

## **PROGRAM CHAIR**

The Program Chair (PC) is a unique office in that its proper execution is one of the most essential functions of the ASR, yet the incumbent is not evaluated either by Council or the membership as to his/her fitness for the position. Rather, s/he is appointed by the newly elected President-Elect, with the only qualification that s/he already be a member of the ASR. The PC must be a person who is extremely sensitive to detail, possesses excellent communication skills, and works well as a part of a team to meet specific goals.

Virtually on the heels of his or her election, the President-elect appoints a PC to serve what amounts to a two-year term, including attendance three annual meetings. (The ASR provides financial assistance for the latter two of these meetings.)

Shortly after the meetings of the year *prior* to when the President-elect takes office (i.e., about 22 months before the meeting for which the PC is responsible), the PC should contact the ASA requesting its deadlines and application procedures for joint ASA/ASR session proposals. While the actual negotiation of these sessions is conducted at the Presidential level, the PC needs to be aware of the process and ensure that s/he is taking all the necessary steps to effect it. In the past, these deadlines have officially been in November--a full 20 months prior to the actual meeting. In actuality, however, joint session proposals may be accepted by ASA as late as February (16 months before the meeting). Still, it is important to know what the deadline is, find out the correct format for joint session proposals, and publicize the opportunity to ASR membership, if possible. The PC may wish actively to solicit such proposals. In any case, the PC will collate the final proposals and forward them to the ASA office in time for ASA's deadline. (Both the PC and President need to remember that ASA requires that everyone on its program be ASA preregistrants as well. This includes all participants in joint sessions. Anyone invited to participate in a joint session should be made aware of this requirement and accede to it at the outset.)

By the beginning of July of the year that the President-elect will take office, s/he and the PC should have determined a theme for that meeting and prepared a "Call for Papers," which will first be distributed at the annual meeting when the President-elect takes office. The Program Call elaborates the theme, suggests relevant topics for thematic papers, and lists deadlines for and places to send the abstracts and proposals. Except as otherwise counseled by Council, these should follow the same format from year to year, hence prior years' calls serve as concrete models. The Program Call should be transmitted in pre-final draft to the Executive Officer (EO) for editorial suggestions. Once the document has been finalized, the EO takes primary responsibility for its duplication and circulation. This is not, however, to say that the PC may not on his or her own initiative pursue publicity in other venues of his/her choosing. Such publicity should be coordinated with the EO only to the extent to ensure that no duplicate mailings are occurring. The EO does not send copies of the Program Call to associations beyond those specializing in the social scientific study of religion.

By the annual meeting at which the President-elect takes office, s/he should have chosen the Paul Hanly Furfey lecturer. The by-laws anticipate that the President-elect will consult with both the

PC and the EO, but in practice the decision is normally made by the President-elect and simply passed to the others.

Both the ASR meeting at which the President-elect takes office and the RRA/SSSR meetings in the fall thereafter are prime venues at which the PC should work to develop the program. If the PC relied only on submissions the program would be smaller, less thematic, and less distinctive. The key to gaining wide participation, highlighting the theme, and setting the program lies initiating special sessions and events that would not otherwise occur, including but not limited to the following:

*Thematic sessions:* Papers or presentations built around a specific topic or issue bearing on the theme, with participants asked to prepare something defined either by them or the PC and President.

*Book sessions:* Review and critique of recent books of major interest, which need participation of both authors and critics, and support from the publisher in terms of review copies for the critics. Beginning in 2005 we made a decision not to accept self-nominated books. Book review sessions should come either from the PC/Pres' initiative or from 3rd parties, who would also put together the session. In 2001 an authors' reception was innovated as a result of an increased number of authors-meet-critics sessions. This was a popular event, but funding for this event must come from authors and publishers and be developed by the PC in conjunction with the EO. This reception has not been held since 2003.

*Special Sessions with Outside Participants:* Presentations by nonmembers or nonscholars on topics of special interest because of timeliness, geographic location of the meeting, thematic relevance, application of knowledge, etc. If they are invited, nonscholars should be included because they offer a specific *competence* rather than a "position." Council has more than once considered and rejected the idea that sessions should be offered wherein devotees of particular religions or religious positions should be invited to present their beliefs or "points of view" on issues. Either the PC or the President may invite outside participants to present at these special sessions.

*Joint Sessions:* With such groups as ASA, Society for the Sociological Study of Mormonism, Association for the Study of Jewry, ISA RC-22, SISR, SSSP, etc. Some of these take longer lead time than a year (like ASA, which the President-elect must initiate early in his/her term), but all need some advance planning and initiative. The PC should consult with the Chair of the International Liaison committee toward joint sessions with RC-22 and SISR, and call upon him or her to initiate these contacts. Not all will work out every year, but to have some each year is stimulating both intellectually and organizationally.

