If your unit is interested in doing a prearranged session, please be sure to look over the paragraph on Special Invitations.

Dealing with Multiple Submissions

The policy concerning multiple submissions is as follows:

To foster broad participation and to facilitate the work of unit chairs, the Program Committee allows but does not encourage multiple submissions of proposals. The limit on such submissions is two. These may consist of the same proposal submitted to two different program units or of any combination of different proposals. Although failure to disclose multiple submissions may result in the rejection of all submissions, disclosure of multiple submissions will not jeopardize full consideration of each.

Conducting Cosponsored Sessions

Program unit chairs are encouraged to explore the possibility of conducting cosponsored sessions with other program units when it seems appropriate to do so. Sometimes cosponsored sessions are arranged ahead of time by program unit chairs and announced in the Call for Papers, and other times cosponsored sessions arise when a program unit chair receives a cluster of proposals that would be best presented in concert with another unit's work. The manner in which cosponsored sessions are listed in the Program Book is alphabetical by program unit name. For instance: Buddhism Unit and Hinduism Unit; Black Theology Unit and Indigenous Religious Traditions Unit.

Number of Cosponsored Sessions

Each unit may have a cosponsored session in addition to its normal allotment of sessions. Seminars are not permitted to have cosponsored sessions. Cosponsored sessions count as each unit's extra session.

A unit receives only one extra session for cosponsoring. Thus, if a program unit has two regular sessions, it will receive a third session if it cosponsors. If the unit cosponsors a second session, that session is considered one of the regular two sessions (ie, the unit does not receive a fourth session).

Policies Concerning Participation in the Annual Meeting

Because the Annual Meeting is a convention of members, program participants must be current members of AAR by June 30. Program unit chairs should verify the membership of each participant before *Program Book* copy is submitted. Individuals listed in a session who are not verified as current members will not be listed in the *Program Book*. Current membership for Annual Meeting participation means having paid in full the membership dues for the same calendar year as that of the Annual Meeting. When possible, the [Director of Meetings](#) will inform program unit chairs of such cases in order to allow the chair time to remind the proposed participant to become a current member or to make alternative arrangements for the session.

Further, all Annual Meeting participants must preregister for the Annual Meeting by June 30. Participants not registered by June 30 will have their name removed from the *Program Book*. N.B. Participants must be registered for the meeting at the appropriate regular, student, or retired member rate, rather than the spouse/partner rate. The spouse/partner rate is intended for those attendees who would not otherwise come to the Annual Meeting.

To ensure that individual members have maximum accessibility to program slots, members may not be on the program more than two times. Business meeting presiders may appear thrice. If the [Director of Meetings](#) discovers a member is slated to participate more than two times during the processing of session forms, the office will contact the member and the affected program units. The member will be asked to drop one or more sessions and to notify the proper program unit chairs of their decision. All sessions must have a presider, and presiders should not deliver a paper in a session over which they preside. Similarly, respondents may not deliver a paper in a session in which they will also respond.

Special Invitations

Requests to invite a nonmember whose field is not religion and who is not located within a religion department or program should be submitted to the [Director of Meetings](#) at as soon as possible, but no later than March 31 of the meeting year.

Typically, the program unit chair sends an email request and gets a response within a day. Authorization must precede the extending of an invitation to a nonmember. In your correspondence with the executive director, please include the full address for the invited participant, and a brief rationale for the exception. A nonmember whose field is religion must become a member to participate at the Annual Meeting. Participants from developing nations are exceptions to this requirement. Keep in mind that membership waivers do not necessarily imply waivers of registration for the Annual Meeting.

Papers vs. Roundtable

The Annual Meeting program has two types of sessions: paper sessions and roundtable sessions. A “roundtable” is a session with one announced theme and a list of participants who address that theme but do not present separate formal papers. A session with a theme and separately announced paper titles/presentations is considered a “papers” session. Any session

that lists individual paper titles—regardless of theme, format or structure—will be considered a presentation of papers.

