

ACCESSIBILITY COMMITTEE REPORT

Submitted 9/20/07 by Carol Brooks Gardner, Chair, for Committee members Liat Ben Moshe, Kathe Lowney, and herself, after an Accessibility Committee meeting of 8/10/07

The Accessibility Committee for 2006-2007 has had a number of items to discuss this year.

The following items came under discussion, and, for some, action was taken:

- 1. The Accessibility Committee wondered – like some Accessibility Committees of previous years – if there was membership support for a division on Disabilities in the SSSP. While the American Sociological Association worked to create a section on Disability and Society, led by Sharon Barnartt, the SSSP’s membership and activist orientation argued that such a division would not be a duplication of effort. This year, the Accessibility Committee successfully co-sponsored a SSSP session with the division on health. The time had certainly come, as noted by previous chairs.**
- 2. The crucial question continued to be one of member interest, and the Committee reached out to gauge member interest, aided by a number of people, including Carrie Foote, Michele Koontz, Valerie Jenness, Valerie Leiter, Nancy Naples, 2007 student desk volunteers, and others. Thanks to the efforts of all, petitions were circulated and obtained the requisite number of signatures for form a “Disabilities” division by the end of the 2007 meeting.**

- 3. The Accessibility Committee hoped that general interest will further be sparked and attention drawn to the new Disabilities division by sponsorship of (for example) an essay contest created to appeal to young scholars. (Or perhaps co-sponsorship by both the 2008 Accessibility Committee and the Disabilities division?) Such a certainly could not proceed without approval and sponsorship of the Board as well as budget committees. (We have noted that past Accessibility Committees have also suggested that scholarships for members with disabilities be considered by the SSSP Minority Scholarship.)**

- 4. The 2007 Accessibility Committee members have themselves had “travelers’ troubles” in securing appropriate and reasonable accommodations from varied meeting hotels. Therefore, this Committee requests that members continue to be reminded to identify their needs, and that SSSP hotels in particular be vetted for true (as opposed to advertised) accessibility. The feedback form should continue to be used, members’ reactions and experiences at annual meetings noted, and availability of the form itself announced to members.**

- 5. With regard to detailed proposals for highlighting meeting accessibility, Liat Ben Moshe and Kathe Lowney have made detailed proposals intended to showcase accessibility issues: in particular, they suggested a SSSP Web-Page to be devoted to accessibility issues. Liat Ben Moshe also suggested that --

--after the stories we have heard from people on this list it is clear that the mere mention of 'ADA compliance' does not guarantee usability of the rooms for people with disabilities. Therefore the idea suggested of actually touring the accessible rooms seems like a viable**

one to me. I hope these can be toured with someone who has the expertise in such areas, which will be different then touring it with a checklist at hand without the corporeal or professional experience attached to disability. In every city there is either a CIL or disability group that might provide assistance in surveying the premises (either for their own shared benefit or for a small contribution). This led me to think of the recent survey that was sent to members about how to increase the participation of unrepresented population at SSSP (PWD [people with disabilities] included). I believe that connecting with such an agency beforehand and maintaining these ties up to the conference date will serve as a great vehicle through which we can increase community participation of underrepresented populations in the organization. It is a well established fact that PWD are underrepresented in higher education, and many times if organizations wish to benefit from the wisdom and presence of underrepresented populations you need to go out of the traditionally exclusionary spaces (such as universities) for outreach.

Since I see SSSP as an activist-oriented professional organization, I believe many PWD can benefit from attending this conference. This could be one way of reaching them.

I also want to note that at SU [Syracuse University], where I am at now, I am a part of a Student-run organization called 'Beyond Compliance'. (the website is [cited at the end of this proposal]). What we are trying to do is advocate that the university and global community will move from the minimum definitions of what is required to do for access and inclusion by laws and codes into thinking about disability as a part of diversity and human variation, as an identity, culture, source of pride. Something you want to

encourage not just abide by in order not to get sued -- I think this is the approach SSSP needs to take, and I feel that the survey that went out recently and conversations we are having here are a great start for such an endeavor.

Beyond Compliance (BCCC)

<http://bccc.syr.edu/> <<http://bccc.syr.edu/>>

- 6. Liat Ben Moshe also reiterated the possibility for the 2008 Accessibility Committee itself doing a survey of disability in the field, perhaps within social problems texts, courses, and journals. The 2007 Accessibility Committee wonders whether this is something the 2008 Accessibility Committee will also want to propose or undertake. It could also be done in concert with the new Disabilities division.**

- 7. The 2007 Accessibility Committee will forward a copy of this report to next year's Accessibility Committee members. While no present action need be taken, the 2007 Accessibility Committee would like the 2008 Accessibility Committee to consider the suggestions put forth.**

- 8. The Accessibility Committee especially thanks Tom Hood, Valerie Jenness, Michele Koontz, and Nancy Naples for their invaluable support and advice. The Chair in particular is grateful for the participation of those named along with that of present Accessibility Committee members.**