

REPORT OF AD HOC RETREAT IMPLEMENTATION COMMITTEE

July 2008

Members: Steven Barkan (chair); Cheryl Boudreaux,
Carrie Yang Costello, Valerie Jenness, Naomi Nichols

The Ad Hoc Retreat Implementation Committee was formed by the Board of Directors in August 2007 to follow up on the recommendations of the Retreat that was held just before the 2007 annual meeting in New York City. The committee reviewed the many recommendations that resulted from the retreat and decided to individually rank those that seemed most important. The ranking tally yielded a list of “top 12” recommendations/categories of recommendations on which the committee then focused. The committee then wrote the Executive Office (EO) to determine the extent to which each of these recommendations was being implemented and what more might need to be done. EO kindly replied in February 2008 with a very detailed and informative document that discussed various steps that were occurring and possible additional avenues that could be pursued (including the names of appropriate SSSP committee chairs to be contacted for further information). This report relies heavily on the EO document and also incorporates information received to queries sent to the committee chairs. We discuss each recommendation separately and focus on the status of its implementation. Our list of “top 12” recommendations appears roughly in the order in which they appeared in the minutes of the Retreat. The Ad Hoc committee recognizes that Board discussion and approval will be needed for many of the recommendations and that the Board in its wisdom may decide not to proceed with one or more specific recommendations.

1. Retention and membership

The Retreat yielded several recommendations related to expansion and retention of membership. One specific recommendation centered on the need to retain student members. EO reported that nothing specific had been done to implement this recommendation, although it noted that the Special Problems Divisions often involve new Assistant Professors (and thus recent students) in various capacities that require SSSP membership. In this regard, the Personal Mentoring Program recently begun by President Nancy Naples may aid retention of any students and other members who sign up to be mentored. EO also noted that various announcements, calls for papers, and employment and fellowship possibilities appear on the SSSP website for free (but also thought that these listings could be expanded and that perhaps a charge could be initiated for the listing of position vacancies). Membership Committee Chair Kim Cook noted that she and other SSSP members conduct workshops at the SSSP conference for graduate students and other individuals on negotiating the academic job market.

Another recommendation in this category involved a strengthened membership drive. EO noted that it is working with Prof. Cook in this effort. In particular, members will be asked to recruit new members through personal contact, and a mailing featuring departmental membership benefits will be sent to Ph.D. departments. EO also has developed a flyer for distribution to

regional and national professional societies, although it noted that direct mail contact with such societies is not cost-effective. Prof. Cook reports that she has “worked closely” with Administrative Officer Michele Koontz on the promotional materials just mentioned and that she continues to monitor membership data. EO recommended that SSSP consider working with other like-minded societies to develop a joint membership fee; perhaps joint meetings could also occur. Board approval would be needed for such efforts. In a related effort, Prof. Cook reports that she and other Membership Committee members plan to attend meetings and/or receptions of other organizations in Boston “in order to promote SSSP and build bridges to other like-minded professionals.”

A final membership recommendation was that a system be developed to track why students and first-time professional members do not renew their membership after one year. EO recommended that this task be assigned to the Membership Committee, with EO providing an appropriate list of individuals to contact. Prof. Cook reports that the Membership Committee will discuss this recommendation at its meeting in Boston.

2. Administrative Officer Michele Koontz and the Executive Office

Another series of Retreat recommendations concerned the status and needs of Administrative Officer Koontz. Specifically, the Retreat recommended that Ms. Koontz receive a significant salary increase to reflect the quality and quantity of her performance. Ms. Koontz did receive a salary increase during 2007 as recommended by the Budget, Finance, and Audit Committee. Reflecting the Retreat sentiment and also that of a site visit by the Permanent Organization and Strategic Planning Committee, Executive Officer Tom Hood recommended an additional increase at the May 2008 BFA meeting to take effect in 2009.

