

ASR EXECUTIVE OFFICER'S REPORT

August 3, 2013

TO: Officers, Members of Council of the Association for the Sociology of Religion

FROM: Jim Cavendish, Executive Officer

RE: Report on the State of ASR

I started my term as Executive Officer of ASR with several goals in mind, most of which have been achieved since the time I began my role at this time last year. These goals were the following:

- 1) To negotiate terms of contract with hotels in New York City (2013) and San Francisco (2014) that would protect ASR's financial strength by ensuring that ASR would not have to pay penalties to these hotels for "attrition," or the inability to fill a sufficient number of sleeping rooms at the conference hotels to offset any charges these hotels would have for meeting room space.
- 2) To work with a web-designer to upgrade our website to include a Members-Only area or "portal" where members could update their member profiles, renew their membership, pay for meeting registration, submit abstracts, vote in elections, and view the new ASR online membership directory.
- 3) To work with the web-designer to create an administrative panel within the website, which could be accessed by the Executive Officer, the Program Chair, and any administrative assistants, so many of the administrative tasks (e.g., keeping track of membership renewals, address changes, abstract submissions, and election results) could be completed through the website.
- 4) To upload many of ASR's documents and archives to the website to enable greater access to valuable information about the Association's history and current operations and greater transparency.
- 5) To maintain an account with the online software "Constant Contact," which enables the EO or other administrators to send mass mailings to members by email.
- 6) To work with the committees to make their operations more efficient and streamlined.

In every one of these respects, the mission has been accomplished. The Doubletree Metropolitan Hotel here in New York City has already told me that we will not be faced with any penalties due to attrition. In fact, our room block sold out a few weeks in advance of the registration deadline of July 10 and I had to negotiate with the hotel to open up more rooms for our members at the lower ASR rate. This success in filling our room block is due to a variety of factors, I'm sure, not least of which were: the fact that I negotiated a hotel contract that would commit ASR to fewer sleeping rooms initially (knowing that I could always negotiate for more rooms through an addendum to our contract); the fact that our hotel is among the most affordable hotels in the city at this time of year (which is something that many of our members stated in a small survey last year was a high priority in their decision about whether to stay in the conference hotel); the fact that I frequently informed our members that the financial health of ASR depends on their staying in the conference hotel; the fact ASR has been making better use of our meeting room space by having more sessions in fewer time slots, thus reducing the number of "room nights" people need to commit to; and finally the fact that we are in New York City, which seems to be a popular location for our members.

I think we are on track for a similar performance next year in San Francisco. In negotiating the contract with the JW Marriott in San Francisco, I argued for a similarly low room block to reduce our risk of having penalties for attrition. Obviously, if the room block sells out quickly, then I will need to act to increase the room block (through the negotiation of an addendum to our contract) so all of our members

can enjoy the low ASR room rates. The rooms at the JW Marriott will be more expensive than they were this year at the Doubletree, but this is mainly because we (i.e., the ASR officers) wanted to choose a venue that was within close walking distance to the ASA conference hotels. In San Francisco, we will be within two blocks of the ASA hotels, and we hope that this will continue to build the level of cooperation and visibility of our associations.

Our Program Chair this year, Kelly Chong, did an excellent job putting together a fantastic program. You'll see that, in the interest of maximizing the number of participants in our two-day conference (and thus ultimately strengthening ASR financially), we have opted to have as many as 5 or 6 concurrent sessions (or break-outs) in the same time slot. We're not sure, yet, whether this will diminish attendance at any one session, but it's clear that there are some time slots when our members will wish they could be in a few different sessions at the same time. Jeremy Uecker, the 2014 Program Chair, has voiced interest in using the new abstract submission feature of our website to receive and evaluate abstracts for next year's conference. This will make the Program Chair's tasks much more efficient because: (1) the website will only accept abstracts from people who are ASR members, thereby eliminating the need to check people's membership status; (2) the website will only accept abstracts that are of a pre-determined length/word count, thereby eliminating the need to manually check the length/word count; (3) the website will send an automated message to each person upon receipt of their abstract submission; and (4) people can check on the status of their submission (i.e., whether the Program Chair has accepted it) through the website. I think these will be huge improvements in the way our conference programs are assembled, and I want to thank our webmaster, Neil Luft, for his patience as he worked with me in covering every detail of this new application. Maybe in future years we'll be able to submit our abstracts and view our program through an app on our iPhones!

