

To: SSSP Board of Directors and the Budget, Finance, and Audit Committee

From: Permanent Organization and Strategic Planning Committee (represented by Dr. Luis Fernandez, Dr. Claire Renzetti, and Dr. Pat Donnelly)

Date: February 19, 2016

RE: SSSP Administrative Office Site Visit

The Permanent Organization and Strategic Planning Committee (POSPC) visited the administrative office of the Society for the Study of Social Problems in Knoxville, Tennessee for the review of the Society's staff on February 12, 2016. The site visit focused on reviewing the current contract with the University of Tennessee and an evaluation of key administrative office staff. The items of business for this visit were as follows:

- Review and make recommendations about the contract between SSSP and the University of Tennessee;
- Evaluation of the Executive Officer, Administrative Officer and Meeting Manager and the Administrative Office staff;
- Discuss the operations manual (last extensive review by POSPC: 2014);
- Discuss the web site (content, design, and links to relevant organizations);
- Plan new goals and identify any future development issues.

During the site review, the POSPC met with various administrators from the University of Tennessee, including Dr. Jon Shefner, Head of the Department of Sociology; Dr. Louise Nuttle, Director of Faculty Development Team; and Dr. Christine Boake, Associate Dean of Research, Graduate Studies, and Facilities. The committee also conducted interviews with Dr. Héctor L. Delgado, the Executive Officer; and Michele Koontz, the Administrative Officer and Meeting Manager.

1. Review of Current Contract with the University of Tennessee

The following summary comes from our meetings with Dr. Jon Shefner, Head of the Department of Sociology; Dr. Louise Nuttle, Director of Faculty Development Team; Dr. Christine Boake, Associate Dean of Research, Graduate Studies, and Facilities. The POSPC met with each individual separately. All administrators expressed a strong interest in continuing the long-standing relationship with SSSP. They all asked that SSSP submit a proposal, suggesting that they are positively disposed to continue the relationship with the Society. To that end, the Society's Treasurer will draft a proposal and submit it to University of Tennessee administrators. This will initiate formal discussion about the continuation of the relationship between the Society and the University. The proposal to be submitted anticipates no major changes from the current agreement, with only a 3% annual increase in personnel costs, a 9.5% annual increase in

fringe benefits for the Graduate Research Assistant and a 6% annual increase in UTK Student Fees for two semesters.

2. Dr. Héctor Delgado, Executive Officer

The committee conducted an interview with Dr. Héctor Delgado, the Society's Executive Officer. This is Dr. Delgado's sixth year in the position. He describes his main responsibilities as providing the public face of the society and interfacing with the board of directors, while working closely and collaboratively with the Administrative Officer, Ms. Michele Koontz. Dr. Delgado is dedicated to maintaining a democratic decision-making approach in SSSP in which all members of the Society and the staff are treated equally and with respect.

Dr. Delgado mentioned some recent challenges. Particularly challenging was a recent move of the Editor of *Social Problems* from one university to another. This move required extensive work, including the rewriting of contracts, securing replacement staff, and a change in university responsibilities. However difficult the change, the journal remains in good standing, stable, and is now settled at the University of Houston. It is worth mentioning that during this change there was no disruption in the production of the journal and that the readership likely did not notice the change.

Recently Dr. Delgado faced an issue with his home university regarding a course release agreement. The University wanted Dr. Delgado to teach more courses. This caused some initial stress, but was worked out through negotiation. Dr. Delgado's term as chair ends this coming June and beginning next year he will teach a full load (6 courses). Instead of reimbursing the University of La Verne for the two-course release that was negotiated when Dr. Delgado became the EO, the SSSP, as agreed to by the Board, will compensate him directly for the two courses. The cost to the SSSP remains the same. Dr. Delgado was also able to negotiate with his institution an increase in travel funds from \$1800 to \$2200, which should cover all of his travel, hotel, and other costs for the annual meeting. This compromised caused the Society no increase in cost and was a satisfactory solution for Dr. Delgado, the Society, and the Department.

As Executive Officer of the Society, Dr. Delgado often engages with external issues that come to SSSP as requests for support. For instance, recently an organization reached out to SSSP regarding a hotel contract dispute. Dr. Delgado intervened by speaking with and writing a letter to hotel administrators, helping to prevent that organization from incurring large fees. On another occasion, Dr. Delgado, acting as Executive Officer, wrote a letter discouraging a university from eliminating a justice studies program. These kinds of issues come up often. As such, it would be good practice if the SSSP Board developed guidelines that the Executive Officer could use to determine when a response to a request for help is appropriate.

