

AMERICAN ACADEMY OF RELIGION SOUTHWEST REGION

REPORT TO AAR BOARD

Fiscal Year 2015 (July 1, 2014 – June 30, 2015)

The Southwest Region held its annual meeting March 13-15, 2015 at the Marriott DFW in Irving, Texas in conjunction with the three other organizations (SBL-SW, ASSR, and ASOR) that jointly compose the Southwest Commission on Religious Studies (SWCRS). The program comprised 24 sessions, including three special events for graduate students and one special session on Religion & Class, Joerg Rieger presiding. Attendance was down, off 8% (27 registrants) overall and 28% (25 registrants) for AAR. This decline represents a trend, as last year's attendance was down 4% (4 registrants). SBL attendance was the same this year as last. The plenary speaker as AAR Past President Laurie Zoloth, who spoke about sustainability. Because she was at the bedside of her ailing father in LA, she was unable to travel to Dallas. The plenary, then, was recorded and broadcast at the SWCRS meeting, the speech demonstrating one of her ideas about environmental sustainability and academic conferences: virtual meetings reduce the carbon footprint. She also emphasized regional meetings as not only intellectually vibrant but also as environmentally responsible. Laurie's speech can be viewed at:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7svMJnEoVFg&sns=em>

The meeting this year exhibited unprecedented support of graduate students.

- Last year AAR-SW agreed to support its Student Director's travel expenses for the national and regional meetings. This resulted in over \$800 of support.
- During the year AAR-SW officers Allen Redmon and Marc DiPaolo drafted the SWCRS "Guidelines for Presenters & Presiders," a document chiefly designed to inform new conference attendees.
- Because last year the SWCRS Directors agreed to invite the student director from each member society to observe the Directors Meeting, AAR-SW Student Director BJ Parker attended.
- Led and largely funded by AAR-SW, coordinated and financially supported by SWCRS, with additional financial support from SBL-SW and ASOR, a graduate luncheon on Saturday was provide for students who registered early. It entailed a much-discounted meal (\$8 cost to students, \$27 balance support by the societies) and brief remarks by the SWCRS Executive and each society's Regional Coordinator on optimizing the scholarly conference experience. From this very successful experiment, SWCRS decided to make this a permanent event and to take on most of the cost, asking each society to contribute nominally (~\$100).
- Saturday evening there was a special graduate student session over which BJ Parker presided on how to turn a seminar paper into a publication. This was followed by a graduate student reception hosted by SWCRS.

AAR-SW enjoyed great visibility throughout the SWCRS conference. It is AAR that is leading SWCRS initiatives and innovations. The AAR-SW Student Director was the first to attend a SWCRS Directors meeting as a pilot of this plan that will be fully implemented in 2016. AAR-SW was the force behind the graduate student luncheon and the several graduate student events, with both concept development and program funding. AAR-SW President-Elect Marc DiPaolo received the SWCRS Junior Scholar Grant to

support his research this year. And AAR member Joerg Rieger, who inaugurated the AAR working group on Religion & Class and organized a special session of it for the regional meeting, was honored by SWCRS with the John Gammie Distinguished Scholar Award. AAR's influence on SWCRS far exceeds its registration numbers.

At the conclusion of SWCRS, representatives of the constituent societies met briefly to plan the 2016 meeting. There it was agreed to pilot a conference theme, one that each society will include in its CFP and its program planning. The hope is that the theme will unify the Commission, fostering inter-society dialogue and enhancing the overall program. The theme for 2016 will be Engaging Diversity. Another innovation for the 2016 meeting will be an exhibit of 3 paintings and a 15-piece graphic sequence, art created by AAR-SW Student Director BJ Parker. His works will be displayed in the main hallway and registration areas. This will bring some scholarly dialogue out of the session room and into the main concourse, as well as adding a visual component to the conference. The Commission will also look into publishing abstracts of papers and presentations online.

Meeting registration and attendance:

SWCRS Annual Meeting Summary 2015

March 13-15, 2015, Irving TX

Registrants and Participants

Total registrants	288
Preregistrants	255
On-site registrants	33
Program participants not registered	0
Total possible revenue lost	0
Registration sales	\$15,069.47
Registration donations	\$262
Registration net revenue	\$15,331.47

By Type and Organizational Affiliation

Exhibitors	9	AAR	65
Faculty	129	ASOR	26
Students	108	ASSR	24
Retired Members	10	SBL	133
Partners/Spouses	9		
Non-members	19		
Unknown	4		
Total	288		

Hotel Sleeping Rooms

Contracted commitment:	180
<u>Total rooms bought</u>	<u>187</u>

Exhibitors

Total tables sold	21
Total exhibitors	10

Abilene Christian University Press, Augsburg Fortress, Baker, Baylor University Press, Hendrickson, IVP, The Jerusalem Center for Biblical Studies, SBL, Wm. Eerdmans, Zondervan

Onsite representatives	9
Total exhibitor fees paid	\$2,714.50
Vouchers paid	\$290
Total exhibitor revenue	\$2,424.50

Business meeting:

The 2015 AAR-SW Business Meeting was held at the Marriott DFW at 7:00p on Friday, March 13. This was the second time the meeting was held the Friday evening before SWCRS rather than Sunday morning. Though attendance was better this year, it was decided to return to the brief Sunday morning Business Meeting format and to use the Friday evening time for specialized discussions.