Many other aspects of the association continue to flourish. In this year's Editor's Report, Scott Schieman reports that *Sociology of Religion* continues to climb in the rankings. This year, our journal ranks 52 out of 137 in Impact Factor in the Sociology journals category of the ISI rankings, which is a dramatic increase over last year, when it ranked 64 out of 137. Congratulations to Scott for this phenomenal achievement. Although we will miss Scott in this role as he moves on to other things, we are equally excited to welcome aboard Gerardo Marti who will continue the fine job Scott has done over these last few years.

This year's committee reports are a testament to each committee's hard work to make their operations more efficient and identify areas in need of improvement. I want to congratulate the committees for doing such good jobs.

Our membership, as you will see in the accompanying report from the Membership Committee, remains quite strong, even though our ratio of student members is lower than that of the ASA Religion Section and SSSR. ASR had 669 members at around this time of the year in 2010, 665 members in 2011, 639 members in 2012, and this year (as of July 17, 2013) we have 674 members. I think the website and the ease of joining ASR through the Member Portal will only serve to maintain our membership base. I've begun discussions with our incoming President, Chris Ellison, about how to increase the number of student memberships in ASR, including among other things a proposal to reduce the membership fee for graduate students. This is something that Council might want to talk about this year.

The accompanying report from the Membership Committee also highlights the extent to which the membership of ASR overlaps with the membership of other academic professional associations which could provide the basis for strategic planning in the years ahead. I believe our incoming President Elect, Melissa Wilde, will be presenting some ideas in response to some of the Membership Committee's recommendations.

The one committee whose advice I did not seek this past year was the Finance Committee (or what our Constitution calls the "Development Committee"). This was not because I was/am not eager to work with

the committee, nor because the Committee didn't offer to help (Kevin has always generously offered his assistance); rather, it was simply because I have spent so much time doing so many of the other tasks of the Executive Office that, quite frankly, I have not had the time this first year of my term to devote the kind of energy that is necessary to thoroughly review the Association's financial investments and to think of additional or alternative ways to save, invest, or allocate money. I realize that this will be a team effort, but until I've experienced a full year of ASR's cash flow (i.e., from January, 2013, when I took over the financial accounts, to January, 2014), I'm hesitate to propose any major changes or new initiatives that would cost ASR money (at least not unless Council was interested in spending down some of our investments.) In fact, I really interpret this first year as learning the lay of the land in terms of ASR's finances so that I can bring ideas to the Finance/ Development Committee soon after embarking on my second year in this position. Among the things that I would like the Finance Committee to do are:

- 1) Review the investment accounts of ASR to determine whether any investments should be allocated differently.
- 2) Identify (perhaps through the assistance of Art Farnsley of SSSR) an independent auditor who would be willing for a small fee to annually audit ASR's finances and submit an "Auditor's Report" to the Finance Committee about the handling of our finances.
- 3) Advise the Executive Officer and the Council about whether it would be wise to either hire a financial manager or appoint a Treasurer who would be able to compose an annual treasurer's report. Other associations of our type have either a paid financial manager or a volunteer treasurer (or both!) to assist the Executive Officer in handling the finances of the Association. This role could conceivably be performed by the chair of the Finance Committee so long as he/she stays in the role for more than one year since the tasks involve reviewing annual auditor's reports and advising the Executive Officer and Council on long-term financial strategies.