*Receptions and Food Functions:* The Welcoming Reception, Presidential Reception, New Members' Welcoming Breakfast, and Furfey Reception are standard program events that are facilitated by the EO, with assistance from the Local Arrangements chair. In recent years, the Welcoming Reception has been supported by Brill. We look to the Pres and LA chair to obtain outside funding to assist in underwriting these functions. From time to time it seems good to the President or the PC to have additional functions. These either need to be (1) brought to Council

at the time the President takes office or (2) supported by outside funding. It would be primarily the responsibility of the PC and/or President to do this additional development work. Responsibility for arranging these events with the hotel remains with the EO. Because hotel space is sometimes limited, it is important that these events be guaranteed as soon as possible.

The more of these special activities that can be worked out in the Fall, prior to the arrival of general submissions, the farther the PC is ahead in his/her work.

In addition, during the Fall, the PC should learn who the coordinators are for the ASA Section on the Sociology of Religion sessions and for the general ASA Religion sessions (if any), as well as whether there are any special sessions on Religion. (These can be discerned by checking the ASA Program Call, usually issued in early November.) The PC should contact all of these people and encourage them to refer papers they reject to ASR for consideration on our program.

### **The Program Construction Process**

There are two very different kinds functions involved in constructing the program. One centers on the intellectual content of the program; this has two subparts--what you include and how all its parts are arranged together. The second function is administrative; it, too, has two subparts--getting all the people to fulfill the requirements for inclusion on the program, then producing the printed preprogram and program. The first function belongs to the PC; the second is the province of the EO. In order for the program to "work," there has to be continuous communication between these two persons.

A note on technical matters: Virtually all program correspondence is conducted by email. All email from the PC sent as replies should be cc'd to the EO. In addition, all email received by the PC that has any substantive content whatsoever should be made into hard copy and filed. Sessions are filed by the last name of the organizer; papers by the last name of the first author. Any submissions received through the US mail or via fax should be faxed to the EO.

There are also two kinds of submissions: session proposals, which have an earlier deadline, and paper proposals. Session proposals tend to make PCs happy because they seem to require less work and to be more likely to have a common theme. As a matter of fact, however, session proposals are often what ultimately cause the greatest frustration, because the data that we need to go on in program construction are missing and/or because participants listed in the sessions turn out to be not as committed to appearing as the proposer thought. The PC needs to follow up these submissions w/ direct correspondence to the participants themselves.

The membership rule: In general, anyone who submits anything, and anyone who presents anything, must be an ASR member. The two principal exceptions are: persons in jointly sponsored sessions, who are members of the other organization, and persons who are coauthors with a member. *Rare* exceptions are made, principally for book panelists or discussants who are *not* in sociology of religion or a cognate field, whose presence nevertheless makes sense in view of the book reviewed or the profile of the meeting (e.g., a senator, mayor, governor, ambassador,

judge, etc.). Exceptions are made by the PC and EO in consultation with each other and the President, if necessary. These exceptions are in all cases limited only to participation in the specific session in which the exceptee is involved. Only the Furfey lecturer gets free registration for the entire meeting without reference to the membership requirement. These same rules apply to registration for the meeting, *mutatis mutandis* (see below).

How we deal with session submissions:

When the PC receives a session submission, s/he should make a quick decision as to whether or not it has any relevance to what the ASR is all about; that is, is it likely ever to be included on the program? If not, then write back and reject it, kindly but firmly. With any submission that looks plausible, write (email) the person acknowledging the submission and stating that you are forwarding it to the EO to be checked for technical considerations. (That reply, cc'd to the EO simultaneously sends the submission to the EO.)

When the EO receives it, s/he checks it for complete addresses and membership criteria. Whether or not it is complete, the EO will email the results to the person who has submitted it; cc to the PC. If it is complete, then it is back in the PC's hands to accept/reject whenever. If it is not, then the EO will tell the submitter the conditions that s/he must meet before the submission can be processed further. When the EO is satisfied that s/he has the proper addresses and membership requirements met, s/he communicates that to the PC. If the PC decides to accept the session, then s/he writes to the submitter, if necessary, reminding him/her that abstracts are required by the published deadline. The EO holds the PC responsible for the abstracts. The PC would do well to hold the session proposer responsible for the abstracts rather than trying to correspond with everyone in the session. A session proposal is not complete until all the technical details are met and all the abstracts (if appropriate) are in hand.

How we deal with individual paper submissions:

Acknowledge all submissions, reject any dogs, but accept none. The EO will check each submission re membership status and inform the PC whether s/he may proceed with the paper or whether a membership issue needs to be resolved. Once the EO informs the PC of a submitter's legitimate membership status, then if the PC wants to accept the paper, s/he accepts, *provided* that the submission includes an abstract of 150 words or less. Otherwise, the PC needs to get an abstract before accepting the paper. Abstracts should unfailingly be Word documents that include the paper title and all the authors names, affiliations, and emails, prior to the abstract itself, all on a single sheet. (Most of the individual submissions are from members, so this is less of a problem than are the session proposals, but there are some people who perhaps are told of the meeting by a graduate adviser or who see a blurb somewhere and submit on their own.)