Special Topics Forums, Plenary Addresses, Wildcard Sessions, and Exploratory Sessions

Sessions in honor of members will be organized by and within existing program units, rather than as a Special Topics Forum (STF). STFs are reserved for committees of the AAR. Plenary speakers are selected by the AAR president. Recommendations are appreciated; however, the decision is ultimately that of the president, and often made far in advance of the current annual meeting year. Wildcard sessions are one-time sessions on the Annual Meeting program. Such sessions are on topics not covered by extant program units. Wildcard session proposals are evaluated by the Program Committee. An Exploratory session is a complete prearranged session that provides a platform for a group of members to announce a line of inquiry new to the AAR program and to seek out others interested in pursuing it further.

Preparing Program Session Materials

Each chair prepares session materials in their entirety and submits them to the [Director of Meetings](#) through the PAPERS by April 1. For each session planned, the following must be submitted: a session request describing each session; room set up and equipment needs; program participant information for each person including presiders and respondents; paper and session abstracts. All of these materials must be submitted online.

The program session form is available online at papers.aarweb.org from early March through April 1. Further instructions for entering the form will be available there. Please keep in mind that one request must be made for each session. This holds even if you are dividing up the session thematically. Your sessions' proper scheduling and Program Book are predicated on accurate submission of this information.

If the session was coordinated by a person other than the program unit chairs, give the person's name and contact information in the comment/concerns field of the online session form. Indicate any special needs including any requests for scheduling (e.g. Sabbath observance or persons with disabilities). When listing other sessions to avoid in scheduling, please be specific about the units or topics to be avoided (i.e. Buddhism Section's session on "Buddhism in Sri Lanka" rather than "anything about Buddhism") and list them in priority order.

Audiovisual Requests

The AAR makes available a limited number of meeting rooms pre-set with LCD projectors and screens. Participants must submit a request for equipment along with their proposal. If accepted, the request is forwarded to the AAR executive office – automatically if the proposal was made in PAPERS or by the chair if another submission method was used – and the session will be scheduled in an AV room set. AV requests must be received by **June 30**.

Audio-visual equipment rental costs have increased dramatically at the Annual Meeting. Recognizing that the majority of Annual Meeting audiovisual presentations involve PowerPoint or computer presentations, the AAR chose to support this trend by furnishing such equipment. A number of rooms will be set with LCD projectors for plug in to a participant's

personal laptop. AAR encourages participants to bring their personal or departmental laptops or communicate with members of the same session in order to share computer use.

Please double-check all AV requests. If there are requests that are puzzling or incomplete, please check with the participant for clarification. All requests for AV must be made at the time program copy is submitted. If you are requesting unusual AV for your session (e.g. dance floors, special lighting or specific computer equipment), contact the [Director of Meetings](#) and confirm the availability of such equipment. Unusual arrangements must be finalized early.

The executive office will make every effort to honor the AV requests received at the time of the proposal, but please also note that due to the high rental costs of computer equipment mean that we cannot guarantee all requests. The [Director of Meetings](#) will contact the program unit chairs and participants if requests are denied. AAR reserves the right to decide whether AV can be provided, depending on costs and availability. AV requests received after June 30 cannot be accommodated.

Acceptance/Rejection Notification

It is very important that you notify proposers whether they are on your program or not. We urge the use of email. Please send notification for each proposal as soon as possible, but no later than **April 1**. In the email, indicate to invitees how and when you should be contacted to confirm acceptance of the invitation. E-mail notification is largely automated in PAPERS.

Preparing Session Requests in PAPERS

Program Book copy is automatically generated from the information you provide through the PAPERS. Below are a few things to keep in mind when submitting your session information.

- Note that participants are attached to particular sessions and cannot be added/edited unless you are within the edit mode of the given session.
- Include an abstract for each presentation (up to 150 words) for publication in the Online Program Book. Only one abstract should be submitted for panels or seminars.
- **ALL ONGOING PROGRAM UNITS MUST SCHEDULE A BUSINESS MEETING.** Please note on your program session form the session that will include your business meeting and who will be presiding over the business meeting. All business meetings must occur within the time frame of one of your sessions and should be open to all registered attendees. Please also note whether it is more important for the business meeting to occur within a particular session or at the particular time you've requested.
- **ALL SESSION ENTRY INFORMATION IS DUE APRIL 1ST.**

Example of Paper Session (with Business Meeting)