- **Treasurer's Report:** AV & Tech expense remained low because the needs were provided by the Regional Coordinator's DFW-area school. AAR-SW contributed \$1000 to the graduate student luncheon and a special session coffee. The region support the Student Director expenses for travel to both the national and regional meetings. Plenary expenses were projected at \$650 but actually zero.
- **Policies & Procedures:** The committee made a brief report of the work to date, which was minimal, largely archival research. The Regional Coordinator agreed to take over the task and to present a draft of the document at the 2016 meeting.
- **New Business:** The Region discussed several significant questions and made three major decisions.
 - The first was that AAR-SW will provide financial support for the Regional Coordinator's expenses to travel to the national meeting if none is available from the affiliated institution. (The Region already supported regional meeting expenses.)
 - The second was that AAR-SW will apply for a Regional Development Grant to support a pre-SWCRS workshop for AAR-SW members to explore how the annual meeting might become more meaningful and membership in the society more useful. Subsumed under this decision were questions about differentiating and expanding the duties of the region's presidential line and program leadership, rationalizing the AAR programs and working groups represented in the region, and creating an AAR-SW website to foster improved communication and year-round scholarly collaboration.

- The third decision was that AAR-SW will create a student paper prize and session around it. A CFP will go out with the region’s call, students will submit papers in December, and the paper selected by the committee of readers will be featured in a special session at the meeting.

AAR-SW Officers:

Regional Coordinator: Katherine Downey, The Hockaday School

Past President: Allen Redmon, Texas A&M University, Central Texas

President: Jens Kreinath, Wichita State University

President-Elect: Marc DiPaolo, Oklahoma City University

Vice President: Paul Martens, Baylor University

Student Director: BJ Parker, Baylor University

Challenges & Opportunities:

- **Regional Leadership:** From a request for nominations disseminated before the business meeting, a very good candidate for the presidential line was nominated and then approved. This procedure will be added to the P&P documentation. In addition, the duties of each of the four offices on the presidential line will be expanded and differentiated so that they have meaning and heft. This will also have the effect of spreading the work of the region across more people and lighten the burden of the Regional Coordinator. The current Student Director recommends that the region nominate the successor at the beginning of Year 2 of the Director’s term of service in order to allow the successor a year to shadow the current Director.
- **Financial Management:** While the region’s commitment to support financially the travel expenses of both the Student Director and the Regional Coordinator, plus the SWCRS graduate student luncheon, reflects enthusiasm for this work and appreciation for those who do it, it also has the effect of consuming most of the \$2500 annual AAR subvention. An annual AAR-SW budget with these commitments might comprise the following, and actual expenses might easily exceed these estimates:

AAR-SW Meeting Expenses:

Student Director Travel & Hotel	\$ 400
Regional Coordinator Travel & Hotel	400
Graduate Student Luncheon	100
Plenary Speaker Travel & Hotel	600

AAR Meeting Expenses:

Student Director Travel & Hotel	500
Regional Coordinator Travel & Hotel	500

Total Budgeted Expenses

\$2,500

The region has a current balance of \$8300, enough to fund unusual expenses that arise or special program opportunities. But this is a balance that grew over the years from managing expenses to total less each year than the annual subvention.

- **Regional Meeting Attendance:** The downward trend in AAR-SW participation in SWCRS despite Atlanta's encouragement of regional meeting participation and the strong programming in recent years suggests the meeting and the regional society might need to confer more value and utility to members of the region.

The Southwest's leadership team is active, enthusiastic, and innovative. The Report to Membership and several subsequent letters to the members from the Regional Coordinator created a few new SWCRS registrations and a couple new relationships. Our Past-President and Student Director will participate in the Regions Forum in Atlanta this November, and the Student Director will design the template for the Regions Posters that will display in the national meeting exhibits area what each region is doing. The P&P documentation mandate has fostered a revisiting of how we do things in the region, raising questions and prompting new and good approaches to what we do and how we do it. The region's lively discussions have led us to propose a pre-SWCRS workshop to explore how the meeting and the society might serve our members more meaningfully and to seek a Regional Development Grant to support the workshop. Next year's conference theme of engaging with diversity will challenge the region to think about equity, inclusion, and representation along a number of differentiations.

Serving in the role of Regional Coordinator was a profound pleasure for me again this year. I thoroughly enjoyed the Regions Committee meeting in San Diego and I am honored to have been nominated as a candidate to serve as its Director. My enthusiasm is always refreshed when I am in the company of the other Coordinators and our current Director, Susan Hill, as I am also when I spend the weekend with the Southwest regional leadership team. Retired now from classroom teaching, I look forward to having more leisure to do more here.

Warmly,

Katherine Downey, Southwest Regional Coordinator