

**To:** SSSP Board of Directors

**From:** Nancy C. Jurik, Chair, Gabriel Aquino, Judi Caron Sheppard, members of the Permanent Organization and Strategic Planning Committee

**Date:** April 27, 2006

**Re:** Report on the SSSP Executive Office Site Visit, April 7-8, 2006

## INTRODUCTION

We had five items of business during our visit.

1. Evaluation of the Executive Office, Executive Officer, Administrative Officer, Meeting Manager and the Graduate Research Associate.
2. Discuss Tom Hood's plans for continuing or stepping down as Executive Officer after August 2008 and make recommendations about plans for transition to a new EO when that is need.
3. Review and update of the Operations Manual.
4. Discuss the 2007 contract with the University of Tennessee.
5. Discuss and prepare the 2007 salary recommendations for the Executive Officer (EO), Administrative Officer (AO), Meeting Manager, and Graduate Research Associate (GRA).

We met with Tom Hood, Executive Officer, Mary Walker, Graduate Research Associate, Michele Koontz, Administrative Officer and Meeting Manager, Bill Dunne, Associate Dean of Research, and Frank Harris, Associate Vice Chancellor, Office of Research. Because the Sociology Department Chair, Scott Frey, had to be in China during our visit, we sent him a list of questions to which he responded and Committee Chair Jurik spoke with him by phone prior to his departure. We were well received and welcomed by everyone at the university. Tom, Michele, and Mary did a fine job of arrangements and support during our visit.

## INTERVIEW WITH TOM HOOD, EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Dr. Hood retired from the University and received emeritus status in 2004. He indicated that he was willing to continue serving as Executive Officer (EO) through August of 2009 assuming that his health continues to be good and that the society wishes him to continue. Tom indicated his desire to see the Society through the next contract negotiations round for *Social Problems*, so that we would not be negotiating with publishers for our journal at the same time that we were recruiting a new EO. Despite his willingness to continue as EO until August of 2009, Tom stressed that it is still important for the Society to develop a job description and transition plan for replacing him when that becomes necessary. Tom also emphasized that it was important to consider individuals who might want to replace him and encourage them to consider that possibility for the future.

Tom and the Committee also discussed the need to consider various options for his replacement. These might include having the EO and Administrative Officer working in different geographical locations. The

current Operations Manual contains language that allows for that possibility, but the Committee felt that the wording was not sufficiently clear.

Dr. Hood suggested that the description of his job (see attached description) in the Operations Manual be revised to formalize the expectation that the EO should network with other associations and vendors. He would like to see more specificity of the types of organizations that might be included and some guidelines for the EO in pursuing these activities. He recommended that any networking possibilities be presented to the board as specific/concrete proposals that the board could better evaluate and then accept or reject.

Committee Chair Jurik will convey suggestions regarding the job description of the EO to Joel Best and Ben Aguirre who have been charged drafting the EO job description to be used for future recruitment purposes. Joel and Ben will then circulate the draft for review and comment by the rest of the Permanent Organization and Strategic Planning Committee (i.e., those not involved in the site visit). This draft will then be submitted to the Board for their approval.

Dr. Hood also recommended that procedures for ending inactive Special Problems Divisions be more clearly specified in the Operations Manual so as to better guide the Executive Office in its dealings with divisions that do not hold elections or put together panels for the annual meetings.

Dr. Hood suggests an updating of the booklet that Pamela Roby edited during her term as SSSP President ("Working Toward a Just World: Visions, Experiences and Challenges" @ 1997). He volunteered to work on this revision if the Board wishes to authorize it. The Committee agreed that such revision would be a good idea. The Committee discussed the possibility of making this updating a recurring event (e.g., every two years) and making the document available on line depending on the interest of division chairs and the Board.