Buddhism Section

Anne M. Blackburn, Cornell University, Presiding

Theme: *Contributions to the Study of Buddhism*

Michael Como, College of William and Mary

Medicine, Immortality and Yoshino

David Drewes, University of Virginia

Caitya Comparisons in Indian Buddhist Texts: A Reevaluation of the Evidence for a Cult of the Book in Indian Mahayana

Justin McDaniel, Ohio University

Negotiating with the Pali: Lao Buddhist Homiletics and the Kammavaca Nissaya

Business Meeting:

Anne M. Blackburn, Cornell University, and Peter N. Gregory, Smith College, Presiding

Example of Roundtable Session

Roman Catholic Studies Group

Rodger Payne, Louisiana State University, Presiding

Theme: *Catholicism and Civil Rights in the Twentieth-Century South*

Panelists:

Gregory Nelson Hite, University of Virginia

Charles R. Gallagher, Milwaukee, WI

Andrew S. Moore, Middle Tennessee State University

Justin Poche, University of Notre Dame

Responding:

Peter A. Huff, Centenary College of Louisiana

Example of Cosponsored Session

Philosophy of Religion Section and Theology and Continental Philosophy Group

Michiko Yusa, Western Washington University, Presiding

Theme: *Kyoto School Thought in Dialogue with Western Thought*

James W. Heisig, Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture

Nishida Kitaro's Medieval Bent

Yoshio Tsuruoka, University of Tokyo

Interpretations of Western Mysticism by Some Kyoto School Thinkers: Suzuki, Nishitani, and Ueda

Thomas P. Kasulis, Ohio State University

Watsuji Tetsuro's Critique of Modern European Social Philosophy and Its Impact on the Kyoto School

Submitting Annual Program Unit Reports

Describing a Year's Activities

The Program Unit Report is an online form made available to program unit chairs by the [Director of Meetings](#). It requests information on attendance at each session, the process used for soliciting and evaluating proposals, and an overall evaluation by the program unit leadership of the quality of proposals and presentations. The form also asks the program unit chair to make both general and specific suggestions that will enhance the Annual Meeting and its processes.

This report is due *almost immediately after* the Annual Meeting so the Program Committee can review it at their meeting in the second week of January. We understand that this is a very tight deadline at a terrible time of the semester. It is essential, however, if we are to preserve the flexibility to make changes from one Annual Meeting to the next. If we scheduled the Program Committee any later, we would have a year's lag before ideas which emerge at one Annual Meeting could find a place on the program. We appreciate your understanding of this very difficult schedule. We are making every effort through the use of online forms to reduce the amount of information which needs to be entered. Please share any suggestions you might have.

These reports play a vital role in helping the committee develop a comprehensive perspective on the meeting, as well as a detailed understanding of the particular needs or problems faced by individual program unit chairs. For these reasons, the reports should be prepared with care even though there is little time between the Annual Meeting and the Program Committee meeting.

Changes in Leadership

Annual reports are the vehicle for reporting leadership changes. If there is to be a change of leadership, the current program unit leadership should indicate who the new chair is replacing and the process by which the decision was made.

The chairs and committee members of seminars serve terms that are coterminous with the term of the program unit. The chairs of units, are appointed for three-year terms, renewable once. Unit steering committee members are appointed by the current chair and serve three-year terms, renewable once. Alternative patterns for terms of office for either the program unit chairs or steering committee members should be proposed to the Program Committee.

The size of program unit steering committees is fixed by the rules governing the Annual Meeting. Seminars may have 3-5 members, and Units may have 4-8 members. Requests for exceptions should be made in the annual report.

The annual report also offers an opportunity for a program unit to make suggestions for special performance events, and extra-meeting events and activities. Please understand that your suggestions and recommendations are appreciated, even if they do not always find their way to realization. Finally, requests for program unit name changes should also be made in the program unit report or as a supplement. Name changes are at the discretion of the Program Committee.

Preparing for Renewal

Rationale

The review and evaluation process represents the chief, though not the only, means by which the Academy is able to assess its work in constituent units. It is also intended to serve as a way

of being responsive to important changes and developments in the academic study of religion and thus remains representative of the interests and concerns of its members.

