

# Executive Officer's Annual Report The Society for the Study of Social Problems (SSSP)

Submitted by  
Dr. Héctor L. Delgado

August 2012, Denver, CO

I would like to begin by thanking you, the Board, and especially Board President Wendy Simonds for your support and hard work this past year. On several occasions I asked for your guidance, at times for a quick vote on an action, and each time you responded thoughtfully and quickly.

In the Administrative Office, Michele Koontz continued to serve the SSSP in her usual exemplary way, and she and I continue to maintain an excellent working relationship. We were very lucky to have Kelley Flatford serve the Society, but she had to step down for personal reasons on January 31st of this year. Our luck continued when she was replaced by Sharon Shumaker, who agreed to return after Kelly stepped down. If you recall, Sharon served as the SSSP's Administrative Assistant from March 2008 to July 2010 before leaving to spend more time with her newborn. Completing her first year as our graduate assistant is Elizabeth "Lisa" East. Sarah Hendricks had set a very high standard for the position, and Lisa seemed to have little trouble meeting that standard. I'm especially impressed with her creativity and enthusiasm, which we must make sure she uses to make good progress in completing her degree.

Thanks are in order again to the University of Tennessee at Knoxville (UTK), but especially to our project director, Dr. Jon Shefner, Head of the Department of Sociology and long-time SSSP member, and Dr. Gregory Reed, UTK's Associate Vice Chancellor for Research and Engagement. This past year we signed a contract with UTK to continue our relationship with them through December of 2016

## **Administrative Officer and Office Workload**

As I indicated in my 2010 report, and reiterated in my 2011 report, I am concerned with the amount of work that falls on Michele's shoulders. I was pleased with the Board's decision, made easier by Michele's creative suggestion, to give her help. Unfortunately, it did not work out as we had planned. The short-term solution was to have Lisa work full-time during the summer, when the workload for the Administrative Office increases dramatically in preparation for the annual meeting in August. Lisa, however, had to finish her master's thesis during the summer and was unable to work the extra hours. Consequently, Michele's workload was not reduced. We will need to re-visit this issue in Denver, and find a way to give Michele the staff she needs to do the work of the Society.

### Las Vegas

While Las Vegas was not everyone's cup of tea (although many of our members loved it), the meeting was one of our best attended. While I was not pleased with the ASA's failure to give us earlier warning, on balance it all came together nicely. I do wonder whether the SSSP could, in the future, hold its meeting at a different place and time than the ASA's. I think it is something we should reconsider, but only when the economic climate has improved markedly. My thanks, again, to Marisa Crame of HelmsBriscoe, who worked very closely with us on very short notice to find a hotel in Vegas.

### Social Problems Journal

Becky Pettit has been doing a great job with the journal, and I wish to commend her and her assistants in my report. Although it seems as if Becky began her stint as editor just yesterday, the process for finding the next editor begins after the annual meeting in Denver, as it does for the editor of our newsletter, *Social Problems Forum*, unless Becky and Brent wish to serve another three years and are approved by the Editorial and Publications Committee and the Board.

Soon we may be taking bids for a publisher since our contract with the University of California Press ends December 31, 2014. Our contract with UC Press has a provision in it for an automatic five-year renewal, unless we notify them by July 1, 2013 that we intend to consider bids from other publishers, in addition to theirs. We have already been contacted by a couple of publishers and we have no reason to believe that the University of California Press does not wish to continue publishing *Social Problems*. The Board will have to make a decision before July 1, 2013 on whether to entertain bids from other publishers.

### Revenue Generation Committee

At the 2010 meeting in Atlanta, the Board created an ad hoc Revenue Generating Committee to try to find new revenue streams for the Society. You have been provided with a copy of the report prepared after the Las Vegas meeting and a copy of the e-mail that I sent to the committee in July of 2012. The e-mail contains a summary of discussions Michele had with folks at UTK pertaining to fundraising. The Board will play an integral role in these efforts since it will require identifying projects or initiatives for which we will be seeking funds. It is virtually impossible to secure funds for the general operation of the Society. Foundations will want to see specific proposals in areas they have identified as areas they wish to fund. UTK has already been very helpful in identifying good matches for our organization to contact.

### New Website

The website is up and running -- and the response has been very good. But as always, if you can think of ways to improve it, please do not hesitate to let us know. Once again I want to thank everyone who helped with it. It truly was a group effort and it was very gratifying to see how a group of people, each with her/his likes and dislikes, came together to produce a website of which we can be proud.

