

**REPORT FROM THE EXECUTIVE Officer, SSSP - 2009-2010**  
**August, 2010 - Atlanta, Georgia**

Having completed my first year as the Executive Officer of the Society for the Study of Social Problems (SSSP), let me begin by thanking everyone for their support and hard work. I especially wish to thank Michele Koontz and Tom Hood; the former for her friendship and legendary dedication and competence and the latter for his *nineteen years* of service to the SSSP as Executive Officer and for making the transition so seamless. Not far behind are Sharon Shumaker and Sarah Hendricks, both extraordinarily competent and smart, and amazingly decent individuals to boot. By the time the meeting begins in Atlanta, Sharon will have resigned as she awaits the birth of her second child. We of course wish her and her family the best. (And we know that Britton will be a fantastic big sister.) When she leaves, we'll keep a light on. You never know. Replacing Sharon was not an easy task, but we believe we were up to it when we hired Kelley Flatford, who comes to us with all of the experience and skills required for the position - *and more*. I would like to express my gratitude to Michele and Sharon for conducting the interviews, and finding Kelley. I would also like to thank Dr. Scott Frey, Professor and Head of Sociology and Co-Director of the Center for the Study of Social Justice at the University of Tennessee, and the University of Tennessee for their support. Scott will be stepping down as the head of the department and taking his place will be Dr. Jon Shefner. We look forward to working with Jon, who is also an active member of the Society's Global Division. Our partnership with UTK is one we value immensely.

Before proceeding with a report on the business of the SSSP, let me add a few words about Michele Koontz, our Administrative Officer and Meeting Manager. Before becoming EO I had the opportunity to work relatively closely with Michele as the chair of the C. Wright Mills Committee and, especially, as co-chair (with Wendy Simonds) of the Program Committee. I was very impressed with her in both instances, but after a year of working with her as EO, my admiration and respect for her have increased exponentially. No one knows the intricacies of the organization better and in my forty years in higher education I do not recall working with anyone more competent than Michele. My only concern is that we ask her to do too much with too little. In the short run, she, and we, will manage, but, in the long run, once the SSSP is on firmer economic ground, we need to get her more support. This is high on my list of priorities, and for that reason, I asked her, Sharon, and Sarah to provide me with an assessment of where we are and need to be administratively.

**Arizona Law 1070 and Proposed Consortium**

The Board and I expressed grave concerns about Senate Bill 1070, signed into law by Arizona's governor on April 23, 2010, which criminalizes undocumented immigrants and opens the door for local police officers to employ racial profiling to enforce the law. The Board approved a letter to Governor Jan Brewer and the membership passed a resolution (469 in favor, 16 opposed, 5 abstentions), which were shared with other public officials and media in Arizona, urging the state to rescind the law. The Board also approved a letter to the Commissioner of Major League Baseball, Bud Selig, to move the 2011 all-star game from Phoenix. Several years ago the National Football League moved the Super Bowl from the state when it refused to recognize Martin Luther King's birthday as a holiday. The two letters and the resolution are on the SSSP website. In addition to this, the SSSP participated in a press conference in Phoenix with

numerous other social justice organizations, decrying SB 1070 and another law passed by the state's legislature, eliminating, or attempting to eliminate, ethnic studies programs in the state. The SSSP was ably represented by board member Luis Fernandez. The SSSP also took the initiative to explore the possibility of forming a consortium of social justice organizations and drafted a preliminary *statement of purpose*, which continues to be discussed by other organizations interested in becoming part of such a consortium. The idea behind it is to share information and, when feasible and desirable, to pool our resources and speak with one voice on important social issues.

### **Marquette University and Academic Freedom**

The Board sent a letter to the president of Marquette University, protesting his decision to rescind an offer made to Dr. Jodi O'Brien to serve as one of the institution's deans. The rescission was based principally on the nature and findings of her scholarship; a serious violation of academic freedom. A copy of the letter can be found on the SSSP website.

### **Social Problems and Social Problems Forum (SSSP Newsletter)**

My comments here will be very brief since the chair of the Editorial and Publications Committee will provide a much more detailed report. The committee is in the process of selecting the new *Social Problems* editor, which we expected to be doing, and a new newsletter editor, which we had not anticipated doing at this time. Unfortunately, the newsletter's editor had to step down suddenly, but Steve Couch and Anne Mercuri, previously newsletter editors, stepped in on very short notice and agreed to produce the next two newsletters. The SSSP is indeed indebted to them, and I wanted to acknowledge their enormous contribution to the SSSP in my report.

### **Internationalization**

This past year the Board and I engaged in several e-mail discussions on a variety of issues. One of these (three others follow) was a proposed fellowship for an international scholar and the larger issue of the internationalization of the SSSP. Alison Griffith, John Dale, A. Javier Treviño, Wendy Simonds, Richard Dello Buono, and I will meet in Atlanta to continue the discussion. As a quick summary, however, some of the issues and concerns raised in these e-mail discussions included whether to give one individual the award or divide it among several recipients and whether to award it purely on the basis of merit or a combination of merit and need (and how to determine both). Another concern was whether these funds would not be put to better use supporting members of racial and ethnic minority groups in the United States. Many, if not most, board members, however, want the SSSP to become more international. But *how* is the question.

