Program Unit Chair Handbook

Revised January 2020

Contents

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 Chief Scholarly Enagement Officer 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. The committee may arrange additional ad hoc meetings (in person or via teleconferencing) to facilitate their work.

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. Units are classified into five tiers as determined by the Program Committee for each term. Each Tier allows Program Units a choice of how many and what length of sessions that they want to use. For each, a cosponsorship adds one 90-minute session.

Tier 1

Choose between one of the following options:

- One 2.5 hour session
- Or Two 90 minute sessions

Tier 2

Choose between one of the following options:

- One 2 hour session and two 90 minute sessions
- Or One 2.5 hour session, and one 2 hour session

Tier 3

Choose between one of the following options:

- One 2 hour session and three 90 minute sessions
- Or Two 2.5 hour sessions, one 2 hour session, and one 90 minute session

Tier 4

Choose between one of the following options:
- One 2.5 hour session, one 2 hour session, and three 90 minute sessions
- Or Two 2.5 hour sessions, one 2 hour session, and one 90 minute session

Tier 5
Choose between one of the following options:
- One 2.5 hour session, one 2 hour session, and five 90 minute sessions
- Or Two 2.5 hour sessions, one 2 hour session, and three 90 minute sessions

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. All Seminars are Tier 1, and can choose between one 2.5 hour session or two 90-minute sessions. Seminar participants 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 two 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.

Students may not chair program units, but may serve on steering committees. 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.

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

Units: Two co-chairs and up to seven steering committee members who serve three-year terms, renewable once. Co-chair terms must be staggered so that both chairs do not rotate off at the same time.

Seminars: Two 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 persons who assumes the leadership in submitting the original proposal to institute a new program unit becomes the unit's chairs 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.) The chair should communicate the work asked of steering committee members each year and during the five-year program unit review.

2. **Organizing program unit sessions.** The program unit chairs oversees the whole process, from submitting the unit's call for papers to evaluation of proposals and final selection of presenters. 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 Chief Scholarly Enagement Officer 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 chairs' 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. **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 that are submitted to the Program Committee. Reports are due in the executive office the second 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. **Chief Scholarly Enagement Officer Produces and Sends out the Call for Papers**
   The executive office posts the Call for Papers at www.aarweb.org by late-January.

3. **Chief Scholarly Enagement Officer 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. The exclusive use of the PAPERS system is highly recommended for the ease of use and the sake of tracking proposals. A complete proposal includes
   a. a description of the proposed paper or session;
   b. an abstract of the proposal for the *Online Program Book*.
   c. a list of the participants in the proposal (including the author of a paper)

5. **Evaluating Proposals**
   Each program unit has its own process for evaluating proposals. The AAR strongly urges that program units to develop processes that balance anonymous reviews with

strategies that promote inclusivity, in keeping the AAR's mission. Some unit chairs, for example, take the initiative in inviting members to participate; 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. Members of the Program Committee are willing to work with unit leaders as they develop new practices, including strategic co-sponsorships, CFPs that invite broad participation, inviting respondents that bring diverse perspectives to panels, etc. The Program Committee has found that the most effective way to promote meaningfully diverse conversations is to establish diverse steering committees.

To allow adequate time for program units to evaluate proposals, there will be a proposal review period until mid-March. 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 the proposal review period, 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 Chief Scholarly Enagement Officer**
   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

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

The **Chief Scholarly Enagement Officer** organizes the program. The *Program Book* is

mailed to all registrants who opt to have it mailed to them in early October. Room locations are listed in the online and print *Program Book.*

9. **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:

Example #1: Study of Islam Unit

Call Text:

This Unit encourages individual paper, paper session, and roundtable proposals in all areas of Islamic studies. Successful proposals will reflect theoretical and methodological sophistication and engagement with existing scholarship along with innovative examination of Muslim practices, texts, and material culture in diverse contexts and geographies. We encourage the submission of coherent pre-arranged sessions involving multiple scholars, and these could include roundtable or other creative presentation formats.

As a new explicit requirement of our Unit, a successful pre-arranged session or panel proposal must incorporate gender diversity. Diversity of race and ethnicity, theoretical method, and rank are also highly encouraged.

If your proposal is accepted and you agree to be on the program, we expect you to show up to participate in your session at the Annual Meeting, barring unforeseeable exceptional circumstances. Please note that the Islamic studies program Units have a policy according to which no-shows may be barred from the program for the following year.

