To: Board of Directors  
Society for the Study of Social Problems

From: Nancy Wonders and Mona Danner  
2003 Program Committee Co-Chairs

RE: 2003 Program Committee Report

Date: August 6, 2003

It has been an honor to serve as Program Co-Chairs for 2003 SSSP President Nancy Jurik. We have also enjoyed serving on the Program Committee with our hard-working colleagues Gray Cavender and Luis Fernandez. This report details the work of the Program Committee over the last year, offers suggestions to future Program Committees, and acknowledges the contributions of several individuals and institutions to this year’s program.

Our work began in June of 2002 when the Program Committee met with President Jurik in Tempe, Arizona to discuss the theme for the 2003 annual meeting. At this meeting, we listed a series of sessions and workshops that we thought reflected the broad theme established by President Jurik, “Justice and the Sociological Imagination: Theory, Research, Teaching, Practice and Action.” Our list included proposed sessions on a wide range of justice related issues that we thought would appeal to the many SSSP Divisions. We also proposed a list of workshops that would evidence SSSP’s commitment to the diversity of its members, particularly students, new scholars, and activists. This list of suggested thematic sessions and workshops turned out to be a very useful tool for facilitating Division participation in the program theme.

During the annual meeting in August of 2002, we met with Kathleen Lowney, the 2002 Program Committee Chair, who summarized her duties as Program Chair and gave us several tips for the work ahead. Later, at the 2003 Program Committee meeting with Division Chairs, we distributed the list of suggested thematics and workshops we had developed in June as a way to encourage Division participation in the 2003 theme. After describing the typical allotment of sessions for Divisions, we explained that Divisions could receive additional slots by developing sessions that corresponded to the theme. We particularly encouraged Divisions to organize some of the sessions provided on our list and/or to suggest related sessions that creatively connected to the program theme; we also encouraged co-sponsored sessions. We then used a portion of the Program Committee meeting for strategic planning by and between Divisions. This strategy facilitated the development of Division sponsored thematic sessions enormously.

During the fall, we fielded numerous queries from Division chairs regarding Thematics and Special Sessions (in excess of the 3 sessions allotted all Divisions). We also began to organize a variety of Program Committee sponsored Thematic sessions. For most of these sessions, an organizer was identified who then submitted the entire session to us by the appropriate deadline. We also worked with Michelle Koontz to
review the Call for Papers for accuracy, particularly regarding Division sponsored Thematic and Special sessions.

Most Divisions and Thematic organizers provided Michelle with their completed sessions by the established deadline in the middle of February. In late February, we developed a list of all papers we had received, either by mail or electronically. We then verified through Michelle that the papers in our possession had not yet been included in a Division sponsored session. In early March, the Program Committee met in Tempe, Arizona to organize into sessions the 50 or so papers we had received either as a result of the Call for Papers or from Division organizers who could not find a place for them. Some of these papers (about 9) were added to sessions organized by the Divisions (in consultation with Division session organizers/Chairs); the rest were assembled into regular sessions. We also located a presider and discussant for each session that we organized. Also in March, we informed individuals of the acceptance of their paper/session. Throughout the spring and summer, we continued to field numerous inquiries regarding the 2003 Program, ranging from late paper submissions to revisions of titles to requests for exemptions of registration fees. At the end of this process, a total of 84 sessions were organized for the 2003 SSSP annual meeting, along with several additional special events.

Divisions sponsored 52 sessions. Of these, 13 were Thematic sessions; most of these were decided upon during the Program Committee meeting last August. In addition, Divisions sponsored 2 special sessions and 34 regular sessions (3 of these were roundtable sessions). Nine of the Division sponsored sessions were co-sponsored by two or more Divisions. We are particularly pleased by the large number of thematic sessions developed by the Divisions in support of President Jurik’s theme. Although the Program Committee conceived of many of the thematic sessions, the Divisions did the hard work of organizing the bulk of the thematic sessions and, thus, integrated the broad membership of the SSSP into the program theme, making it their own.

