

July 20, 2017

To: SSSP Board of Directors

From: Amir Marvasti, Chair

SSSP 2017 Annual Meeting Program Committee

RE: SSSP Program Committee Report 2017

**Theme: Narratives in the World of Social Problems: Power, Resistance, Transformation**

It was an honor to serve at the invitation of President Donileen Loseke. As stated in her program statement, the theme of the 2017 conference was about stories, storytelling, and storytellers, inviting scholarly investigation of who is allowed to tell stories, for what purpose stories are told, and how stories can be transformative and transformed to create a more just society. This echoes SSSP's interest in promoting social justice, and it builds on its recent conference themes.

Though I have participated in SSSP meetings since the early 1990s, I was largely unaware of the inner workings of the conference and the painstaking labor and dedication that make the annual meetings possible. Whether it was the Online Session Management System or the various policies that govern the submission process, at every step of the way, I am truly indebted to Michele Koontz for steering me in the right direction and patiently and selflessly helping me carry out my responsibilities. I am also grateful for the generous support of Héctor Delgado, Executive Officer; Rachel Cogburn, IT Specialist; and Marisa Stone, Administrative Assistant. Collectively, the SSSP staff have been an instrumental and invaluable part of the success of this year's conference.

In addition, I was fortunate to have the assistance and cooperation of my co-chair, Sara L. Crawley (University of South Florida), whose attention to details, past experience, and awareness of the scope of the project helped us remain faithful to Professor Loseke's vision for this year's conference. Similarly, I am thankful for the efforts of other members of this stellar Program Committee: Hsiao-Chuan Hsia, (Shih Hsin University, Taiwan), Karyn D. McKinney (Penn State Altoona), Marc R. Settembrino (Southeastern Louisiana University), and Jessica Sperling (City University of New York).

Many others deserve credit for the success of this year's conference. The Local Arrangements Committee, chaired by Jason Carmichael (McGill University), was exceptionally helpful. I am grateful to last year's Program Committee Chair, Professor Yvonne A. Braun for sharing her expertise with us at a lunch meeting in Seattle. Lastly, I am grateful to Bhoomi K. Thakore (Chairperson, Council of the Divisions) and chairpersons of the various divisions for sponsoring thematic sessions and offering their own exciting and insightful sessions in line with President Loseke's vision for this year's program.

Michele Koontz was kind enough to help me gather the necessary information for this year's SSSP program. Based on the Online Session Management System, there were originally 909 papers submitted on February 1, 2017, a day after the January

31st deadline. As of July 12, 2017, there were a total of 777 papers submitted using the online submission process and 58 papers added by session organizers for a total of 835 conference papers. At this point in mid-July, there were 1,015 registrants for this year's conference. A total of 41 program participants were removed from the program for failing to register despite multiple reminders. There are 179 total sessions this year. Twelve sessions were cancelled; it should be noted that one of these sessions was a "placeholder" while triaging the repository papers for placement into the program. In total, there were 2 plenary sessions, 67 thematic sessions, and 8 special sessions. There were 73 sessions that were co-sponsored.

Each of the Program Committee members was asked to organize at least one thematic sessions including: "The Changing Narrative of Race" (Karyn McKinney—this session included the current President of the American Sociological Association, Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, as well as its former president, Joe Feagin); "Storytelling as an Act of Resistance" (Hsiao-Chuan Hsia); "Autoethnography, Narrative, and Social Problems" (Sara L. Crawley); and "Beyond Spectacles and Hashtags: Making Sense of Disasters in the 21st Century" (Marc R. Settembrino). In addition, President Loseke organized two important sessions personally: "Presidential Reflections: SSSP Presidents Discuss the Meaning and Purposes of SSSP in the Current Political Era" and "Narratives as Method."

Other notable offerings included: "Undergraduate Research" a papers-in-the-round presentation exclusively devoted to undergraduate research (Chris Wellin and Janelle M. Pham); "Social Constructionism: Its Origins and Futures" (Michael Adorjan); "Globalizing Social Problems Narratives" (Jun Ayukawa and Kwansei Gakuin); and "The Academic Job Market" (Héctor Delgado).

The Program Committee sponsored the following author-meets-critics sessions: "Calling the Shots: Why Parents Reject Vaccines" by Jennifer A. Reich (organized by Sara L. Crawley) and "Botox Nation: Changing the Face of America" by Dana Berkowitz (organized by Sara L. Crawley). We were also able arrange a screening of the film "Tested" and invited the filmmaker, Curtis Chin, to serve as a discussant along with Ellen Schneider from *Active Voice Lab*, a nonprofit devoted to using "story to advance social change."

A one-day workshop on qualitative research practice was offered this year for the first time. The sold-out workshop focused on "the epistemological and methodological foundations of qualitative research" as well as "practical issues associated with the most common methods used by qualitative researchers." The presenters for this workshop included: Kathy Charmaz, Sara Crawley, Jaber Gubrium, James Holstein, and Donileen Loseke, Margarethe Kusenbach, and Amir Marvasti.

In closing, I would like to bring three topics to the Board of Directors for your consideration. The first has to do with training for the incoming Program Committee Chairs, a point that was also raised by my predecessors. In my experience, it is impossible to create a "handbook" or a similar document that would cover all possible contingencies involved in organizing a successful conference. The basic flow of the

submissions is itself relatively straightforward and can be discerned easily from the many documents available on the SSSP website. In an ideal world, the papers are submitted, routed to the appropriate sessions, and eventually presented at the conference. However, each step of the process is fraught with potential complications that require individual attention and consideration. The wide range of contingencies include: 1) requests for extensions of the submission date for very legitimate reasons (e.g., computer glitches), 2) requests for exemptions of membership and/or conference fees, 3) requests for reassignment of papers to different sessions, 4) requests for specific times and days for presentations, 4) requests for extension of the due date for conference registration, and 5) withdrawals of papers from a session resulting in the need to rearrange or reassign the remaining papers. These are just a handful of things that might be referred to a Program Committee Chair. Each request is somewhat unique and requires individual attention. In my experience, a handbook could not encompass all the particular circumstances and possibilities—there are simply too many variables involved in the process. Instead, I suggest consulting the existing aids (such as the frequently-asked-questions documents) available on the SSSP website and then working closely with Michele Koontz and her staff to get the job done.

The second issue has to do with the need for clear guidelines about author-meets-critics sessions. While individual divisions might have their own policies, it was not clear to me how to handle self-nominated book presentations. It would be helpful to future program committees to have specific guidelines as to whether or not self-nominations should be accepted and under what conditions. Lastly, this year we had a few requests for online presentations via Skype from scholars who could not travel to Canada for various reasons. To my knowledge, at the present time SSSP does not have a policy regarding virtual presentations. Some of the possible topics that need to be considered in this context are: 1) whether or not virtual presentations are permitted; 2) how virtual presentations should appear on the program; 3) who is responsible for covering the basic costs of providing the high-speed connection and other computer equipment; and 4) is the virtual presenter required to be a current member and register for the conference.