After great successes, we will again have a session centered on graduate student research in Islamic Studies. This session will continue to offer graduate students the opportunity to present for 5 minutes on their dissertation research, followed by short responses from other panelists and open discussion. If you are an advanced graduate student and interested in talking succinctly, and with an eye toward "so what—why does this matter?" questions, about your research at this session, please submit a paper proposal through the PAPERS system. Please make your abstract and proposal the same text and length (maximum 150 words) and indicate that your submission is for this special session format at the top of the proposal. If your proposal is accepted, instructions on making the most of this format will follow.

As always, we welcome submissions dealing with the Qur'an and the Sunna, law, philosophy, theology, mysticism, ritual, gender and sexuality, modernity and globalization, teaching,

religious pluralism, and other areas of general interest. Furthermore, we encourage proposals dealing with Shi'ism within and across these areas.

For the 2019 meeting in San Diego, we are also especially interested in paper and/or panel proposals on:

- prison and imprisonment (in the US and abroad);
- graduate session: this year, the Study of Islam Unit will co-sponsor a session centered on graduate student research in Islamic Studies, with the Islam, Gender, and Women Unit. This session will offer graduate students the opportunity to present for 5 minutes on their dissertation research, followed by short responses from other panelists and open discussion. If you are an advanced graduate student and interested in talking succinctly about your research in this session, please submit a paper proposal through the PAPERS system with the abstract and proposal the same text and length (maximum 150 words) and indicate that your submission is for this special session format at the top of the proposal;
- historic or contemporary iterations of forced migration and borderlands;
- Latinx Muslim communities;
- Islam, ecology, and environmentalism, historically or contemporarily;
- Chinese Muslims, state persecution, and Uighur communities (for possible co-sponsorship with Chinese Religions); or
- relationship between Islamophobia and antisemitism in Europe, including its connection to nationalist populism, responses to immigration (co-sponsorship with Religion in Europe Unit).

All proposals will be evaluated according to the following criteria: a descriptive title; a clearly formulated argument; engagement with secondary literature; articulation of a contribution to the field; and clearly identified methodology and sources.

Further suggestions for AAR proposal writers can be found in Kecia Ali's "Writing a Successful Annual Meeting Proposal": https://www.aarweb.org/annual-meeting/writing-successful-annual-meeting-....

Selected presenters will be notified of their acceptance approximately a month after the PAPERS deadline. Our Unit requires that the full text of their presentation be submitted for pre-circulation among session participants by November 2, 2019.

Study of Islam Mission Statement:

Revised January 2020

This Unit is the home for the academic study of Islam within the AAR. This Unit encompasses various approaches and subjects, from Qur'anic studies to modern reform movements and from textual research to sociology. The Unit also has an enduring interest in pedagogical issues associated with the teaching of Islam. The purpose of the Unit is both to provide a forum for dialogue among differing approaches and projects within Islamic studies and also to provide opportunities for the discussion of work that affects the overall field of the study of religion. We normally meet for five to seven sessions at each Annual Meeting. We coordinate our work with other Islam-related AAR Program Units, including the Contemporary Islam Unit, the Islam, Gender, Women Unit, the Islamic Mysticism Unit, the Qur'an Unit, and the Material Islam Seminar.

Anonymity: Proposals are anonymous to chairs and steering committee members during review, but visible to chairs prior to final acceptance or rejection

Method of submission:
PAPERS

Leadership:
Chair - Bazzano, Elliott, Le Moyne College, bazzanea@lemoyne.edu
Chair - Morgenstein Fuerst, Ilyse, University of Vermont, ilysermf@gmail.com

Example #2: Anthropology of Religion Unit

Call Text:

We invite proposals from the full range of ethnographic theories and methods exploring diverse traditions, regions, topics, periods, and encourage standpoints from across the discipline. We especially encourage individual and panel submissions that address:

- Author Meets Critics -
  We encourage traditional and creative arrangements, including single authors, books from multiple authors on a related or contested theme, and prominent writers of religion in the public sphere. Book(s) should be recently published and anticipated to have an enduring impact on theoretical and/or methodological dimensions of the anthropology of religion.