An additional recommendation was that a .5 FTE be hired to assist Ms. Koontz. This person (Sharon Shumaker) was hired and, according to Ms. Koontz, has been very helpful with the SSSP website and other matters.

Regarding the Executive Office, the Retreat recommended that conversations occur with the new Executive Officer regarding the scope and responsibilities of the EO. Those conversations obviously need to occur once this person is hired.

3. Have a session for the Social Action Award winner to fully discuss their program

As EO pointed out, implementation of this recommendation requires that the Program Committee reserve space on the program and that the Social Action award Committee coordinate the session with the award winner. This in turn requires that the award be determined soon enough for these processes to occur; presently this determination occurs during the summer, far too late for inclusion in the annual meeting. EO also pointed out that attendance at this session may be limited because of competition with other sessions. According to Program Committee co-chair Hector Delgado, this is an excellent selection, but it was too late for this session to be established at the 2008 annual meeting in Boston. Prof. Delgado also pointed out that this session

should be held just before the awards ceremony to make it convenient for the award winner to present at the session and to receive the award. Echoing EO, Prof. Delgado said this would in turn mean that the session would be competing with other sessions and limit the attendance. Thus, it is not clear when a session featuring the award winner should be held. He added that perhaps the Social Action award could be given to three organizations rather than to only one organization. The increased number of winners would recognize a greater number of deserving individuals and organizations and also make SSSP more visible in the social action community; it would also result in three presentations at a social action award session and help maximize the session's attendance because members would be more likely to have some interest in at least one of the presentations. It might also be useful for the multiple winners to meet each other if they do not already know each other. Because the Social Action Award is now \$1,000, multiple winners would require an increase in the total award or a smaller amount going to each winner. This suggestion would presumably need perusal by BFA and Bylaws committees and by the Board.

4. Experts list

The Retreat minutes included a recommendation that an experts list be established on the website so that “members [could] find areas of expertise to get names out there and make connections.” EO indicated that the purpose of this list needs to be clarified. Is it meant to enable non-profit organizations to find experts for voluntary consulting? Is it meant for SSSP members to advertise their professional services for hire? Whatever its purpose, should SSSP members designate themselves as experts or should there be some vetting system? If SSSP were to publish a list of experts on the website or in an official publication, that might imply an endorsement of the experts' expertise. The Board needs to consider this issue.

5. Links to other groups, websites, and newsletters (and have them reciprocate)

EO favors this recommendation but noted the need to make sure that any such groups have goals and means that align with those of SSSP. Links to some groups and websites are already on the SSSP website; EO recommends that the Permanent Organization and Strategic Planning Committee review this list annually. The online membership directory now allows members to list their personal website address. Increased use of relevant links on SSSP Division websites would be in order; the new .5 FTE can post various items to these websites.

6. Money for grants for members to work on social justice issues

The Retreat recommended that SSSP develop and offer a pool of money to be allocated as grants to members to work on social justice issues. EO noted that some other professional organizations do this and suggested that BFA be asked to determine an appropriate amount of money, if any. The Board could then appoint an ad hoc committee to explore the development of a small grant program for this purpose. According to BFA Chair Gray Cavender, when BFA met in May 2008, it decided it did not have enough information to discuss this issue since “this is a new process and no one has actually applied for anything” and “we didn't know specifics such as how many,

how much, and so on.” BFA assumes that the Board will be discussing social justice grants recommendation at the annual meeting in Boston.

7. Appointment of a public affairs officer or community liaison to publicize SSSP public policy research

According to EO, this recommendation affects SSSP staff structure and thus should be referred to the Permanent Organization and Strategic Planning Committee (POSPC), which would have to write a job description, determine whether it should be a paid or volunteer position, and assess the relationship of the position with EO and the Board. If POSPC determines that this position would involve a change to SSSP bylaws, it should propose such a change as an amendment to the Bylaws Committee.