### **Experts' List**

A proposal was submitted to create an experts' list or bureau, i.e., to make available to the public (including media) the names of members with expertise in a variety of areas. Most universities provide this service, which journalists from time to time employ. Concerns raised included who would manage the list and the potential of harm to the SSSP in the event that an expert engages in behavior that reflects poorly on the organization or opens up the organization

to legal liability, a disclaimer notwithstanding. The original proponents of the list and I decided that for the time being it is perhaps best to have individuals wishing to speak to an “expert” contact the Executive Officer, who will, in turn, contact the appropriate division. The Board and membership can of course resuscitate the issue anytime it wishes.

### **Outreach to Practitioners**

The clear consensus among board members is that we should do more to increase the number of members from disciplines other than sociology and practitioners. The principal suggestion was to contact scholars in other disciplines and organizations doing social justice work. We need to discuss ways of doing this, but my initial inclination is to ask our members to identify individuals in their own institutions and organizations in their respective communities (either where they work or live). Also, and I have not proposed this to the Board officially, I am contemplating proposing a new type of membership. We have a special membership for academic departments (which has gone down markedly in the past few years), but what I am thinking of is the creation of a membership for community and other non-academic organizations. The idea is in its infancy, but I wanted to float it to see if others think this is worthy of further consideration.

### **Resolutions Guidelines**

I worked closely with PJ McGann and Michele Koontz to revise the guidelines for the submission and approval of resolutions. The new guidelines can be found on the SSSP website. The principal changes are ensuring that resolutions (with some exceptions) are submitted early enough for the membership to have time to read and consider them (in order to cast an informed vote) and that individuals or divisions submitting resolutions take more ownership of their resolutions. By more ownership, we mean being present to respond to questions pertaining to their resolutions, assisting in the distribution of the resolution (i.e., if the resolution calls for a mass mailing, providing the addresses and assisting in the mailing), and following up on resolutions. If a resolution involves legislation, members must be provided with a way to access the legislation in order to evaluate the resolution more responsibly.

### **Committee on Race and Racism**

The ad hoc Committee on Race and Racism discussed a variety of issues in a conference call and will meet in Atlanta to continue the discussion. It is the hope of the committee to generate recommendations and to provide the Board and membership with these recommendations for discussion and action. There was discussion as well that perhaps this committee should be a permanent committee on inclusion. Some of the issues discussed in the conference call included perception versus reality on racial/ethnic inclusion; the dearth of good data, including membership by race and ethnicity; organizational culture and climate; focusing more on consequences or results than on intent; and organizations’ resistance to change.

## By-Law Changes

- The following is a by-law revision pertaining to divisions approved by the Board.

*“The Council of Special Problems Divisions may recommend that a Division be terminated, if the division fails to comply with one or more of the following requirements: (1) HAVE AT LEAST 150 MEMBERS FOR TWO YEARS RUNNING, (2) DISTRIBUTE AT LEAST ONE NEWSLETTER A YEAR, (3) HAVE A REPLACEMENT CHAIR ELECTED BY THE END OF THE CURRENT CHAIR’S TERM OF OFFICE, (4) ORGANIZE AT LEAST TWO SESSIONS FOR THE ANNUAL MEETING, (5) BE REPRESENTED AT EVERY MEETING OF THE COUNCIL OF THE SPECIAL PROBLEMS DIVISIONS, (6) HOLD A DIVISIONAL MEETING AT THE ANNUAL MEETING, (7) MAINTAIN A CURRENT ENTRY IN OUR ONLINE PUBLICATION WORKING TOWARD A JUST WORLD, AND (8) MAKE A STRONG ARGUMENT, IN THE JUDGMENT OF THE COUNCIL, FOR CONTINUING THE DIVISION. The recommendation goes to the Board of Directors for final disposition.*

A couple of concerns were raised after the changes were approved, which I think will improve the by-law appreciably. I will propose to the Board that we add in the first line “placed on probation and” and eliminate #8 and insert instead something about the right of appeal. Neither of these will change the by-law substantively.

- Another by-law revision pertains to the Lee Scholar-Activist Support Fund. The proposal is to change (and the change is in bold letters and underlined) “The purpose of this fund is to help defray expenses of scholar **activists** attending the Annual Meeting” to “The purpose of this fund is to help defray expenses of foreign scholars **from economically disadvantaged countries who without these funds could not attend** the Annual Meeting.” This will go to the membership for a vote.
- Finally, we hope *very soon* to conduct elections and other voting processes, notify members of meetings, and make official announcements *electronically only*. This will save us a lot of money and make us much more efficient.

## Wikipedia

We now have an entry for SSSP in Wikipedia.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Society\\_for\\_the\\_Study\\_of\\_Social\\_Problems](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Society_for_the_Study_of_Social_Problems)

This was, as so many other things we do are, very much a group effort. A. Javier Treviño and Susan Carlson suggested it, John Galliher and I worked on the first draft, Sarah Hendricks and Michele Koontz improved it with their editing and suggestions, and Sharon Shumaker got it up and running on the web.