In general, we discourage multiple submissions from the same person, certainly at least at first blush--that is, if someone sends in two (or even three) paper proposals, s/he should be told that it may not be possible to have them all included, hence s/he should be asked to prioritize his/her submissions.

The EO needs the abstracts of anything the PC accepts as soon as the PC accepts them. Since the abstracts must be listed alphabetically, this is the least painful way for the work to be done at the Executive Office.

Although the McNamara award is separate from program participation, the PC is asked to remind students who submit paper proposals of the award and encourage them to submit something to the committee by the deadline. This is not a requirement, but it usually helps to generate a slightly larger group of papers for the McNamara Committee to assess.

Once all of this winnowing has occurred, which would ideally be by mid-March, the PC constructs sessions from the individual submissions, and then organizes the whole into the Preliminary Program. Things to keep in mind: We have a maximum of 47 slots to fill, including joint sessions (but not including the Presidential or Furfey addresses). We do not have to fill them all, but it is important that we fill them all for the first day, especially the morning of the first day. That morning also should not be used for sessions primarily of local origin. Ideally sessions will have 4 papers; we will accept 3 papers and a discussant. We do not accept 2-paper sessions. In general, 4 papers are preferable to 3, because if someone drops out, the PC doesn't have to scramble to rearrange whole sessions. We will also accept 5-paper session proposals, though the PC should try to encourage 5-paper session proposals to solicit a 6<sup>th</sup> paper, and then create two 3-paper-plus-discussant sessions.

It is important that the PC understand that the program is an economic as well as intellectual venture for the ASR and that we need to work to maximize hotel registration. The ASR *never* makes money on our annual meeting. The goal is to keep our losses within bounds. Thus, if we have space, for example, we try to accommodate late submissions. But we build our program with what we have more or less at the deadlines (giving a week or so for the habitually dilatory).

Arranging free papers into sessions may initially seem a daunting task, but if the PC finds some way to spread out what s/he has, they usually congeal fairly quickly with only a few scattered around the edges. These usually call for creative titling. "Pot pourri" should not be used more than once.

The lay of the day is that we run four sessions concurrently. Normally we have one fairly large room, one medium sized room, and two smaller rooms. As s/he lays out the program, the PC needs to think about the potential "draw" of different sessions so that they coincide with this room layout throughout the day. We do not have evening sessions. The ASR provides standard overhead projectors and screens as needed. We do not provide other a/v equipment. Persons who wish to use other forms of a/vs are responsible for arranging this on their own. The EO will assist them if they require hotel services for this. It is also important not to schedule two sessions on the same or closely related topics at the same time.

The PC is responsible for finding conveners for all the sessions and discussants for 3-paper sessions. The convener of a 3-paper session should not also be the discussant. We would like to have as many of the conveners and discussants in place as possible by the time the Preliminary Program is mailed. The PC is also responsible for keeping everyone informed about the

organization of the meeting. People become antsy if they feel their materials have fallen into a black hole.

*The Preliminary Program should be completely ready to go to the printer on 1 April.* This is not simply a "nice idea." Our contracts with hotels require submission of the preliminary program to them by this date, or they may reallocate meeting room space to the eventual detriment of our program. In addition, members often need to submit travel requests within a fixed-term before the end of their spring semester. For schools that end in May, distribution of the program by early April is essential if, e.g., a 30-day advance is required for processing approvals and their funding.

All participants are expected to preregister for the meeting (with the exception of the Furfey lecturer, who comes as our guest). This is the next place where the EO and PC have direct interaction, because not everyone meets this expectation in a timely manner, and then it is ultimately the PC's job to run down delinquent preregistrants. The EO makes the first contact, but if that doesn't yield results, it is up to the PC to track down the errant preregistrant. We do drop people from the final program if we cannot track them down. (Registration for the conference as a whole is never waived. We will waive registration for invited participants who are coming for a single-session only, but only for that session: that is, they come in for the session and leave again. They receive no registration badge, materials, etc. [Registration may, of course, be paid for by a third party.]

The preregistration deadline is normally set at 15 June, giving about a month to locate delinquent registrants. Some years a 1 July deadline is possible. Unfortunately, the principal reason for delinquent preregistration is that the person has decided not to attend the meeting (but doesn't tell the PC). What this means is that the PC does much more backing and filling than s/he may at first blush expect. The Preliminary Program really is preliminary, and quite a bit of restructuring goes on between the two. This is probably the most frustrating part of the PC's job, and more than one PC has finished his/her term recommending that we keep a black list of those who back out on us. We have begun to implement this strategy, albeit cautiously.