Assumptions

The review of program units is undertaken for the purpose of determining which units shall be continued. Beyond continuation considerations, the Program Committee uses these reviews as a primary mechanism for allocating the limited number of programming slots at the Annual Meeting. The Program Committee wishes to emphasize that competition for program slots has become increasingly intense in recent years. For renewal, there needs to be a compelling argument for continuation, a healthy procedural structure, and persuasive evidence of conceptually rigorous plans for another term. Seminars are nonrenewable.

Procedures

The review is based on at least three forms of evidence, both qualitative and quantitative:

- The program unit chair's annual reports.
- A self-review stating the aims of the unit, its procedures, its programming accomplishments, and a rationale for the unit's continued existence (due in the executive office and to the unit's reviewer by October 15th of the review year).
- Quantitative data, such as the number of proposals a unit receives, the number of proposals it accepted or rejected, the number of members who attended their sessions, and the number of sessions it sponsored or cosponsored. Some of this data is derived from the PAPERS System, but also from the Annual Reports.

Self-Review

Among the criteria deemed relevant to the self-review, though not necessarily in this order, are the following:

1. the extent to which the field of interest represented by the unit continues to reflect a significant area of interest and work for the Academy's membership.
2. the intellectual rigor, imagination, conceptual richness, and distinction of the work carried on by the unit, whether through the presentation of papers, the sponsorship of discussions, or the publication of proceedings.
3. the degree of commitment that the unit's constituency exhibits to the ongoing life of the unit.
4. the procedural health of the unit, including leadership practices, such as mechanisms for selecting new chairs and steering committee members; communication within the unit, between units, and with the AAR; and the unit's proposal review process and other decision making practices.
5. the extent to which the unit's constituency has been afforded an opportunity to participate in the unit's sessions (with attention to the demographic diversity

- (racial/ethnic, gender, geographic), professional diversity (seniority, institutional type), and intellectual diversity (sub-field, methodologies) of presenters).
6. the unit's range of appeal to those members of the Academy whose own fields of specialization do not typically fall within the field of interest represented by the unit and the unit's ability to involve such people periodically in its programs.
 7. the Program Unit's goals: the promise the unit offers for advancing the academic study of religion, or the relation of that study to other disciplines over the course of the next five years.
 8. The Program Unit's largest challenges in the next five years, and the unit's plans for overcoming those challenges.

External Reviewers

If a Unit requests additional sessions, requests an external review, or if the Program Committee, after its examination of the Program Unit's self-review, decides to follow-up with an external review, a reviewer will be selected by the Program Committee. Efforts are made to locate a member who has expertise in the field and who is able to play the role of participant observer in the unit's review.

The reviewer's written report, is based on (1) attending as many sessions of the unit as possible during the Annual Meeting, including the unit's business meeting(s); (2) personal interviews with the unit chairs, members of the steering committee and a cross-section of participants at Annual Meetings both current and previous (if that can be arranged); and (3) the unit's written self-review.

Program Unit Chair's Responsibilities during External Review

The following is a list of program unit chair responsibilities to guide you as you prepare your unit's proposal for an external review. Program unit chairs should:

1. cooperate fully with the reviewer in supplying all requested information in a timely fashion;
2. assist the reviewer in arranging a mutually acceptable time or times at the Annual Meeting to meet with the steering committee of the unit;
3. prepare any supplemental material the unit wishes to submit to the Program Committee in light of the reviewer's report;
4. submit to the Program Committee a formal petition for reauthorization for an additional period of time. That petition should review the history and activities of the unit since it was last authorized, present a plan for the future work of the unit if it is continued, and indicate the contribution of the work done under the unit's auspices to advancing the academic study of religion;
5. indicate committed leadership for the future of the unit (a CV for any new chair(s) and letters of agreement/support from steering committee members.)

Previewing the Reviewer's Report

The reviewer will arrange to meet with the chairs and steering committee of the unit under review near the conclusion of the Annual Meeting and will indicate to them the substance of the report that will be made to the Program Committee.

The chairs and steering committee of the unit may choose to submit additional materials responsive to the reviewer's evaluation of the unit. The supplement will be due at the same time as the Program Unit Report, but should be submitted separately as an e-mail or e-mail attachment.