Dr. Hood is working on a number of research projects but continues to have the interest and time for his SSSP duties. He is very satisfied with his current arrangement with the University and with SSSP. Last year, the University had a 3 percent pay increase for its employees and Dr. Hood would like to see that 3 percent reflected in his compensation from SSSP. The Committee felt that this was a very reasonable request in light of Dr. Hood's fine work for our organization. Dr. Hood and the Committee also discussed the likelihood of significant increases in the costs of the Executive Office budget once he is replaced. Such increases might stem from the need to buyout the teaching time of a new EO. (Because of Dr. Hood's emeritus status, the Society does not have to buy out his teaching time.)

Dr. Hood was very enthusiastic about the job performance of Michele Koontz, Administrative Officer and Meeting Manager. He believes that Michele Koontz is very important to SSSP and enjoys working with her. Tom noted that Michele does two jobs-that of Administrative Officer and Meeting Manager. He noted that the job of Meeting Manager was formerly contracted out to different individuals with what he described as "mixed results." Sometimes it went well and at other times it went poorly. Tom rates Michele's performance as Meeting Manager very highly; her performance in this capacity has also been widely praised by SSSP officers, board, and membership alike.

Tom rated Graduate Research Associate, Mary Walker's performance very highly. He stressed that the Executive Office is running very smoothly and that the Sociology Department is very supportive of him and of SSSP's presence there. Dr. Hood feels that he and SSSP have a good relationship with Sociology Department Chair, Scott Frey. He also perceives that there is solid support for SSSP presence on campus among from the higher levels of the University administration (e.g., Bill Dunne and Frank Harris).

## **INTERVIEW WITH MARY WALKER, GRADUATE RESEARCH ASSOCIATE**

Mary Walker began her position with SSSP last August and very much enjoys her work with the Society. She believes that the job description (see attached) contained in our Operations Manual adequately reflects her work in the position. She is satisfied with the instruction and training that she has received to do her job. Michele Koontz has developed a training manual for the G.R.A. position that Mary found very helpful in assuming her duties. Much of her work entails managing SSSP's Web site and membership database. She also takes daily calls into the Executive Office. She enjoys working with Michele Koontz and indicates that she stays busy, but that Michele manages her time and assignments so that she is not exploited as a G.R.A.

Mary is happy with her working relationships with both Michele and Tom. She enjoys the opportunity to meet sociologists active in the Society and is looking forward to the annual meeting. She is satisfied with her work space in the Sociology Department and feels that she can get her job done there without too many interruptions. Overall, Mary Walker seems quite satisfied with her position with SSSP and would like to remain another year if she gets into the PhD program at U.T.

## **INTERVIEW WITH MICHELE KOONTZ, ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER AND MEETING MANAGER**

Ms. Koontz prefers that her two jobs for SSSP, that of Administrative Officer and Meeting Manager, be treated separately although there is some spillover between the jobs each year (see attached position descriptions). She thinks that the current job description for the AO position is adequate although it does not cover all that she does. She said that the job changes throughout the year and that each email may entail a new and different request of her. Each month is different and each new President may have a different agenda for that year. She stressed that SSSP is a flexible and dynamic organization and it is also a volunteer organization. Volunteers vary in their level of performance and commitment and the AO must be able to recognize and adapt to these variations. Michele suggests that language be added into the AO job description, which reflects the changing and miscellaneous duties that she performs.

Michele enjoys working from home and appreciates the autonomy and flexibility that Tom and the Society have given her. She believes that she is more productive due to the work-at-home arrangement where she has a separate office, equipment, and phone line as well as the space to store what she needs. She enjoys both of her jobs but that of Meeting Manager is the one that she enjoys the most. She enjoys the negotiations and arrangements entailed in managing our annual meetings and experiences a lot of job satisfaction in seeing strong participation levels and meetings that run smoothly.

Michele is very positive about her working relationships with the U.T. Sociology staff, with Tom Hood and with Mary Walker. She and Tom have a solid working relationship and communicate well with one another. Michele gave a strong positive evaluation of Mary Walker, saying that Mary is "a team player, accurate, professional, reliable and committed to the SSSP." She hopes that Mary will be able to continue with SSSP next year. She favors an increase in Ms. Walker's pay as a sign of SSSP's positive evaluation of her job as G.R.A. Although in the past, Michele has had some GRA's who did not perform well on the job, she believes that it might be equally difficult to recruit a good part-time, non-student worker. The increase in the student stipend has been important in helping recruit applicants for the Research Associate position. Students typically prefer to either teach or work as research assistants because of the professional experience that they gain. The 12 month stipend helps to make the SSSP G.R.A. position more attractive.