## Administration/Staffing

*(This section of my report draws heavily on an assessment provided by Michele Koontz, Sharon Shumaker, and Sarah Hendricks and which I requested.)* As I indicated in the first part of this report, we are fortunate to have Michele, Sharon, and Sarah, and will miss Sharon immensely. They are devoted to this organization, as most, if not all of you know much better than I do. I know

that we all appreciate their work and I believe that they feel appreciated. What troubles me is the inordinate hours that they, but Michele especially, devote to the organization and whether we are living up to our commitment to social justice in our own organization. As you know, Michele is our only full-time "employee." Sharon, Sarah, and I serve on a part-time basis, as will Sharon's replacement. My position is, or is supposed to be, the equivalent of a two-month appointment.

In recent years, the responsibilities of the Administrative Office and expectations of the membership have changed, in some cases significantly; partly, no doubt, because of technology. The rate of change is fairly rapid, which requires us to adjust to current demands and expectations and to plan for more changes in the coming years. The expectations of the Administrative Officer position have expanded. This position fields continuous requests from officers, board members, division chairs, committee chairs, committee members, program participants, and members; supervises more people (and assists, bordering on "supervising," numerous division and committee chairs); tests and consults the online management system; provides feedback for website design; administers the Society's fiduciary requirements; etc. The demands of this position have grown beyond what can be effectively accomplished in a 50-hour, let alone 40-hour, week.

The following is a combination assessment-wish list for the organization. I'd like the Board to give these recommendations careful consideration, albeit in light of our limited financial and other resources.

1. A part-time, dedicated Webmaster (independent contractor) would be great. This position needs to lead changes, make recommendations, and have web/programming experience. This person could spend their time re-organizing, designing, and adding nice web features rather than being consumed with administrative tasks. A dedicated Webmaster would have the liberty to create a regular schedule to perform content updates, post latest news, emphasize current events, remove out-dated material, add new features, update images, tweet on Twitter, post on Facebook, etc. In addition to being a more effective approach, it would provide some relief for the Administrative Office in regard to dealing with technology requests as they continue to grow and change in the future. This person would require access to SSSP information on the Avera servers as well.
2. A re-designed website that clearly portrays SSSP's purpose and creates an interesting visual impact using the latest web technologies such as flash, streaming videos, Facebook, Twitter, and RSS feeds or subscriptions. It should provide current news which is regularly updated so members will be more likely to frequent the website. It should also feature a consortium of other organizations which will automatically increase traffic to our website and hopefully attract new members. The website could be far more effective as a marketing tool to reach new members besides just renting lists and targeting other professional associations. Most people spend only seconds on generic marketing e-mails, but may surf the web for hours. High visibility on other key organization's websites will likely direct more web traffic to our website.
3. A full-time Administrative Assistant would provide the help needed to relieve the Administrative Officer of some of the less critical, yet necessary tasks. With training, this person should be able to mirror most of the Administrative Officer's responsibilities.

4. Eliminate paper ballots in all elections and resolutions and reduce the number of choices members have when receiving *Social Problems*, *Social Problems Forum*, etc. The preparation time and administrative costs of these options are difficult to justify. Additionally, an all electronic system would shorten the required voting response time (currently 30 days) and allow more flexibility on scheduling elections.

5. The Graduate Research Associate could concentrate on elections, division newsletters, mailings, and could assist the Executive Officer and Vice President in editing, drafting, and distributing resolutions. Since this person would be working towards a graduate Sociology degree, the GRA would be a great asset in this respect and would likely welcome the experience of working within the field. The GRA would also help with conference and any other activity passed down from the Executive Officer and/or Administrative Officer.

6. Increase membership services to our members, including:

- Guides for graduate students on getting published
- Guides for new members on how to become involved within the Society
- Tips on presenting papers
- Webcasts from prominent members on special topics such as activism and other topics that are compelling and of interest to the membership and will set SSSP apart from other sociological organizations
- Quarterly or semi-annual webcasts from the Executive Officer on important current events and how the membership can help (a call to action)
- Volunteer opportunities (rather than just mentorship which may feel one-sided) where graduate students or other members can get exposure, take ownership, and get valuable experience (which they can put on a resume...a perk for them and it is free for the Society).

7. Reduce the number of special problems divisions from three to one for the annual membership fee (additional memberships can be added for additional fees). This will encourage members to select the division that they want to be most active in. By doing this, some of the special problems divisions could be combined and/or eliminated. This change would reduce the number of sessions that divisions sponsor at the annual meeting. By having fewer options, session attendance would be higher.

### **Concluding Remarks**

If you have any questions or concerns pertaining to this report, please do not hesitate to contact me. After serving for an entire year as EO, I can tell you that it was more work than I had anticipated, but even more fun and rewarding as well. I am grateful for a Board as smart and as dedicated as this one. Thank you.

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