So, what does the financial status of ASR look like at the current time? ASR's assets at the current time are summarized below:

	<i>Value as of 3/28/13</i>	<i>Value as of 6/28/13</i>
ASR's Checking Account at the USF Federal Credit Union		\$64,885.59
ASR's Savings Account at the USF Federal Credit Union		\$5,004.79
<i>American Funds Accounts (Mutual funds)</i>		
Washington Mutual Investors Fund-A (Fund #01)	\$87,752.89	\$91,414.63
The Bond Fund of America-A (Fund #08, bond fund*)	\$130,001.39	\$125,863.15
American High-Income Trust-A (Fund #21, bond fund*)	\$117,921.55	\$114,423.01
Capital World Grown and Income Fund-A (Fund #33)	\$87,012.71	\$86,858.20
SMALLCAP World Fund-A (Fund #35)	\$98,480.97	\$99,566.90
American Funds Money Market Fund-A (Fund #59)	\$11,196.19	\$11,196.19
Total Value of American Funds Portfolio	\$532,365.70	\$529,322.08
TOTAL ASSETS		\$599,212.46

*Bond funds #08 and #21 pay dividends monthly.

Funds #01, #33 are growth and income funds, which pay dividends quarterly.

Fund #35 is a growth fund, which pays dividends once a year with the goal of establishing equity.

Fund #59 is a Money Market fund, which serves as a cash reserve.

I mentioned above that this year is the first of the past few years when ASR is not paying a penalty for inadequate occupancy of the sleeping rooms at our conference hotel. Last year, as you recall, ASR had to pay stiff room-take (or attrition) penalties. Even with these penalties, however, ASR's financial situation at the end of 2012 was pretty good, as you can see in the financial report below. So far this year, we have not had to dip into our investment principal to pay for our website upgrade or to fund our grantees and travel awards, and it seems that we will not need to do so to pay for this year's meeting (even though now, unlike past years, the meeting expenses will include the cost of renting AV equipment, which costs approximately \$11,000 here in New York City). In large measure, ASR's financial stability is due to the interest we earn on our investments, our cost savings in member services through the use of our website instead of regular, postage-paid mailings for dues mailings, ballot mailings, etc., and the revenue that is generated from our journal. Below you will find a financial statement for ASR for the past couple years, the budget we approved for 2013, and the proposed budget for 2014.

Because ASR's assets now exceed \$500,000, Bill Swatos sent me the following email message when he finished the 2012 tax forms earlier this year:

One thing you and the Board may want to think about is the matter of investments. If our investments exceed \$500k in value, then you will have to file the longer Form 990 in the future, not the 990-EZ that we have used for the past several years. If the inflow from OUP continues at the current rate, however, Council might want to reflect on whether it needs an endowment of over \$500k or whether it might increase its grants program(s) in some way... (However), I don't think it's wise to reduce registration fees, which are already quite low.

When I was asked to serve ASR as its E.O., I mentioned to Roger Finke and Fred Kniss that I would like to forego having an administrative assistant, at least during my first year, and do all of the tasks of the Executive Office myself so I could experience everything that the job requires and be able to instruct future assistants on the basis of my experience doing the various tasks. Having had this experience, I can say that the workload, at least without an assistant, is much more than can be expected of someone who also works full time as an associate professor. I enjoy serving as E.O., but I am convinced that I will require an administrative assistant to help with managing the website, reviewing and processing membership fees and registrations, and responding to members' questions, which often come on a daily basis. For this reason, I intend to hire one of the graduate students at USF who specializes in sociology of religion to help with these tasks. This will enable me to devote more time to many of the other tasks that cannot be neglected, such as arranging contracts with hotels, corresponding with book publishers to set up exhibits at the conferences, paying bills and keeping tabs on our grant programs, and brushing up on the financial aspects of the job. In addition to hiring an assistant, I have also created a separate email account at USF specifically for the ASR Executive Office, which can be accessed by the assistants I recruit to help me. That new email address is ASREO@usf.edu. Soon after our annual meeting, I will remove my personal USF email account from the website and replace it with this one.

