

## ASR EXECUTIVE OFFICER'S REPORT – 2010/11

Strictly speaking, ASR operates on a calendar year, yet the reality of a mid-year meeting is that in many respects our real operations work on a year that ends and begins at each annual meeting. Fiscally 2010 ended well, although again we were faced with significant room-take penalties as a result of poor attendance at the Atlanta meeting. Since attendance here is even worse, I expect we will see some of the same. My hope is that the room rate will counter that in one of two ways: more people will come because the rate is low, and the low rate will mean we will owe a lot less in room penalties if we don't make our minimum. On the other hand, we had to accept a higher food-and-beverage minimum, though no higher than the one to which we had to agree for next year (which is why I didn't fight it).

There is no question, however, that regardless of whatever is the case for other organizations, the Las Vegas decision as a whole was a hurtful one to us. I am happy to say The Bismarck in Chicago released us from our contract without any attempts at argument or delaying tactics. (We had a protective clause in that contract, but still, some vendors are more responsive than others when these things arise.) We really had very little choice in Las Vegas, since the bulk of the properties adjacent to Caesar's Palace are owned by the same corporation (as Caesar's Palace). There are some smaller properties, but they lack meeting facilities. Other properties that were available would have required a half-mile to mile walk. I do think city sites make a difference. SSSP will probably break its attendance record (at the top), while we have not had this few people in several decades. People who are interested in social problems are more likely to be interested in what Las Vegas has to offer!

I remain convinced that ASR needs to reflect with greater energy upon its meeting arrangements. If you look at our program this year you will see that whereas we once had four sessions in four time slots across three days, this year we have only two time periods with four sessions. One time period has only two sessions. Most of our sessions have three papers, not four. Some have only two. One has five, by the request of the organizer. I also approached the program quantitatively in two ways: First, I looked at the actual number of sessions we had and what they would require in time blocks if we ran four sessions in every time block. The answer was 8.25 – in other words, 2¼ days. Second, I then added the total number of papers being presented and did the same division by four. That reduced the amount to 6.25 – in other words, 1¾ days. So, in a sense, we're really shopping facilities that are far beyond our needs. We could, for example, shave time by having our first Council meeting at 10 a.m. of day one; a mid-day meet-and-greet; our first two sessions beginning at 1 p.m. The Presidential Lecture and reception as usual. Four full sessions the second day. The Furfey Lecture and reception as usual. A morning session Day 3. A closing Council meeting and lunch. We would need less room nights and make better use of our meeting room space. Because we go to larger cities with larger hotels, we do not gain advantage by having fewer sessions across more days. We will gain greater advantage by having more sessions in less days (possibly even going to 5 concurrent sessions, if we were to have a sudden up-tick in submissions). I also think we should consider limiting persons to one paper presentation per meeting, unless the 2<sup>nd</sup> paper is in a session organized by the President or the Program

Chair (i.e., an invitational session). We would lose another session or two if we didn't have some people giving two papers.

The earliest such a strategy could be put into place is the New York meeting, where costs are really exorbitant. So far we have not had an offer under \$200/n—even in Jersey City! I will continue to pursue this. Next year we are in Denver at the Hyatt Grand, where the SSSP is also meeting. We both have a rate of \$189/n, which took a lot of backing and forthing, bring in their national sales rep as well, toward the end. We would not have obtained this rate if SSSP had not negotiated down to that point. I do think we have the nicer meeting rooms, though if you're scared of heights, you won't think so. The view from the room where our receptions will be held is quite spectacular. I frankly don't know what a \$189 rate will do to us, and that is one reason why I am going so slowly with New York, even though I realize it could create problems for us in New York—and one reason why I have left the Jersey City option in. A lot there will be determined by other things that happen in New York City between now and then, but I really can't conceive of going to a base rate of over \$200/n and getting the kinds of numbers we need to get the bills paid.

Fortunately, in the broader sense we remain strong financially, and thus far we have not had to dip into our investment principal (nor change our investment principles) at all at this point to deal with meeting expenses. So in that sense, we have yet to be hurt by the specific decision to move to Las Vegas or by the economy in general. In this respect, one might want to say “Thank God for OUP.” We made a right decision there at the right time. (Attached you will find a financial statement for ASR for both last year and the first half of this year, plus a summary of our investments).

One thing I nevertheless think we need to consider is a dues increase. As things stand now, we “give” all our dues to OUP. The result of that is that all our member services (dues mailings, ballot mailings, processing grant materials) are in effect “out-of-pocket” expenditures of ASR. Raising our dues to \$40 and \$20 respectively for regular and student members, while being what could be called “only” a \$5 difference, would give us about what it costs for these mailings, so that in effect members' dues would pay for their direct member benefits in terms of their *SoR* subscription and membership notices (i.e.,  $600 \times 5 = \$3,000$ ). Every member who attends the annual meeting, of course, gets an enormous financial return on his or her dues investment, as the registration fee hardly covers the per capita cost of the meeting (which last year was about \$260/attendee).

I also think we should consider the Gallagher (foreign) Travel grants. For the past two years, we have had a disappointing show-up ratio from those to whom we offered grants. My observation on this is that \$500 is not enough to give significant travel help to people coming from abroad. The original idea, admittedly, was *not* to underwrite people's travel to North America, but rather to provide “on the ground expenses.” That is, if people could get themselves here, then we would “take care of” their on-site expenses—a kind of free room and board. As fares increase, the “free room and board” pales as an inducement. I would propose that instead of six \$500 grants, next year we offer three \$1k grants. (We are not a loss for applicants. In addition to the six grantees to whom we tendered offers [of whom only one is here], we turned down six others. In

the case of at least three of the people to whom we offered a grant, they withdrew for financial reasons.) In this approach we would be giving the free r & b plus half the ticket price. They would still have to come up with the other half, so it would not be a total freeloader—and would more closely approximate what a North American colleague would pay.

Our membership also remains strong. Last year at this time we had 665 members, the year before 669, this year 652. That's only a 2.5% loss across the two years—though the difference between 2011 and 2010 is much larger than that between 2010 and 2009. Still, I consider that loss negligible. (One thing we need to realize simply as a secular demographic trend is that a lot of the Catholic crowd who remained very faithful as members, whether or not they attended our meetings, are now being called up yonder, and there is not a corresponding value-commitment sector to take their place.) At the same time, I am from time to time taken aback by the number of younger scholars who seem to think ASR is the ASA Religion Section. I wish we could figure out how to make the difference between the two more prominent without ourselves seeming to be “sectarian.”

I want, finally, to state definitively that the coming year will be my last as Executive Officer. This is an elective office, and I simply will not accept renomination. I had originally hoped to go out (early) this year, but the search process was unproductive. I am committed to working with Roger in any way I can to ensure that we find the right person to take the job and also to explore alternative modes for dealing with some of the functions I now perform. It is the case already that the workload is much less than what it was four years ago, when the journal originated through my office (libraries and all that). In addition, the Executive Officer no longer has to print and circulate a quarterly newsletter, since *News & Announcements* now appears in *SoR*. (S/he does still have to compose *N & A*.) Now all we have is billing and ballots, and it may be possible to get those handled by third parties too and/or streamline them through on-line options. I would be interested in learning from those more tied into the governance of SSSR what their opinion/evaluation is of the greater use of on-line there. If these can be done this way, then the EO's job largely becomes that of the annual meeting and some riding herd on the budget and financial processes/circumstances as a whole. These two need to continue to be integrated into a single person's remit—in the sense that the annual meeting is our largest expenditure, hence the person doing the annual meeting planning must have more than a superficial knowledge of the cash flow and reserves.

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Executive Officer  
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