8. Stipend for outreach by Executive Officer should be \$15,000

According to EO, this recommendation should be referred to BFA. POSPC should then review the job description of the Executive Officer and recommend changes to this description to cover outreach activities. This should be done in consultation with the current Executive Officer and with candidates for his successor. Any draft revisions concerning outreach should be presented to the Board. According to BFA Chair Gray Cavender, BFA discussed this matter at its May 2008 meeting with input from Tom Hood. BFA concluded that the selection committee for Dr. Hood’s successor should discuss outreach aspects (and appropriate financial issues) with candidates, as it thought, according to Prof. Cavender, that the selected successor would want “serious input into such a stipend and its uses.” BFA assumed that the Board would be discussing this issue at the annual meeting in Boston.

9. Secure new Executive Officer to replace Tom Hood

This search has been underway and a new Executive Officer is scheduled to be selected by March 1, 2009.

10. Revamp nominations process so that it is more systematic, transparent, and less “ad hoc”

The website now contains a form allowing people to nominate or self-nominate. EO noted that the bylaws specify the nominations process and that the involvement of the Council of Special Problems Division Chairs (CSPDC) in the process “adds a grassroots element and an unpredictable element” to the process and also “militates against oligarchic tendencies.” EO thought that a possible way to make the process more systematic would be for the Board to accept the list without change when it comes from CSPDC rather than reordering the list. Nancy Mezey, Chair of CSPDC, applauded the new website nomination form. She said that “the problem we run into at the Nominations meeting” is that many CSPDC members are fairly new to SSSP and thus do not know many of the nominees or SSSP members in general. In turn, she reports, “This means that we don’t have much information in making nominations.” She thinks

that the new nomination form may help with this problem, and she also agrees that the Board accept the list as it comes from CSPDC rather than reorder it. If that is done, however, she also thinks that “we should have some more senior members of the Board (presumably the President and/or VP) sit on the Nominations committee—perhaps not as voting members, but *ex-officio* as a resource.” She notes this may need a by-law change.

11. Diversify SSSP (a recommendation that is central to many other recommendations)

Implementation of several of the preceding recommendations should help increase diversity. To further increase diversity, EO recommended recruitment of members from organizations working on specific social problems such as homelessness, poverty, capital punishment, and family difficulties. Membership Committee Chair Cook reports that the attendance of her committee members at other organizations in Boston will help increase diversity as recommended by EO. Ms. Koontz provided Prof. Cook a list of relevant organizations.

12. Increase meaningful participation of activist scholars

To do this, EO observed that the organizational structure and annual conference program would have to find a place for activist scholars, who now “have to find a home” in an SSSP division. EO recommended that all divisions include an activist panel in the annual program. CSPDC Chair Mezey agrees that activist scholars should be more involved in the annual meeting and SSSP in general. She thinks the sponsoring by each division of an activist scholar panel would enhance these scholars’ participation, but fears that this structure would also “ghettoize” them and their scholarship. For this reason, Prof. Mezey “would rather see activism built into all of our sessions and scholarship, at least in the form of policy recommendations.” On a related matter, she suggests that a change in the format of SSSP resolutions be considered: “Right now, the resolutions are sparse and often unfocused, and heavily rely on division chairs who may not know how to formulate resolutions. Perhaps there should be a ‘Resolutions Committee’ made up of activist scholars who can take suggestions from Division Chairs, or from any members, and then turn those suggestions into well-formulated resolutions. [Having] such a committee would formalize SSSP’s commitment to activism and activist scholarship. A final suggestion from Prof. Mezey is that a requirement could be added to the by-laws that a certain minimum number of activist scholars be added to the Board: “This would help focus our efforts on activist scholarship.”

Other Recommendations

Several recommendations from the Retreat did not end up in the set of twelve recommendations selected for priority by the Ad Hoc Retreat Implementation Committee. These remaining recommendations are listed below, along with Executive Office reaction solicited and received in July 2008, for the Board’s information and possible consideration. Lack of time precluded the gathering of the kind of information from committee chairs that was gathered for the priority list.

