

AAR-SW Regional Development Brown Bag Meeting

SUMMARY OF THE 2016 PRE-SWCRS REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOP:

With funding provided by an AAR Regional Development Grant, the Region conducted a pre-SWCRS workshop, "How Might the Region Become a Stronger and More Meaningful Presence in the Scholarly and Professional Lives of its Members? A Workshop to Re-Imagine Our Time Together During and Between Annual Meetings." Twenty members of AAR-SW who responded to an invitation to participate and who together represent the diversity of our membership as much as possible, particularly with respect to discipline, gender, race/ethnicity, and age, gathered at the conference hotel on Friday, March 11, 2016 for a full day of facilitated discussion, brainstorming, and planning. The workshop began with luncheon discussion of why we come to this meeting, what we value about it, and what we expect from it. There were three working groups, each addressing one major topic:

The AAR-SW Annual Meeting

Collaboration and Work between Annual Meetings

Diversifying Our Scholarly Community

Groups engaged in wishful thinking brainstorming, developed major themes and issues, and presented to the entire workshop their discussion and recommendations. This was enormously productive, resulting in a list of specific, substantive, and actionable ideas, as well as four task forces to realize them. The four task forces were to focus this year on the Region's website/social media presence, membership, programs, and supplemental meetings. A tentative date of April/May was set for a task forces meeting in Oklahoma City. Everyone who attended left the workshop excited for the work ahead, appreciative of the time together, and hopeful the Region will conduct a follow-on workshop in 2017. The Region's leadership team – the Regionally Elected Coordinator, the President, and the Student Director – shared the experience with the other nine regions of the AAR by conducting a workshop at the AAR meeting in San Antonio in November 2016 for RECs and officers of other regions, which was well received and appreciated.

PRE-SWCRS WORKSHOP GROUP DISCUSSION NOTES:

Table Discussions:

- Spring Break presents a scheduling conflict for many members in the region
- Travel money is in short supply for many members in the region

Annual Meeting:

- Scrap program units
 - 10-15, one session per unit
 - New units: more chairs/units
 - Descriptions
 - Co-sponsored especially with SBL
- Impermeability of anti-intellectualism re pedagogy
 - Create real dialogue
 - Invite local religious leaders
- Teaching workshops

- Sensitive topics
- Course evaluations
- Trade secrets
- Fit in LA curriculum, competing with STEM
- Collaboration
 - Saturday morning open rooms: issues, open tables, invited presenters
- How we use the whole two days
- Foster dialogue, diversity of engagements
- Activate other regional members
 - Survey to collect data
 - Recruit speakers
 - Invited panelists
- Speed Dating session: 1-page, 1-slide presentations
- Venue: ambiance of seminary vs hotel

Between Meetings:

- Provide info about AAR, AAR-SW and other events, opportunities, organizations, resources
 - Website
 - Social media
 - Media officer
- Facilitate collaboration: more time together here to get projects started
 - Open rooms
 - Mentoring, professionalism, activism time
- Supplemental annual meeting
 - Supported by budget
 - Hosted around the region
- Flip meeting content
- AAR research grants
- Public resource

Diversifying:

- Lack of Senior/Junior scholar engagement
 - Seniors don't come: need to change
- AAR-SW lack of identity
 - absorbed into SWCRS identity
 - dominance of SBL
 - SBL: white, male, Christian
 - ***website to establish identity
- Limited funds: best use, needs to be valuable
- Location/Timing of meeting
 - SXSW conflict
 - Spring break: travel research and family conflicts
- ***Cut program groups
 - Program meetings throughout year networked with programs and institutions
 - Small group work eventually presented to national meeting

- Senior scholars as focus
- Senior scholars will want to be involved if we make it about them
- Diversity via re-imagining program groups
- Program groups manifest the identity of the region
- Many scholars we want are not in departments of religion

TASK FORCES & CHAIRS:

Website/Social Media: Nick Werse & BJ Parker

Region's Membership: Jens Kreinath & Kathy Downey

Programs: Paul Martens and Rebecca Huskey

Supplemental Meetings/Venue: Marc DiPaolo & Justin Doran

BRIEF REPORTS:

Regional Coordinator:

- Task forces meeting was rescheduled to September, ultimately did not happen: What do we learn from this viz. our discussions about collaborating between annual meetings and about scheduling supplemental meetings elsewhere?
- Created a regional office, Multimedia Coordinator (MMC): Nick Werse assumed the responsibility after the workshop, the office has been added to the Policy File and will need membership approval at the Business Meeting
- Graduate Student Luncheon panel discussion topic will be the career value of learned society participation and especially leadership
- Questions:
 - How might we encourage members to access the website regularly, to use it and also to contribute content to it?
 - How might we redesign the meeting papers process from CFP through registration of presenters to preclude errors, enhance clarity, and ensure seamless execution regardless of who the program chairs, president, and REC are?
 - How might we increase our attendance numbers at the annual meeting to reverse the trend of recent years?