Michele is very happy working for SSSP and hopes to continue both of her jobs even after Tom Hood steps down from his EO position. Michele would also be willing and happy to telecommute with a new EO should she or he be located elsewhere.

#### **INTERVIEW WITH SCOTT FREY, CHAIR, DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY, UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE**

As noted above, Dr. Frey was not on campus at the time of the site visit. He was unexpectedly invited to visit China on University business. However, before his departure, Dr. Frey responded to a set of questions submitted by the Committee; he also spoke with Committee Chair, Jurik by telephone.

Overall, Dr. Frey is very supportive of SSSP's presence in his department and is interested in a continuing relationship with SSSP in the future beyond Tom's initial departure date of 2008. He said, "I could not be happier with the arrangements between SSSP and the department." He also said he did not see any problems with SSSP's presence there on the horizon. He would strongly support Tom's continuation as EO beyond the initial August 2008 date. He said that if Tom continues past August, 2008, "We will probably want to discuss the specific arrangements between the department and SSSP at that time."

We asked Dr. Frey about any individual staff, faculty, or students had helped facilitate the link between Sociology and the SSSP office. He indicated that the departmental administrative assistant Susan Woodcox has worked closely with Tom and Michele on a number of issues and done an especially good job.

By phone, Dr. Frey reiterated his positive assessment of his department's relationship with SSSP. He hopes that the relationship can continue. If the relationship continues past 2008, the department may wish to ask for more financial support from SSSP. Dr. Frey was very positive about SSSP and Tom, Michele and Mary as the Executive Office staff. He believes that things run quite smoothly due to their hard work and the good relationships they have with Sociology staff.

#### **INTERVIEW WITH BILL DUNNE, ASSOCIATE DEAN OF RESEARCH, GRADUATE STUDIES AND FACILITIES**

Associate Dean Dunne was enthusiastic about SSSP's presence on the U.T. campus. He believes that is it good for the University to have SSSP there. He was aware of the status of our journal *Social Problems* and also said the he was pleased with how smoothly the SSSP office functions there. He indicated that he is willing to continue to waive the indirect costs for the SSSP-U.T. contract. Dr. Dunne said that the present office arrangements for SSSP in McClung Tower were not a problem for the University. He also indicated that the University would be happy to continue its relationship with SSSP beyond 2008 and also after Tom decides to step down from his position as EO for SSSP.

#### **INTERVIEW WITH FRANK HARRIS, ASSOCIATE VICE CHANCELLOR, OFFICE OF RESEARCH**

Associate Vice Chancellor Harris was also pleased with the relationship between SSSP and U.T. He was very positive about his working relationship with the Sociology Department and with Dr. Hood. He gave us an overview of research opportunities for faculty and students at U.T. He asked a number of questions about our association and offered some advice about how SSSP might increase the awareness of our

organization and what we have to offer among Washington policymakers. He is quite supportive of a continuing relationship between SSSP and U.T.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:**

### **Evaluation of the Executive Office and Staff:**

The Site Visit Committee was favorably impressed with the smooth functioning of the Executive Office, its relations with the University of Tennessee, and with the quality of the staff including Tom Hood, Michele Koontz, and Mary Walker. SSSP is indeed fortunate to have such an excellent Executive Office and at costs that are reasonable.

### **Executive Officer Transition When Needed:**

The Committee is happy to hear that Tom Hood is willing to continue for a 2008-2009 term if the SSSP wants him to do so. However, both Tom and the Site Visit Committee agree upon the importance of continuing SSSP's effort to develop a clear transition plan for replacing Tom when that becomes necessary. The Chair of the site visit and Permanent Organization and Strategic Planning Committee will convey this discussion to Committee members Joel Best and Benigno Aguirre who are drafting a new EO job description for that purpose.