## **Finances**

Because the program is an economic as well as an intellectual endeavor and the annual meeting never makes money, we ask that wherever possible the PC act so as to have his/her institution absorb the costs and time associated with his/her work. Where this is not possible, the EO will reimburse costs for postage, phone calls, faxes, etc. Receipts are required. (Fortunately, the advent of email has reduced the costs associated with the PC's tasks enormously.) We do *not* pay for personnel costs. Agreement to take the PC's job is agreement to do the PC's work.

The PC should understand that a hotel contract is negotiated about 4 years in advance of the meeting and that contracts are quite specific about space utilization. We try to be the only meeting in a property in order to maximize our options with the management, but it is often the case that we are not. The PC should not make any commitments for expenditures without consulting EO, who manages the annual meeting budget and finances. In general, participants

should bear costs for special services they desire, such as audiovisual, food services, etc., unless the EO gives specific prior approval.

The PC also receives in the first instance applications for Gallagher Grants. Beginning in 2002, we initiated a 2-tier structure for these grants. One-half of the money available is allocated to the President and PC to build the program by inviting scholars from outside North America. This money is not by application, but is rather at the initiation of the President and the PC. The only rule governing this money is that no grant exceeds the maximum of our grants to foreign scholars, which is \$1,000. (Normally, grants to foreign scholars are \$500; thus, \$1,000 is a substantially higher grant.)

Applications for Gallagher Grants come from members and are supposed to be submitted with or shortly after the submission of paper abstracts. There is no application form, but the prospective grantee should indicate the reason for his/her need and show that s/he has a way of obtaining the additional funds necessary to make the trip. In general, students from the US/Canada receive \$300 or less, while foreign scholars from developed countries receive \$500. When the \$500 figure has been exceeded, it has been for foreign scholars from other parts of the world, principally eastern Europe, South America, and the PRC. People may receive these annual grants without limit. The general idea is that Gallagher Grants cover "on the ground" expenses, not transportation, but this is not a rule.

*No one* receives Gallagher moneys in advance. The grants are paid in cash the first day of the meeting. Grant recipients are expected to spend a minimum of 2 nights in the meeting hotel and to participate in the entirety of the meeting.

In general, the PC and EO evaluate the applications and allocate the funds, subject to the concurrence of the President. The EO then informs the recipients. If moneys remain left over, the PC, EO, and President decide on a strategy for their use. (Strategies have included an emergency reserve fund, readvertizing the grants, or supplemental grants.)

The matter is not entirely settled there, however, because it almost always happens that some grantees cancel between the time their grants are awarded and the time of the meeting. The standard practice when this has occurred has been for the PC and EO to decide whether or not the funds might be used to recruit another scholar and/or to respond to belated requests. On the other hand, there is a "gentlepersons' agreement" between the Council and the Gallagher Committee that the money does not have to be spent, and should not be spent simply to be spent. It is a resource, not an obligation. As a result, by the time of the meeting itself, there is usually some money left over. Unlike the Fichter and McNamara awards, however, the Gallagher Awards are not underwritten by designated funds. Moneys that remain unspent here may help fill in a shortfall somewhere else. Council has not reduced the amount of money allocated for the Gallagher program in one year because all of the money was not spent in a prior year.

Beginning with the 2007 program, Council has authorized two additional underwriting programs for attendees. One is for the McNamara attendee and involves no selection work on the part of the PC or EO, but the PC needs to be aware of this option, because it may be the case that a McNamara awardee who has not submitted his/her paper previous to the award may wish to take

advantage of this grant and attend the meeting; hence the paper will need to be accommodated. The other program is for previous Fichter grantees to present results from the research their grants funded (once only). These requests should come to the PC with their paper proposals and will generally be granted on a first-come, first-served basis in a way that is consistent with the Gallagher guidelines (i.e., no one will receive more than \$1k, and it is not expected that ASR will be covering the entire expense budget of the applicant).

## **Reports**

The PC normally makes four reports: The first is at the first Council meeting of year prior to that for which s/he has program responsibility. This comes in the form of the "Call for Papers." While the Call is also first circulated to the membership at this time, it is subject to review and revision by Council. This happens rarely, but it has happened.

The second report is made by the PC to the first Council meeting of the year when s/he is responsible for the meeting. It is normally written and details the nature of the program construction process by addressing, as appropriate, successes, failures, and frustrations. It also should provide some quantitative assessment of program participation.

The third report is made by the PC to the general business meeting of the Association. It is a very brief oral report that should partially reprise the report presented to Council, but it also gives a progress report on the meeting itself.

The final report is an oral report to the Council meeting at the close of the meeting for which the PC has had responsibility. This partially reprises the progress report made to the business meeting, but it also may make a deeper assessment of positive outcomes and more specific suggestions for future PCs.