### **Troy Davis**

A couple of years ago we passed a resolution on a murder case in which Troy Davis was convicted of and received the death penalty for murdering a police officer, Mark MacPhail, largely, if not exclusively, on eyewitness testimony. Since my previous report, new evidence emerged, including recantations of earlier testimony and an appeal by one of the jurors before Georgia's State Board of Pardons & Paroles to commute the sentence to life. We sent an e-mail to our members with information on the case and encouraged them to write to Georgia's Board if they believed such a letter was warranted. Pleas from around the world, by individuals representing a wide spectrum of political ideologies, however, did not succeed in stopping Mr. Davis's execution. He was executed on September 21, 2011. I wish to express my condolences to the families of Mark MacPhail and Troy Davis.

### **Legal Advice**

From time to time we have received pro bono legal advice from Miriam Lopez, a labor attorney with a great deal of experience with contracts and copyright law, but we were uncomfortable asking for advice without compensating her, and her firm, for her time. The Board approved setting aside \$1000 for legal and other forms of advice. We now have a written agreement with Bush, Gottlieb et al. at a very favorable rate to the Society.

### **501(h) Election**

As a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, we can lobby as long as it is not a "substantial" part of what we do. Unfortunately, the IRS does not define what "substantial" means. Therefore, we are considering a 501(h) election or an expenditure test to measure our lobbying activities. This is a much more objective test and will, based on the research I've conducted thus far, provide us with more protection if we are audited or otherwise challenged. I have provided you with much more detailed information on the 501(h) election and have asked our accountants for advice. Attached is the letter that I sent to Lattimore et al. By the time of our meeting in Denver, we should have all of the information we need to make a decision. *I do want to make one thing very clear. If we choose to file IRS Form 5768, or the 501(h) election, we remain a 501(c)(3) organization.*

### **2015 Meeting in Chicago**

Michele and I visited Chicago last November to select a hotel for our 2015 meeting. We believe we recommended, and you approved, an excellent site for our 2015 meeting - the Radisson Blu Aqua. It is a new hotel, with great meeting space, beautiful rooms, excellent accessibility, and a great location. Our one regret is that it is not a union property, but the difference between it and the only union property available to us that was relatively close to the ASA meeting, was substantial, both in terms of the cost and the meeting space. I did check with the union local in the area to make sure that they had not tried to unionize the property, and they had not, and did not have plans to do so in the near future. Hopefully they will have unionized the hotel by 2015, or at minimum, the hotel will have respected workers' right to unionize in case of an

unsuccessful attempt to unionize the hotel. In any event, our contract with the hotel protects us if there is a strike or boycott by the time the meeting rolls around.

### **Michigan Appropriations Bill**

The Board and I drafted a letter and we signed another one with numerous other organizations sent to Michigan legislators, urging them to strike from a higher education appropriations bill, the following section (273a): *"It is the intent of the legislature that a public university that receives funds in section 236 shall not collaborate in any manner with a nonprofit worker center whose documented activities include coercion through protest, demonstration, or organization against a Michigan business."* This language appears to have resulted from a field placement of a University of Michigan social work student with a non-profit organization that advocates for, among other things, fair treatment of restaurant workers. Our letter emphasized two things. First, as a non-profit, tax exempt organization, the University of Michigan is, as we are, already constrained in the activities in which it can engage, so that this language is unnecessary. Second, our letter emphasized that this section interferes with students' learning and faculty's pedagogy and undermines academic freedom. The letter is posted on our website.

### **Topeka, KS City Council Letter on Domestic Violence**

In October of 2011, we sent a letter to the Topeka, KS city council expressing concern with their decision to repeal the city's law that made domestic violence a crime. We noted in the letter that we understood that the City Council took this step in response to District Attorney Chad Taylor's announcement that his office would no longer prosecute misdemeanor domestic violence cases because of budgetary cuts, thereby placing an added financial burden on Topeka, which the council felt it could not bear. We indicated that we were pleased that the D.A. reversed his decision, but remained concerned, especially because it is precisely during periods of economic hardship that domestic violence increases. As social scientists and as an organization focused on the study and resolution of social problems, including domestic violence, we expressed to them the hope that in the future the city and state will avoid making cuts in an area where the impact on victims, disproportionately women and children in the case of domestic violence, and the community at large, is so severe morally, psychologically, and economically. In this case, we received a call from one of the council members who was in the minority. Ms. Denise Everhart thanked us for the letter and said she was going to share it with other individuals and groups in the city and county who were trying to get the council to reverse its decision. A copy of the letter is on our website.

<http://www.sssp1.org/file/2011AnnualMeeting/Topeka-Council%20Member%2010-25-11.pdf>.

### **Thank You**

It is indeed an honor to serve as the Executive Officer of the SSSP, and an absolute pleasure to work with Michele, Sharon, Lisa, and you, the members of the Board of Directors. If there is any way in which I can improve my service to the SSSP, please do not hesitate to let me know.