- Building on the AAR's theme focused on "creating, redefining, and expanding spheres of public discourse," we invite papers on San Diego's Chicano Park and its mural paintings. This multi-unit co-sponsored session will likely be supplemented by a separate tour to the site. In 1970 Chicano Park emerged through the efforts of community activists responding to the fracture and displacement of Chicanx communities caused by the construction of the Interstate 5 freeway in the barrio of Logan Heights. On this freeway's pillars, Chicano Park displays one of the largest assemblages of public murals

in North America, inspired by Chicanx history. In 2018, the San Diego Tribune described the space as a "battleground" for cultural identity between right wing groups waving American flags and Chicanx groups waving flags of Aztlan. We welcome papers from multiple disciplinary vantage points. We are particularly interested in proposals that take an ecological approach by engaging both the manner in which the contested space informs religious/spiritual identities and practices and the manner in which Chicanx spiritualities have influenced this built environment. Likely co-sponsors include the following Units: Religion and Cities; Religions in the Latin Americas; Native Traditions in the Americas; Latina/o Religion, Culture and Society; Anthropology of Religion; Religion, Memory, History; Ecclesial Practices; and Latina/o and Latin American Biblical Interpretation (SBL).

- Querying the "Public" in "Public Religion" and "Public Scholarship" - Critically reflecting on the relations among contested and diverse publics; the multiple configurations and performances of being public; the spatial, temporal, structural, and ideological dimensions of public-ness.

- Technologies of Fieldwork - Exploring the ways in which various media shape ethnographic theory and method, fieldwork encounters and relationships, and understandings of what constitutes religious practice (including but not limited to smartphone devices, software applications, and social media platforms).

- Contact Zones of Infrastructure and Labor - How does religion help shape the origins, development, and impact of contact zones? How do the transnational, cultural, political, economic, and technological conditions of these zones structure forms of lived religion and religious institutions?

- Borders, Boundaries, and Borderlands - Considering contestations of space and religiosity related to the nation-state or to space more figuratively.

- Nationalism, Religious Violence, and Peace-Making - Emerging forms of religious nationalism, religious critiques of nationalist ideology, religious movements supported and challenged by the nation.

- Ethnographies of Environment and Ecology - Sustainability, nature-culture relationships, responses to climate change.

- Daniel Murray (daniel.murray@mail.mcgill.ca) would like to propose a paper session on fieldwork and ethnography with the Daoist Studies Unit and the Anthropology and Religion Unit.

Further, we encourage panel proposals that use creative and alternative formats that elevate critical dialogue and engage multiple senses, for example:

- Flash Formats - An increased number of presenters are allotted ~7 minutes, followed by a robust, guided discussion.

- Sensory Props - Presenters engage with a material form that bears fieldwork significance, such as physical objects, visual images, and/or sound recordings.

Anthropology of Religion Mission Statement:

This Unit draws together scholars who utilize the methodological tools and theoretical perspectives of anthropology in the study of religion as a social and cultural phenomenon. Given the increasing importance of anthropology and ethnography for the academic study of religion, we serve the academy as an important forum for sustained discussion and critique of anthropological approaches that can connect scholars working on diverse traditions, regions, and eras who otherwise might not have the opportunity to learn from each other. Interested members are encouraged to join our (low volume) list-serv:
http://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/AAR-Anthropology/info

Anonymity: Proposer names are visible to chairs but anonymous to steering committee members

Method of submission:
PAPERS

Leadership:
Chair - Bielo, James, Miami University, bielojs@miamioh.edu
Chair - Selby, Jennifer A., Memorial University of Newfoundland, jselby@mun.ca

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 Chief Scholarly Engagement Officer through the PAPERS session entry form.

It is imperative that all applicants be notified about the status of their proposal by the April 1 notification deadline. The PAPERS system automatically emails submitters, but we suggest following up with separate emails as well.

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 equitably, offering opportunity for the broadest possible participation in an AAR annual meeting.

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

To foster broad participation and to facilitate the work of unit chairs, the Program Committee allows but does not encourage multiple submissions of proposals. Applicants can submit no more than two proposals in response to the Call for Proposals. This includes submitting the same proposal to two separate Units or two different proposals to two different Units. Submitters should disclose if they are submitting the same proposal to two separate units. The PAPERS system automates this if the submitter uses the same form to send the proposal to both units. 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 90-minute 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 90-minute 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 Chief Scholarly Enagement Officer 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 Chief Scholarly Enagement Officer 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 Chief Scholarly Enagement Officer at as soon as possible, but no later than March 31 of the meeting year.