The Program Committee Meeting

The Program Committee considers all review reports and related documents early in its meeting. The Committee must consider the case for renewal or change of status in relation to a range of other considerations. The decisions of the committee regarding the future of a program unit are final.

Reimbursement Policy

In addition to your contributions of time and talent, we recognize the financial support that your colleges and universities provide (in the form of telephone calls, copying, and postage) to help our volunteer system work. Without such support, we would not be able to have such a large, varied, and participatory process and event. We do, however, want to be sensitive to those unit chairs who are without institutional support. Thus we have set up a fund to help defray costs (up to US\$200). All requests for reimbursements should be sent to the executive director in writing. Only those receipted expenses not covered by your home institution can be reimbursed. Please contact the [Director of Meetings](#) for an expense report form, if necessary.

Suggested Best Practices

The following is a short list of guidelines, based on the calendar, to assist you in managing your program unit and its sessions more effectively.

January

Upon the posting of the *Call for Papers*, send a reminder to your unit's "faithful" that the proposal process has begun for the current year's Annual Meeting. Also, send reminders to your steering committee that they must renew their memberships in order to take part in the review process in March.

February

Contact your steering committee with instructions on how to access PAPERS if you are using this system; and/or on the timetable and procedures for proposal review.

March/April

Proposal reviews begin in earnest. If you are not using PAPERS, the following are merely suggestions on how to organize the review:

- Separate the proposals into two stacks, complete and incomplete. Decide whether you will or will not entertain incomplete proposals. The CFP instructions indicate that only complete proposals are eligible.
- Devise a balloting system, with rankings 1-5 and then a space for comments and a possible theme, if an individual paper proposal. Assign each proposal an arbitrary number. Keep a master list.
- Send out copies of the proposals to each of your steering committee members with a copy of the ballot for each proposal.
- Set a solid deadline by which ballots should be returned to you. Keep in mind that your final session requests are due to the [Director of Meetings](#) by April 1.
- Assemble the results and organize a conference or group e-mail among steering committee members if necessary. Finalize session themes and best time slots, including business meeting.
- Send acceptance/rejection notifications via e-mail; await responses if necessary before submitting finalized session information online.
- Inform your participants when their papers are due to respondents, if necessary.
- Enter all the information for your participants and sessions into PAPERS no later than April 1, 4:59 pm Eastern time.

June

Watch your e-mail for non-member and/or non-registered participant notifications from the [Director of Meetings](#). Participants who have not renewed their AAR membership or who have not registered for the Annual Meeting will have their name removed from the *Program Book* before it goes to print. It is your responsibility as chair to ensure that your participants are current members.

July

Searchable version of the *Program Book* goes online. Double-check your sessions to ensure all the information is accurate. You will also receive confirmation of your sessions' AV requests during this time.

October

Upon receipt of your *Program Book* in the mail, contact each of your steering committee members to remind them of the time and location of the unit's business meeting during the upcoming Annual Meeting. Propose an agenda; including any leadership changes which might need to be made.

November

Hold business meeting and elections if necessary; generate ideas for the next year's *Call for Papers*. During the meeting, if you find that a room does not have the requested AV equipment

or that it is malfunctioning, contact Meeting Management Staff by going directly to the Convention Information Desk. They will handle the situation by contacting the audio-visual company as indicated. Do not contact the audio-visual company unless you are willing to assume the costs that are incurred by their response to your problem. Further, if there is a need to add equipment not originally requested, participants may do so at their own expense by contacting the audio-visual company. Costs for on-site equipment can be prohibitive.

December

Turn in Program Unit Reports.

A Word of Thanks

The AAR owes program unit chairs a great deal of gratitude. The work is time consuming and sometimes tedious, but without it we would not have such a rich and variegated forum for sharing research and learning with one another. The executive office staff are ready to assist program unit chairs in whatever way possible. Please feel free to call on us whenever you have a question.

Each year, the executive director sends letters of appreciation to the institutions who support your work on our behalf. We solicit names and addresses of presidents, deans, department chairs, and other officials from you on our Web site in the Program Unit Chair Resources pages. Please see the online request form [here](#).

The executive director is also pleased to write a letter on your behalf for appointments, promotions, tenure, and other career advancement decisions. Please send an updated curriculum vitae with your request.

Let us know how we can make this process work better for you!