

Editorial and Publications Committee Report, 2012-2013

The most important two tasks that were on the agenda of the SSSP E&P Cmte were 1) selecting a new Editor or Editorial team for Social Problems and 2) negotiating a continuance or a new contract with a publisher for the journal. This year, in a sort of nasty “harmonic convergence,” both of these key issues needed to be addressed simultaneously. This tended to push any other committee business to the side and created an enormous amount of work, e-mail traffic, controversy, stress for members and the chair, etc.

Today (8/9/13) we met to finish up our business. All the members of the committee participated rather actively in our e-discussions (I have archived HUNDREDS of messages in the past 8 or 9 months!). The composition of the committee was as follows: David A. Smith, Suzanne Vaughn, Nancy Jurik, John Galliher, Mary Bernstein, Paul Luken, Becky Pettit (ex-officio, non-voting, Editor, Social Problems), Brent Teasdale (ex-officio, non-voting, Editor of Social Problems Forum), Patrick Donnelly (ex officio, voting, BFA Chair) and Ted Chiricos (ex-officio, voting, former Editor, *Social Problems*). At our annual meeting in New York the following were present: Smith, Vaughan, Jurik (via speaker phone), Bernstein, Luken, Pettit, Teasdale, Donnelly and Chiricos (Galliher could not participate because of a minor medical issue). The board welcomed newly elected (but as yet non-voting) members Nancy Naples and David Fasenfest to our onsite meeting on 8/9 – they received various background materials on the editorial and publisher searches prior to the conference and were active contributors to the high-quality discussions (thanks to both for agreeing to attend a bit prior to the beginning of their “official” terms!).

Editorial Search. We have now completed the search for a new Editor/Editorial team for the journal. Congratulations to Professor Pamela Quiroz and Nilda Flores-Gonzalez, both affiliated with the Department of Sociology at the University of Illinois-Chicago on their successful application. Professor Flores-Gonzalez has research interests in race and ethnicity, youth, education, U.S. Latinos, and qualitative methods. Professor Quiroz work is in the sociology of education, children & youth, identity and race, and qualitative methods. Both earned their PhDs in Sociology at the University of Chicago. UIC has a top-notch research and graduate training department in sociology and various inter-related fields (Urban Planning and Public Affairs, Latino Studies, Educational Policy, Latin American Studies, etc) with strong relevance to the core mission of the Society for the Study of Social Problems – and their proposal to edit Social Problems included a strong commitment from administrators to support the new editorial office there. Since Professors Quiroz and Flores-Gonzalez will be first-time journal editors, the members of the E&P Cmte – many of whom are either past or present editors themselves – offered to provide extensive advice and support to our new editorial team. We are pleased and fortunate to have recruited two such fine and dedicated scholars to be the first formal Co-Editors of the journal!

While someone wrote a long time ago, “All’s well that ends well,” the truth is that this search was a very difficult process. We had planned to carry out the search and issue a “call” along the lines of previous E&P Committees. But soon after the 2012 annual SSSP conference I learned, as Chair, that a new society “Operations Manual” OM was in place that seemed to make some significant *changes* in our process. When I used the 2009 “call” as a template for a draft, this became apparent. The new OM contained language about this search that suggested we should insert language in the call about “a *maximum* budget that SSSP would cover” (apparently inserted by SSSP leaders worried about the “bottom-line” of journal operations), a request for all Editor candidates to include the names of three “references” (which seemed unnecessary for the