The request should be made through the web form at https://aar.wufoo.com/forms/aar-membershipannual-meeting-registration-waiver/. Authorization must precede the extending of an invitation to a nonmember. 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.

Plenary Addresses, Wildcard Sessions, and Exploratory Sessions
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 Chief Scholarly Enagement Officer 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 made at the time of proposal submission.**

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 Chief Scholarly Enagement Officer 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 Chief Scholarly Enagement Officer 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 must made at the time of proposal submission. Late requests may not be accommodated.**

Acceptance/Rejection Notification

Acceptance and rejection notifications are automated through the PAPERS system, but because It is very important that you notify proposers whether they are on your program or not, we urge the use of a follow-up 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.

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 roundtables 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 Unit
Theme: *Contributions to the Study of Buddhism*

Anne M. Blackburn, Cornell University, Presiding

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

Rodger Payne, Louisiana State University, Presiding

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 Unit and Theology and Continental Philosophy Unit
Theme: *Kyoto School Thought in Dialogue with Western Thought*

Michiko Yusa, Western Washington University, Presiding

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 Chief Scholarly Enagement Officer. 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 2-3 weeks 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 seminar. The co-chairs of units, are appointed for three-year terms, renewable once. The terms of Unit co-chairs must be staggered so that they do not rotate off at the same time. 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 steering committee members, and Units may have 4-8 steering committee members. Both Units and Seminars are required to have two co-chairs.

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.

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. Finally, requests for program unit name changes should also be made in the program unit self-review or as a supplement. Name changes are at the discretion of the Program Committee.

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 or requests an external review, or if the Program Committee, after its examination of the unit's quantitative metrics or 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.

Timeline

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. You can find instructions on how to manage the evaluation and review of proposals and submit your sessions through the PAPERS system at https://papers.aarweb.org/PAPERS_Instructions_for_Chairs.pdf.

June

Watch your e-mail for non-member and/or non-registered participant notifications from the Chief Scholarly Enagement Officer. 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

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, find the audiovisual tech assigned to the nearby block of rooms or visit the audiovisual office in the hotel or convention center. 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.

Program Unit Best Practices for Governance and Operation

In order to create a collegial environment that upholds the values of the AAR (academic excellence, professional responsibility, free inquiry, critical examination, diversity, inclusion, respect, and transparency) within the academic study of religion and in the work of the Academy, the Program Committee presents this list of Best Practices for Program Unit governance and operation. In conducting its five-year reviews, the Program Committee maintains the values of academic excellence, critical examination, free inquiry, and transparency in the AAR's Program Units. We offer these Best Practices to further the values of diversity, inclusion, respect, transparency, and professional responsibility.

Diversity

- In order to foster rich, innovative, and challenging intellectual conversations and scholarly discoveries, we encourage units to develop leadership that is diverse (including diversity of age, religion, race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, subdiscipline, professional status, region, and type of institution). Potential leaders are often identified from among past panelists who have broadened conversations in individual panel sessions. The Program Committee is willing to work with unit leaders to identify potential steering committee members.
- Develop and include a diversity and inclusion statement for your Unit's proposal selection

  Sample Diversity and Inclusion Statements:

  Contemporary Islam Unit:
  The Contemporary Islam Unit is committed to inclusion. Our Unit requires pre-arranged sessions or panel proposals to incorporate gender diversity; diversity of race, ethnicity, and rank are also highly encouraged.

  Study of Islam Unit:
  As a new explicit requirement of our Unit, a successful pre-arranged session or panel proposal must incorporate gender diversity. Diversity of race and ethnicity, theoretical method, and rank are also highly encouraged.

  Religion, Media, Culture Unit:
  RMC is committed to diversity and inclusivity. Pre-arranged panels should reflect gender and racial/ethnic diversity as well as diversity of field, method, and scholarly rank as appropriate.

- To diversity session presenters' composition, combine anonymous review with other review practices, such as making proposer names visible to chairs but anonymous to steering committee members or making proposer names anonymous to chairs and steering committee members during review, but visible to chairs prior to final acceptance or rejection
- Assign presiders and respondents with an eye to diversity and bridges with new constituencies.