It's been a pleasure to serve ASR as its Executive Officer. This past year would not have gone so smoothly without the help of my predecessor, Bill Swatos, who devoted a great deal of time and effort to answering my questions and relaying valuable information. Thank you, Bill, for all of your support through this period of transition!

**PREVIOUS YEARS' BUDGETS AND PROPOSED BUDGET FOR 2014
ASSOCIATION FOR THE SOCIOLOGY OF RELIGION**

	2011 actual	2012 budget	2012 actual	2013 budget	Proposed 2014 budget
<u>Income</u>					
Memberships	14,345	20,000	19,455*	20,000	20,000
RSO/Brill	5,210	1,500	3,239	1,500	1,500
Dividends & Interest	16,042	17,000	12,911	15,000	15,000
Fund contributions	580	1,000	804	600	600
SoR royalties	76,126	75,000	107,724	100,000 (?)	100,000 (?)
Processing fees	350	300	200	200	200
Annual meeting	7,370	12,500	10,815	8,000	8,000
Miscellaneous	0	200	0	0	0
In-out	11,791	0	8	0	0
Total Income	131,814	127,500	155,156	145,300	145,300
<u>Expenses</u>					
Office operations	13,286	13,500	15,376	20,000	20,000
<i>Soc of Religion</i>	27,094	30,000	23,334	38,750	43,000
Reimbursement for editor to travel to annual meeting		1,000		1,500	2,000
Editor's Stipend		4,700		7,500	10,000
Editorial Assistant		5,000		5,000	5,000
Book Review Editor stipend		1,450		2,750	4,000
Reimbursement of expenses ...of editor				1,000	1,000
...of book review editor				1,000	1,000
Payment to Oxford U. Press for member subscriptions	19,695	20,000		20,000	20,000
RSO	1,291	1,500	1,334	1,500	1,500
Awards	13,000	30,000	20,008	26,500	30,000
Annual Meeting	35,227	35,000	57,706	40,000	40,000
Website	4,619	0	0	6,100	3,000
PayPal		0	0	500	500
Constant Contact		0	0	336***	350
Investments	15,000	17,000	45,000	11,114	6,450
Miscellaneous	352	500	185	500	500
In-out	11,791	0	290	0	0
Total Expenses	121,660	127,500	166,233**	145,300	145,300

*Includes \$8,275 dues paid in advance (2013, 2014)

** Actual expenditures less \$45k to investments = \$118,233

*** A subscription to Constant Contact is \$28/month or \$336 /year.

Notes:

- “RSO/Brill” includes all income (e.g., royalties, contributions, and sales) from the RSO series and Brill corporate.
- “SOR Royalties” includes all income from *Sociology of Religion* (i.e., OUP and prior-issue contracts).
- Awards are not necessarily paid in the year they are awarded.

Notes on the highlighted expenses for *Sociology of Religion*:

The projected budget for publishing *Sociology of Religion* in 2014 are identical to the terms of the agreement that was reached with Gerardo Marti. The increases to the editor’s stipend, the editor’s travel reimbursement, and the book review editor’s stipend are scheduled to begin in 2014 because that is the year that Gerardo’s first issue of the journal will appear. These amounts were determined as follows:

1. The editor’s stipend was determined based on comparisons to SSSR’s budget for publishing *JSSR*. *JSSR* received 379 manuscripts in the past 12 months, publishes 850 printed pages/year, and had a 2011 impact factor of 1.348. SSSR pays its editor a stipend of \$12k year. In comparison, *Sociology of Religion* receives approximately 120 manuscripts/year, publishes 500 printed pages/year, and had a 2011 impact factor of .861. The \$10k figure, therefore, seemed like a fair starting point, but this could be increased over time, especially if there is an increase in the number of manuscripts received, pages published, and/or the impact factor of the journal.
2. The amount of reimbursement for the editor to travel to the annual meetings was determined based on increases in the cost of hotel rooms.