

7/18/2007

To: SSSP Board of Directors
From: JoAnn Miller, 2007 Program Committee Chair
RE: Program Committee Report

Here's news: This being the second year of online-only submissions resulted in 47 percent of the papers being submitted *on the deadline date*. Note, please, that a number of papers were submitted well after the deadline. And so it goes.

Janice Tocher worked with Michele Koontz, Val Jenness, and JoAnn Miller to smooth out the electronic submission process. Only a handful of presenters had difficulty. (But the Commodore computers and the punch cards continue to gunk up the process.)

This year's preliminary program features 143 sessions. Among those are 35 Thematic Sessions, representing all our Special Problems Divisions. There are 12 Special Sessions, many of them workshops and sessions designed for our newest members, and one reserved to reflect upon the exemplary career of an SSSP scholar and activist.

The Program Committee organized 46 sessions. Included is the popular "Speed Mentoring" session, introduced by Steven Barkan, Student Award Winning Paper Sessions, and Author Meets Critics Sessions. A number of sessions, however, were created and sponsored by the committee to accommodate a large number of papers that did not fit into a session organized by a special problems division.

The number of papers and sessions is indeed record breaking. It is also instructive. As more members participate in our program, it creates the need for an ever increasing number of new or Program Committee created sessions.

Now, please flip the coin over: An unusually large number of co-sponsored sessions resulted in no paper submissions. While co sponsorship is a wonderful idea, it tends to create highly specialized topics or fields in which few if any SSSP members work. Thus, a number of sessions were cancelled.

And consider this. The larger than ever number of submissions compelled the Program Committee to exercise its stated right to place papers in already-organized sessions. Some organizers complained gracefully (and some forcefully). Nonetheless, the Committee had little opportunity to raise the funds necessary to build an extra meeting room or two for the Roosevelt Hotel.

While the number of papers and sessions is larger than in prior years, the number of persons failing to pay dues decreased (from 289 in 2006 to 271 in 2007). Michele Koontz cleverly sent reminders for pre-registration to capture some of those who would have neglected to renew their SSSP memberships.

Three SSSP program policies were challenged or potentially introduced. First, a student winner and sole author was also presenting a second (and sole authored) paper. The Committee decided to waive the "single rule" and invited her to present both papers. Second, after consulting with The Scholar's Choice, our book exhibitor, the Committee decided to permit The National HIV

Testing Mobilization Campaign to have an exhibit. Third, the Committee received a large number of requests for waivers of program fees. Some were from employed academics in the humanities or visiting scholars from Western European nations. Though their requests were denied, in order to accommodate the underemployed and the scholars from less advantaged countries, three persons withdrew from the program as a result.

The Program Committee makes the following recommendations to the Board:

1. Revisit the sole author rule to accommodate student winning papers.
2. Consider the possibility for additional types of exhibits. Should there be a fee? What types of organizations are reasonable exhibitors?
3. Draft wording for waiving program fees that focuses strictly on financial need rather than work in the social sciences.
4. Consider a number of general roundtable sessions for future programs to accommodate the large number of “orphan” papers. Or, consider assigning a Program Committee member, other than the Chair, the responsibility of creating new sessions.
5. Limit the co-sponsored sessions, not in number, but in topic. Keep the topics broad enough to generate submissions.
6. Increase the number of papers per session to six in the call for papers (with an acknowledgement that sessions with five papers, an organizer, and a discussant will be placed on the program).

I would like to thank Susan Will, Nickie Phillips, and Sarah Damaske for the time they invested to invite SSSP members to New York. The “Graduate Student Edition” of local arrangements is a welcomed addition that I hope will be repeated in future years.

Jim Holstein, Lynn Schlesinger, Deborah Thorne, and Billie Gastic consulted with Val Jenness on the program. They also proof read the preliminary program. Jim organized a wonderful session on getting published, and Deborah organized a teaching workshop.

Michael Smyth took sole responsibility for this year’s Film Exhibit. Combining his creative and scholarly interests and expertise, he identified extraordinary films, and added a new and exciting dimension to our program this year. A film maker, Jamie A. Lee, will participate in panel discussions following the screening of two of the films.

This SSSP program would not be possible without Michele Koontz. I regret a limited ability to express the gratitude I feel for her assistance and for her sincere appreciation for all the work that SSSP members accomplish each year. Her secret? She has a remarkable and sharp wit, even when handling late submissions, late requests for LCD projectors, and lots and lots of complaints.

The persons who worked with Michele, especially Mary Walker and Janice Tocher, made our lives in an electronic world bearable. Mary continued to make program changes as the final program was going to press. Thanks!