The final portion of the interview involved a discussion of Dr. Delgado's future as Executive Officer. He stated that he has no current plans to step down, which was good news to the committee given that he is doing a good job. The committee kindly reminded

Dr. Delgado to give two-year notice, if possible, when he decides to step down. This would give the Society enough time to select a replacement. Dr. Delgado agreed, stating that he would do his best to give as much notice as possible when the time comes.

3. Michele Koontz, Administrative Officer and Meeting Manager

Michele Koontz has been the Society's Administrative Officer since 1992 and the Meeting Manager since 1994. She is responsible for the day-to-day operation of the administrative office and the successful execution of the annual meetings. Ms. Koontz works closely with the Executive Officer, the Division Chairs, and the Board of Directors. Additionally, she is the official liaison between the Society and the University of Tennessee. In her position as the Administrative Officer, Ms. Koontz oversees the administrative office staff, maintains ledgers, prepares checks and oversees accounts receivable and accounts payable, and promotes the Society through work with the newsletter and journal editors. As the Meeting Manager, she negotiates the Society's contract with the host hotel, lays out the program and menus, and supervises the Administrative Office staff and registration workers at the registration desk.

The Committee reviewed Ms. Koontz's Performance Evaluation that was conducted by the Executive Officer. The Committee found her performance to be stellar. It is obvious that Ms. Koontz is well organized, self-directed, and generally regarded as the backbone of SSSP. Ms. Koontz's performance is a mix of competency and grace. She is able to maneuver difficult situations and manage multiple tasks effectively. The committee recognizes that without Ms. Koontz the organization would be in trouble. This assessment was confirmed during our interview with Dr. Delgado, who suggested that Ms. Koontz is key to almost all aspects of SSSP.

Ms. Koontz stated that her success is in part due to a strong collaborative approach between her, Dr. Delgado and other SSSP staff. Since 2009, the administrative office has grown after the Society approved new staff, rendering the staff pool more robust. She added that the IT position is a good example. The IT person has a strong vision and the ability to make changes as needed that allows for the organization to be responsive to the needs of its membership. For instance, the online submission process is designed solely for the needs of SSSP. Ms. Koontz added that SSSP leadership is strong and supports her efforts in making the organization function well. Her assessment is that the Society is on good footing, with staff, leadership, and membership working together. She concluded by stating that she was happy and did not have any plans to leave the organization, comments that the POSPC welcomed.

Given the above, the discussion turned toward the following questions: What would happen to SSSP if Ms. Koontz left the organization for unforeseen reasons? What would the future of SSSP look like? While this is not expected, the POSPC is charged with thinking long-term for the Society. As such, the committee believes it is important to think about such an event, if for no other reason than to be prepared. In the end, we did not come to any solution or conclusions. However, the committee asked Ms. Koontz and Dr. Delgado to consider developing contingency plans in case the Society found itself in

this unfortunate situation. It is the committee's hope that changes to the Administrative Offer is something we don't have to deal for a long time to come. Yet, it is prudent to consider the issue and be prepared for any potentiality.

4. Review of SSSP Operations Manual

The SSSP Operations Manual was last thoroughly reviewed in 2014, resulting in multiple changes. In addition, the Manual also undergoes changes as needed on an annual basis as the administrative office uncovers issues. The POSPC is satisfied with the manual as it stands.

The committee recommends that the POSPC thoroughly review the entire Manual every five years, with the next review scheduled for 2019. In addition, the Executive and Administrative Officers can revisit the manual on an as-needed basis when issues arise, notifying the POSPC of the changes. For example, if the Board of Directors approves by-law changes that also require changes in the Operations Manual, then the two officers can make the required changes while notifying POSPC.

5. Website Evaluation

One of the tasks of the POSPC is to review the Society's website. The website was completely redesigned in 2011. At that time, there was a complete overhaul that included changes to the entire webpage structure, content, and color scheme. There was a general agreement that the page functions well as is. Thus, the committee recommends no changes at this time.

6. Plan new goals and identify any future development issues

The committee did not set any specific goals. However, it did identify the need to establish contingency plans for transition in executive and administrative staff should the need arise. The committee did not see an imminent transition and, given how well things are working, the committee does not want changes in these positions. Regardless, it would be prudent if the Society had contingency plans in case an unexpected change occurred, particularly in the role of the Administrative Officer. We all know how important Ms. Koontz is to the organization, since she is a central figure on whom we all depend. Thinking about contingency plans, while not immediately necessary, would be good in ensuring the stability of the Society in the long-term.

The committee, thus, asked the Executive and Administrative Officers to start a conversation about strategies that the Society could implement in case of unexpected emergencies.