

TO: SSSP Board of Directors  
FROM: Cary Gabriel Costello, Chair, SSSP Accessibility Committee  
RE: Committee Annual Report  
DATE: 9 July 2012

This year the Accessibility Committee accomplished a number of tasks. Our central charge is to ensure that the Annual Meeting is accessible to all. To further this goal, we reviewed the responses to the 2011 Annual Meeting Survey, and will summarize our findings and the recommendations we made below. We revised the question about accessibility issues included in the 2012 Annual Meeting Survey, reviewed the memo distributed to all Annual Meeting participants giving guidance in ensuring presentations are accessible to all, discussed the distribution of accommodation funding for 2012 Annual Meeting participants, and worked with Michele Koontz to handle access requests for the 2012 meeting.

Committee members also gave of their time to assist in educating others about accessibility issues at the 2012 meeting. Committee members Thomas Horejcs, Kathleen Lowney, and Deborah Little are joining me in jointly offering the panel "Graduate Student Pedagogical Seminar: Accommodation in the Classroom" at the 2012 meeting.

The Accessibility Committee agreed that accommodation funding should be disbursed at the 2012 Annual Meeting to provide ASL interpreters for a Deaf meeting attendee and a scooter to an attendee with mobility issues; the attendee requiring a scooter cancelled his attendance, however, so no funds were required for his access. A blind attendee's access needs are being met without the need to expend funds by volunteers from the Accessibility Committee.

#### Changes in Accommodations in 2012

The Accessibility Committee is pleased to report two improvements in accommodations in 2012 that were not available in 2011: the provision of a Comfort Zone for the three central conference days (with a description of the purpose of the space in the Final Program), and the availability of a gender-neutral restroom.

This year, panelists whose presentations will be attended by a Deaf attendee received a memo giving them specific guidance in how to interact with the individual and ASL interpreters, as well as how to make their presentation as accessible as possible.

## Issues Raised in the 2011 Annual Meeting Survey

Out of the 265 completed surveys received reviewing the 2011 Annual Meeting, 39 (15%) included a response to the question regarding access. The issues that were raised are as follows:

1. A substantial number of complaints were raised about cigarette smoke, due to meeting in a Las Vegas venue where smoking was permitted in the casino and bars. We do not anticipate this to be a recurrent problem, but the Committee does note that smoke in the conference space was a source of concern to many with breathing difficulties and chemical sensitivities.
2. Three individuals complained about the lack of a gender-neutral bathroom. Wendy Simonds had attempted to solve this problem by making a sign designating one of the restrooms in the conference area as a gender-neutral restroom, but Harrah's staff insisted that the sign be removed lest it "offend other groups."
3. Two people stated that they faced mobility challenges attempting to navigate the large hotels in Las Vegas, and asked that future meetings be held in less vast venues.
4. Two people stated that they had problems due to the noisiness of the venue. The Accessibility Committee views this as another issue related mostly to being in a hotel with a casino. We do note, however, that any conference space located next to entertainment facilities in a hotel can pose a problem for hard-of-hearing attendees at paper panels.
5. A complaint was raised that although paper presenters are asked by the SSSP in our Access Memo to have large-print copies of their presentations available for people with low vision, few presenters actually had such handouts available.
6. An individual asked that in the future, local liaisons be identified and their contact information made available to people with specific needs. This individual also suggested that SSSP prepare resource lists related to specific needs such as mobility or addiction for the city in which the conference is held.
7. One individual expressed concern about the lack of participation of people with (evident) intellectual disabilities.

Two positive comments were also made: one about the excellence of the vegetarian catering options, and a second that the accessible room that was arranged for zir was very nice.

## Suggestions Made and Actions Taken in Response to the 2011 Survey

The Accessibility Committee suggested that the Executive Office send a letter to Harrah's providing feedback on accessibility issues. We suggested starting with the compliments about accessible rooms and our approval of the easy access to rental scooters. We suggested then moving on to address the problem of cigarette smoke, noting that we understand that there is a tradition of allowing people to smoke in casinos, but that it is a problem for many, and at least some measures could be taken to limit the entrance of smoke into the conference area of the hotel. We also wished to address the problem of lack of gender-neutral bathroom facilities, explaining that their presence is a necessity for some individuals protected by our nondiscrimination policies (both those protected by our gender identity nondiscrimination policy, and people with disabilities who employ the assistance of other-gender caregivers). We suggested that at a minimum, there should be at least a single-stall, wheelchair-accessible gender-neutral bathroom in Harrah's conference area.

## Concern for Future Action

The Accessibility Committee notes to the Board that there is an ongoing problem with panel presenters not paying attention to the Access Memo sent to them explaining how to make sure that their presentation is accessible to all—presenters do not have large-print handouts available, continue to cram PowerPoint presentations with walls of text, speak to the projection screen with their backs to the audience, do not describe projected tables or illustrations, etc. Some form of community consciousness-raising seems to be needed.