- a. *Increase contacts with international scholars, perhaps by having volunteers being responsible for a specific nation.* EO notes that SSSP has 200+ international scholars, about half from Canada. A session featuring Japanese scholars was organized by Joel Best a few years ago and was well attended. An Indian scholar has inquired about organizing a similar professional society in India. Also, the last meeting of the Board authorized an ad hoc committee to consider an international fellowship. Beyond these efforts, no other actions have been taken.
- b. *Encourage all members to start discussion groups on social problems in their local communities and/or schools; these groups should be ethnically diverse.* EO reports that no actions have been taken on this recommendation. A committee or website section could help develop these groups.
- c. *Consider reduced dues for members of related organizations.* According to EO, BFA has not discussed this. Many SSSP members belong to the American Sociological Association or the American Society of Criminology. Perhaps a package discount could be negotiated with these and/or other organizations, but BFA would have to consider the financial implications.
- d. *Redesign the website to make it more visually appealing and personal.* SSSP's new webmaster can help accomplish this, perhaps with increased use of photos.
- e. *Develop fact sheets listing scholarship in areas of interest to us.* EO notes that these documents could be valuable to journalists, lawyers, or others working on specific social problems and trying to find experts to interview or testify.
- f. *The website should include a divisional showcase, i.e. a sample paper(s) from each annual meeting chosen by the chair of the division.* Because each division has a student paper award winner, EO and the Ad Hoc Retreat Implementation Committee suggest that a divisional showcase could feature these papers. The Council of Special Problems Division Chairs has been asked to discuss this idea and, if it favors the idea, to come up with an appropriate process to present to the Board for its information. Questions that need consideration include: how long will papers be posted on the website? who will contact the award winner and request an electronic copy of the paper? should the award winner be required to have the paper posted? should honorable mention papers also be posted? The posting of student award papers could be the primary function of a divisional showcase, but perhaps other types of papers could also be posted. For example, each division could choose the best or most interesting paper regardless of whether the author is a student.
- g. *Money should be available to help community activists and/or practitioners attend the annual meeting.* A foreign scholars and community activists fund already exists but has been primarily used to support travel for foreign scholars. SSSP could decide to increase the size of this fund.

- h. There should be a panel at the annual meeting for government/NGO/policy/private research practitioners.* Some Divisions have sponsored such sessions. Should the Board decide to formalize this recommendation, it could be written into the operations manual entries for the Program Committee and for the Council of Special Problems Division Chairs.
- i. Minority Scholarship Award winners should be brought back annually for a panel and reception; they could also sponsor someone.* No action has been taken on this; the Program Committee could be asked to establish such a panel.
- j. There should be a minority practitioner award.* No action has been taken on this; guidelines and funding would have to be developed.
- k. SSSP sponsored panels should occur at other professional meetings.* EO says this could be accomplished at regional meetings by having members organize social problems panels; this has occurred at meetings of the Society for the Study of Symbolic Interaction and of the Christian Sociological Society. It may be more difficult to have this happen at national meetings than at regional meetings.
- l. Interdisciplinary colloquia.* No action has been taken, though SSSP is, according to EO, “very well situated to organize interdisciplinary sessions or conferences on topics dealing with social problems.” A committee could develop guidelines.
- m. A user’s guide (i.e., how SSSP works) should be developed and put on the website.* The operations manual is on the website and receives continual updating.
- n. Consider thematic meetings at various times/years focusing on specific issues.* No action has been taken, but the SSSP annual meeting has had thematic sessions. Examples include a conference organized by the Poverty and Inequality Division, Richard Dello Buono’s work with the Global Division, and workshops on violence against women held the day before two earlier SSSP conferences. Also, the International Coalition Against Sexual Harassment and Critical Sociology conferences are both being held at the SSSP hotel in Boston following the conclusion of the SSSP conference. ICASH has held several such conferences since the 1990s, while the Critical Sociology conference has its origins in Global Division-sponsored special sessions the day after the 2006 SSSP conference .