Although the Site Visit Committee believes that U.T. continues to offer an excellent home for SSSP, the Committee also recommends that the transition plan include an option that might entail the geographical separation of the Executive Office and the Administrative Officer. A chief rationale for this option would be to retain Michele Koontz in her current positions.

The Committee also wants to emphasize that once Tom does step down, a new EO and/or new Executive Office location will probably entail significantly greater costs for the association. Due to Tom's emeritus status, the Society no longer buys out his teaching time. The need to offer such compensation for a new EO might increase the costs of the Executive Office. Moreover, the possible separation of the EO and AO might entail a need to pay assistants at both sites. In any case, the Board and its Budget, Finance, and Audit Committee should discuss the possibility and impact of future Executive Office budget increases on the SSSP.

### **Revisions to Operations Manual and Job Descriptions:**

The Site Visit Committee recommends that the current language about the transition and possible separation of EO and AO locations be examined for clarity and consistency. Chair Nancy Jurik will speak with Joel Best and/or Benigno Aguirre who are charged with revising the EO job description to coordinate the position drafting and Operations Manual revision processes.

The Committee recommends that the Administrative Officer job description be revised to include the generally reference to the changing and miscellaneous duties that she performs.

The Committee recommends (per interview with Tom Hood) that the procedure for termination of special problem divisions be clarified.

The Committee recommends (per interview with Tom Hood) that more language be added to the Operations Manual about networking with other organizations that might go beyond one Presidential

term. It will be added that any proposals for such networking be written down and submitted for Board consideration.

The chair of the Site Visit and Permanent Organization and Strategic Planning Committee (Jurik) will draft these suggested revisions, submit them to the full Committee and then to the Board of Directors for their consideration.

### **Compensation issues:**

Tom Hood: The Site Visit Committee recommends that the Board consider a four percent increase in Tom Hood's stipend from SSSP. Tom asked only for a three percent increase so as to be consistent with the raise that U.T. gave him last year. We believe that his performance for SSSP merits more than that amount. Tom continues to serve the Society well not only by his daily commitment of time, but also with his vast historical knowledge and experience with SSSP. He and Michele work well as a team. SSSP is fortunate to have someone of Tom's caliber and commitment. We are happy that he is willing to continue past the initial 2008 term of departure.

Michele Koontz: The Site Visit Committee recommends that the Board consider a four percent increase in her compensation for both jobs. Michele continues to perform both her jobs as Administrative Officer and Meeting Manager in an outstanding manner. The smooth functioning of our Executive Office and Annual Meetings is in no small part a reflection of the talent and hard work of Michele Koontz.

Mary Walker: The Site Visit Committee recommends that the Board also consider an increase in the compensation for our graduate research associate, Mary Walker. Both Tom and Michele rate Mary's performance as excellent. The 12-month stipend is the major attraction of this job for capable graduate students as they weigh it against teaching and research opportunities.

### **2007 Contract:**

The Site Visit Committee discussed the 2007 contract with the University of Tennessee. The Committee recommends the renewal of this contract with amendments in salary discussed above. The Committee also recommends that the Budget, Finance, and Audit Committee and Board of Directors consider offering a small increase in the amount of money that goes to the Sociology Department. The department has been very welcoming of the SSSP Executive Office and its costs are very reasonable at this time. The SSSP is fortunate to have such a supportive institutional home at the University of Tennessee and in the Sociology Department there.

The Committee strongly advises that the Board and the Budget, Finance, and Audit Committee give careful consideration and begin planning to accommodate the likely cost increase that may occur when Tom Hood steps down from the EO position and if another University becomes home to the Executive Office.

The Committee concludes that the SSSP Board and members owe a great deal to our Executive Office for its outstanding work over the years. Thank you, Tom, Michele, and Mary!

cc: SSSP Executive Office  
SSSP Board of Directors  
SSSP Budget, Finance and Audit Committee  
SSSP Permanent Organization and Strategic Planning Committee