The Program Committee developed an additional 6 Thematic sessions, 4 Special Sessions, and 4 Workshops. In addition, the Program Committee sponsored two Thematic Events and a Town Hall on “Justice in These Troubled Times.” Using the submissions that resulted from the Call for Papers, the Program Committee also organized 14 regular sessions. Additional items on this year’s program include two Plenary Sessions, an Open Discussion of SSSP Resolutions, a Student Paper Session, a Memorial Session for Beth B. Hess (co-sponsored with ASA, SWS and SSSP), and an Auction and AIDS Fundraiser.

Though there are many highlights in this year’s program, we would particularly like to draw attention to several sessions organized by the Program Committee. The Program Committee felt that President Jurik’s theme invited creativity and “imagination” about how justice might be achieved. Consistent with her theme, we organized an exhibit entitled on “Imagining Justice Through Art” and a series of performances by SSSP members entitled “Imagining Justice Through Music and Poetry.” Topics covered by other thematic sessions include feminist justice, international justice issues, WTO and
global activism, constructing fear, obstacles and opportunities for public universities, racial profiling, and globalization. Additionally, workshops were developed to support students, new scholars, and activists; these focused on job hunting skills for graduate students, jobs for activist/scholar students, the tenure process, and on globalization, scholar activism and movement building. These events are viewed by the Program Committee and President Jurik as important outreach activities to attract and serve students, activists, and new members.

A relatively large number of exemptions were requested this year; 17 were approved by President Jurik and/or the Program Co-Chairs. Registration fee waivers were granted for six individuals invited to participate in the meetings by the President or members of the Program Committee because of their special expertise; three non-sociologists/activists; 7 foreign scholars; and one graduate student with special circumstances.

There are several suggestions that we offer to future Program Chairs and Committees. First, we suggest that next year’s Program Chair continue to facilitate Division participation in the program theme by providing Divisions with a list of suggested thematic sessions. Such a list is an efficient way to foster active Division participation in the theme. It is also important to make time during the Program Committee meeting with Division Chairs for Division collaboration and consideration of the theme to occur. This strategy helps to locate the work of developing the program within the Divisions and ensures their active participation in the program theme.

We also suggest that future Presidents consider inviting two people to co-chair the Program, or to invite one Program Co-Chair to select another co-chair. Sharing responsibility for the program made the enormous workload more manageable. At our August meeting with Division Chairs, we asked half the divisions to work with Wonders and the other half to work with Danner. In addition, though we worked together throughout, Wonders took primary responsibility for organizing information in advance of the March committee meeting and Danner took primary responsibility for program changes after March. Sharing the work of Program Chair made our individual work on the program less time-consuming and far more pleasurable. In the future, others might benefit from such a shared arrangement as well.

One problem that occurs each year is that some individuals provide late notification that they will not be attending the meeting resulting in a session with only two papers. To minimize the impact of this problem, we suggest that next year's Program Chair strongly discourage panels that begin with only 3 papers. Each panel should have at least 4 and maybe even 5 papers. That way when people drop out, the panel can still maintain at least 3 presenters. It is too hard to regroup them late in the program process, so including more papers up front will increase the odds of more full panels at the end.

Another problem that has developed is the greater reliance of the SSSP membership on technology for their presentations. Unfortunately, the costs of video equipment like power-point or video (e.g., this year $700) is really a barrier to media
reliant presentations. The cost associated with technology supported presentations is particularly a problem for those who do media research. We encourage the SSSP to consider this issue as it tries to jazz up its meetings and keep them relevant.

Finally, we would like to acknowledge the hard work of the 2003 Program Committee members, Gray Cavender and Luis Fernandez. We would also like to acknowledge the strong collaborative relationship we had with this year’s President, Nancy Jurik. President Jurik played a leadership role in the organization of numerous thematic sessions and played an active role throughout the entire process; it was a pleasure to work along side with such an active and activist President. We would also like to acknowledge the generous contribution of Arizona State University’s School of Justice Studies and College of Public Programs and Georgia State University to the AIDS Fundraiser and the Graduate Student and New Member Reception. Finally, we would like to acknowledge and emphasize that the bulk of the work associated with the SSSP program is performed by Michelle Koontz. Her organizational skill, knowledge of past SSSP practice, sensitivity to the membership, and professional and pleasant personality made our jobs SO much easier. We thank her enormously for her hard work and her dedication to SSSP, and we urge the Board to do the same.