type of scholars who would likely apply), and specified an application “due date” in the fall academic term (December 15th). After some negotiations between the committee chair, the committee and the SSSP Administrative Offices, we decided to NOT include the language about the budget in the call (so as not to discourage applicants), did include the request for the three referees (of course, we never used those!) and convinced the SSSP to allow us to move the call back to February 1st). The logic for the latter decision was the following: fall term is a very busy one for most academics – and some campuses don’t even begin until close to the beginning of October – so it would be rather difficult for candidates to line up editorial teams, secure administrative endorsements and support, write up proposals and confirm budgetary approval by December (and, in any case, since late December is a vacation time for virtually *everyone* there seemed little advantage in collecting applications right before that period, anyway). We moved the formal application deadline to February 1st when it had traditionally been. (Had we gotten ample applications – and not “lost” any of those via withdrawal – this 2/1 deadline certainly would have provided plenty of time for the E&P Cmte to make a recommendation in mid-Spring. Later in the process we ran into another “issue” with the new OM. It called for us to do “site visits” to any campuses with competitive applications. It was not clear who would be doing these visits (obviously not the entire committee), nor what they would be trying to learn, what sort of questions they would ask applicants or administrators, etc. The committee and the chair felt that these mandated site visits were odd and unnecessary – and we also questioned whether there had been anything like them in the past during editorial searches (as best as I can tell, they had happened occasionally, for specific reasons, but not often). I would hope that the part of the OM relevant to this search process can be officially revised – with some representative of the current E&P Cmte as part of the process – before the next editorial search.

In January, as committee chair, I was in contact with several promising candidates (and, indeed, I was contacting by aspiring applicants as soon as late August 2012 about applying to become the new Editor). But to the committee’s great surprise, only two proposals were received by February 1st (and one of those subsequently summarily withdrew when asked to address committee questions and make some revisions). Because of the lack of applications the committee did some extensive e-consultations among ourselves (honestly, a great volume of messages!) and decided we really should try to solicit some additional proposals even though the deadline had passed. We “ran this by” the Executive Officer and the Administrative Office, they voiced support for our plan and suggested we also get Board approval for it – which we did (all this was done in February). There was a bit of “controversy” later about whether we should have re-opened the search – and whether personal solicitations from committee members of those “late applicants” were a problem. But, frankly, this was really the ONLY prudent thing that the committee could do. We had dearth of applicants (ending up with only one at the end) and the membership worked hard to try to generate more in the fairest way that they could. There was a controversy about this later after some SSSP leaders realized who the various applicants were – and these leaders (beyond our committee) become rather concerned, contacted the committee chair with a lot of “advice,” etc. While I appreciate the good intentions of all involved, my own view is that this is a matter that is better left to the Editorial & Publications Committee until the August meetings – I am not sure the Executive Officer or the Board of Directors are wise to interject themselves into the process earlier. But that is a matter for those involved to decide. The real problem that this lack of applicants points to (and indeed, this is even reflected in the application of the successful Editorial team) is a problem with diminished expectations for university administrative support to journal editors. I found out from multiple potential

applicants that they were unable to secure more than one course of “teaching release” for editing a journal. With *Social Problems* currently receiving somewhere between 400 and 450 submissions (including revised manuscripts) per year, an Editor needs to essentially get “half time” off to work on the journal – this is two courses per academic year. The co-editors at Illinois-Chicago *each* got one course off – other than the semi-retired professor who withdrew his application last spring, this was the *most* “release-time” any potential candidate or applicant was able to secure! Unfortunately, Deans and other administrators seem to have become unwilling to support major journal editing (and candidly, I was particularly frustrated to learn that *my own* Dean of Social Sciences at UCI was one of the administrators unwilling to cooperate). This is a problem that the Society may need to seriously consider the next time we try to recruit new Editors. I think it is absolutely RIDICULOUS that the administrators who reward faculty with tenure and promotion for publishing in major journals (and are, arguably, *obsessed* with counting publications of this sort) will not provide the minimal support necessary to free up faculty time to edit (editing is a difficult, time-consuming and sometimes thankless task... I know!). But, assuming that this doesn't change, the SSSP and other societies with major journals may need to explore the idea of explicitly offering to “buy out” potential Editor's time (this runs completely against the OM language about minimizing SSSP cost for running an editorial office, but that may just have to go). Given the current “business climate” surrounding journal publishing, during our committee discussion, someone suggested that it may be possible to “partner” with our current publisher and cost-share on these course buy-outs.

These problems created a lot of work for the committee (and, yes, the chair) and a certain amount of stress and angst for everyone involved. There are probably are issues that the SSSP needs to address here before the 2016 editorial search; of course, mentioning the problems encountered during the search, of course, doesn't imply anything about the candidates that we finally unanimously and enthusiastically approved.