Inclusion

- Maintain a steering committee of sufficient size to provide a wealth of diversity within the subfield: 3-5 members plus 2 co-chairs for Seminars, and 5-7 members plus 2 co-chairs for Units.
- Facilitate graduate student and diverse faculty participation (including professional status, discipline, region, type of institution, etc.), asking the appropriate level of work of graduate students and junior faculty.

Respect

- Give graduate students who submit paper or panel session proposals feedback on rejected proposals so they can improve.
- Establish and maintain expectations concerning participation in the Annual Meeting. For example, a unit may establish consequences for presenters who cancel their participation in a session at the last minute (or who simply do not attend).

Transparency

- Develop and post a clear statement of how your unit chooses co-chairs and steering committee members.
- Schedule and conduct a public business meeting, and let attendees know how decisions regarding leadership and conference presentations are made
- Communicate among co-chairs, steering committee, and constituency throughout the year.
- Communicate among co-chairs and steering committee to compose annual report and five-year reviews.
- Consider developing bylaws. Bylaws provide clarity and pathways towards consistent application of policies, prevent inequitable treatment, and offer processes for conflict resolution that promote a healthy collaborative environment within and between units.

  Example (North American Religions Unit)

  Purpose of the North American Religions Unit:
  The North American Religions Program unit exists to sponsor conversations about the field at thematic, theoretical, definitional, experimental or historiographical levels, in order to ask where the study of North American religions is going or should be going.

Such conversations embrace the diversity of scholars, disciplines, methods and traditions that make up the field.

Routine functions:
The Steering Committee composes the Call for Papers for NAR sessions for the AAR Annual Meeting; reviews, shapes and accepts proposals for those sessions; reviews and reports on sessions; and communicates with the NAR constituency.

Composition: The Steering Committee is made up of ten members, two of whom are elected by the members to serve as co-chairs. A Steering Committee term is three years, renewable for a second three years if everyone is amenable. The terms are staggered, so that there are continuity and change on the committee. During a total of six possible years, a member might serve a co-chair term, which is three years. A member elected to serve as co-chair has at least one full year's experience on the Steering Committee. The co-chair elections are staggered as well, so that each new co-chair serves with an experienced co-chair.

Responsibilities:
The co-chairs take care of the business of NAR and moderate communication of the Steering Committee. All members of the Steering Committee make decisions on substantive matters. All attend the Annual Meeting and reserve Friday dinner for Steering Committee socializing, envisioning and business. All attend the NAR Business Meeting.

Succession:
Members of the Steering Committee are replaced by the following procedure: when there is a vacancy, after the Annual Meeting the co-chairs ask the NAR constituency (via email) for nominations. From among the nominees, the Steering Committee votes to elect a new member.

The co-chairs maintain this "NAR Purpose, Practices & Procedures" document, make it available to the Steering Committee and the NAR constituency, and revise it as needed by vote of the Steering Committee.

Professional Responsibility

- Develop and post a clear statement of responsibilities of co-chairs and steering committee members, and communicate it to all new members. Sample statements of SC responsibilities:

  Example 1 (Women and Religion Unit):

  Steering committee responsibilities include:

* Attending the AAR Annual Meeting each year and at least three of our panels there
* Attending the Women and Religion business meeting at the AAR (usually held on Saturday afternoon) and our steering committee lunch or dinner
* Helping to compile our session reports and next year's Call for Papers after the AAR
* Evaluating proposals
* Assisting the co-chairs in preparing our 5-year self-review

Proposal review is usually the most time-intensive of these responsibilities, and is concentrated over a 3 week period in March. Term of service is an initial 3 years, renewable for an additional 3.

Example 2 (Religion, Media, and Culture Unit):
The RMC Unit's policy is that steering committee members should attend the Annual Meeting, attend the RMC business meeting and/or steering committee lunch, and attend 2 of our 3 panels.

- Use a shared repository (such as Dropbox, or Google Drive) to store program unit documents, for continuity across leadership changes.
- Consult AAR Program Director/Program Committee by e-mailing the Chief Scholarly Enagement Officer for help when unit is not functioning properly. A chair or steering committee member who is not upholding the mission or values of the AAR, or who is behaving in an unprofessional manner, may be removed at the discretion of the Program Committee.

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!