Publisher Search. The committee was much less directly involved with this: an Ad Hoc Committee of the Treasurer, the Executive Officer and the E&P Chair were directly involved in intense screening of applicants and discussions of the proposals, winnowed the publishers down from seven (I think) to four who were interviewed at the New York meetings, etc. Our three person Ad Hoc Committee (joined by Michele Smith Koontz, our Administrative Officer) interviewed the finalists this week and made a recommendation to the E&P Cmte that we support the proposal from Oxford University Press. This led to a spirited discussion of the both the process and the specific press proposals at the annual committee meeting in New York (all members of the committee received the proposals of the four finalists which, in addition to Oxford UP, included our current and long-time publisher the University of California Press, Routledge/Taylor & Francis, and Sage).

The procedural issues raised by the E&P Cmte mainly addressed whether a three-person Ad Hoc Committee (the Treasurer, the Executive Officer, and the Chair of this committee) is the most appropriate way to vet the proposals, do the publisher interviews, and make a “choice” via a recommendation to this committee. The argument for the Ad Hoc group as currently constituted seems to be that the “business” end of the publishers relationship to the SSSP is imperative – but the members of the committee (several of whom are past or current journal editors) seemed to think that there should be more attention to the editorial end (with a bit more representation on that selection committee of scholars who are more experienced and intimately familiar with journal editing and publishing). My own personal view (as Chair of this committee and one of the three on the Ad Hoc Cmte) is that I would strongly prefer to have more than three decision-

makers involved – I also felt that it really did lead to a strange situation for other E&P members – who carefully read a couple hundred pages of written proposals, but who were NOT privy to the actual face-to-face meetings (which, in all honesty, were absolutely *critical* in the selection of the chosen publisher). I know that some folks will say, “we have *always* done it this way” – but 1) that doesn’t make it the best practice, and 2) this is the first time in a very long time (25 years?) that we have chosen a new publisher. I believe that this is another SSSP policy that may need some review – perhaps leading to changes in the By-Laws and/or the new Operations Manual.

The discussion of the specifics of the various proposals was also quite interesting – even enlightening. Even though I was a member of the Ad Hoc Cmte, I learned (for the first time!) what the underlying “trust” issue was with the UC Press (it dates back a few years, before the current Press director, involved what sounds like a mistake by UCP staff involving access to *SP* content, etc). It was very clear that these problems virtually ruled out supporting a continued publishing relationship with UCP for a significant number of influential people in SSSP – and also for many on the E&P Cmte. Most of discussion shifted then to the relative merits of the Sage and Oxford proposals (with some committee members – including two who are currently working as Editors for Sage – arguing that this press might offer some better opportunities). Ultimately, however we did vote 6-1 to support the recommendation of the Ad Hoc Cmte to go with Oxford University Press.

This result may ultimately benefit the SSSP. But I have some concerns about the process: I believe it should be changed to give a somewhat less influence to the “business”/“bottom-line” logic (the revenue angle) and a bit more attention to the needs of editorial needs of the journal. I will leave it up to others to consider if this makes sense and/or how to do this. One idea would be to have the current Editor of *Social Problems* part of a small Ad Hoc Cmte to do this, another would be to involve more E&P Cmte members in the process (which might be particularly feasible if the publisher contract is negotiated in a year when there is NOT a search for a new Editor/Editorial Team – then perhaps the entire committee could be incorporated fully into that process).

Current state of *Social Problems*. The journal is doing very well in the past year, under the extremely able editorship of Becky Pettit. *Social Problems* now puts accepted papers “online ahead-of-print” (some available up to three months ahead of regular publication). Four of the papers published in the last year have won various sociological awards, several more were featured in the media (I personally saw one grad student author on *The Colbert Report* recently!). Submission rates are rising, and Impact Factor for the journal rose rather substantially in the past year! Professor Pettit has fielded some complaints this year (it comes with the territory) and handled them (I believe) adroitly. As Becky enters her final year as Editor, the SSSP owes her an enormous debt of gratitude: she has done extremely well in a very difficult but critical job!

SP publication frequency. During a long day of interesting discussions at the NYC meeting, the topic of journal frequency came up. There seems to be a misconception about this among the SSSP leadership and the Board: while the journal has appeared quarterly for many years, at least three of the four publisher proposals suggested that it might make sense to move toward a schedule of six issues per year. In the RTP for the publisher’s proposals, it was specified that the SSSP needed to stay on the quarterly schedule – and, in fact, UC Press was taken to task because they suggested moving to six issues as part of their plan to enhance Society revenue. Apparently, the presumption behind this thinking was that moving to six issues would over-burden the editorial office, dramatically increase “workload,” etc. There are some possible issues to

consider before moving toward more issues – accepting more papers for publication would lower the “percentage acceptance rate” and might have a depressing impact on Impact Factor (more published articles per year, increases the IF “denominator” – but if they were “really good” papers and got lots of citations, no problem even there). Since the current and recent past Editors all feel it is important for *Social Problems* to retain our excellent in-house Managing Editor, who does final copy-editing of accepted papers, more annual articles and journal pages definitely *would* increase her hours of work. But in terms of the workload of the Editor, Advisory Editors, graduate staff, etc., adding issues would definitely NOT create “more work.” And Professor Pettit, our current Editor, does believe that she could accept quite a few more very good articles with more “space” available. If this is something that could create a better financial return for the journal, it probably should be seriously examined in the future (and the key decision-makers need to know that it doesn’t increase the editorial office workload, overall).

Global/international reach of SP. The committee spent a lot of time in our onsite meeting today discussing these issues with the current editor, the in-coming editorial team, and in reference to the selection of a new publisher. There is great concern in the SSSP about the journals lack of “global reach” – especially as it pertains to penetration of foreign library markets and subscriptions. One of the main arguments for moving to a new publisher was the claim that this would greatly increase our worldwide visibility, since presses (like Oxford) have many “on the ground” offices in far-flung locales (this is something that the UC Press definitely does *not* have). Longer term members of the committee (like me as I finish my three year service) have heard about this problem for several years. But this committee strongly believes that is a fallacy to expect a new publisher to “solve” the global marketing problem. The really issue – and one that various entities in the SSSP must take seriously! – is the lack of journal *content* that is global/international (multiple publisher proposals highlighted this – we do poorly in comparison to other major sociology journals in this area), as well as a sense that many in the Society itself are ambivalent about “change” that would expand the purview of SSSP and social problems research beyond our own shores. (Today it was noted, for example, that SSSP is not even a institutional affiliate of the International Sociological Association (ISA) – this came up when the newly selecting in-coming editors proposed traveling to the next ISA convention to promote the journal.) It’s fine to “talk” about the need to move to be more global/international; it’s more difficult to actually take action that “puts our money where our mouths are.” For the journal, the committee is encouraged that Oxford UP is proposing an annual monetary award to the author(s) of the best comparative/global article. We would also encourage the in-coming editors to consider proposing a special issue related to a global/ international theme. We think it is imperative that the new Editorial Board be even more broadly international than the current one (as the current Editor of *International Journal of Comparative Sociology* I will be happy to suggest names, aid in recruitment, etc.). Looking even further ahead, the committee suggests that the Society, with backing of the Board of Directors, actually make some sort of international/global/comparative perspective part of the “call” for the next Editor/Editorial team in 2016. We had limited time today to discuss this issue – others in the SSSP might have excellent ideas to promote this “global push” in the society and the journal that we didn’t think of – this should be another on-going dialogue within the Society.

A new Editorial & Publications Committee Chair. As our final piece of business at our onsite meeting, after a long agenda, we did identify a new committee Chair. Nancy Jurik, who was participating via speaker phone (and perhaps less able to “hide” or “look away” at that point in the meeting?) was nominated for this position – and she graciously agreed to serve (pending

some family issues that shouldn't be an issue). Thanks to Nancy for taking on this role in the coming year! (And, yippee! I am done!)

Respectfully submitted (regardless of the above parenthesis!),

David A. Smith

Sociology, UC-Irvine