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July 11, 2022

To: Society for the Study of Social Problems Board of Directors

From: Jackie Krasas, Program Chair SSSP 2022 Annual Meeting Program Committee

Re: SSSP Program Committee Report 2022

Theme: The Sociological Reimagination: From Moments to Momentum

Dear Board of Directors:

It has been both enjoyable and a privilege to serve as Program Chair with Heather Dalmage at the request of Noreen Sugrue, President of SSSP. I have been a member of SSSP nearly continuously since 1992 when I joined as a graduate student. SSSP remains one of the places I feel most at home and most energized. Never has there been a more crucial time for SSSP and our members to find seats at the tables where social problems are addressed. Our members are uniquely positioned in all of our diversity to engage for social change in informed, equitable, just, and intersectional ways. This year's conference theme, *The Sociological Reimagination: From Moments to Momentum* is a clarion call to understand how our work can shape social action and for us to assert our participation in public discourse in dialogue with those who have the power to effect change. Our voices and perspectives are sorely needed to counteract the hackneyed and hegemonic neoliberal frames and the current organization of power and resources.

I am grateful for the hard work and support of Noreen Sugrue, President of SSSP, Héctor L. Delgado, Executive Officer, Michele Koontz, Administrative Officer & Meeting Manager, Heather Dalmage, my program committee co-chair, Carlos Royal, the local arrangements chair. Having twice served as a division chair, I have deep appreciation and even deeper gratitude for the division chairs as well as the session organizers for sponsoring and putting together a slate of meaningful sessions around the program theme. I would also like to acknowledge all of those who contributed less visibly to the program but without whom we could not succeed.

The annual meeting is being held in person in Los Angeles. We certainly never anticipated experiencing a third summer of pandemic conditions, fluctuating as they are even with widespread availability of vaccines in this country. Anecdotally, SSSP members' approach to the in-person conference range from elated to ambivalent to apprehensive. Uncertainty

on a global scale has shaped the Program in ways both predictable and unpredictable. In some ways, the liminality of our current conditions makes this year's conference more challenging. We are not "back to normal," nor have we attained a "new normal." We are unsure. Indeterminate. Shifting. There remains uncertainty in all our minds as to the course of the pandemic. Will it preempt our gathering again? In addition, many institutions and organizations where our members work are recovering or still suffering from budget shortfalls because of the pandemic.

Based on Michele Koontz 'most recent information on this year's SSSP program from the online session management system, there were originally 445 papers submitted on January 31, 2022. As of July 7, 2022, there were a total of 349 papers submitted using the online submission process and 18 papers added by session organizers for a total of 367 conference papers. At this point, there are 482 registrants for this year's conference. A total of 20 program participants were removed from the program for failing to register despite numerous reminders. Currently, there are 99 sessions on the program. Four sessions were canceled after the program schedule was created. In total, there are 2 plenary sessions, 23 thematic sessions, and 5 special sessions. There were 40 sessions that were co-sponsored. After the 1/31/22 Call for Papers deadline, 50 sessions were canceled due to not receiving enough submissions and 10 sessions were added due to receiving more papers than could be accommodated in a session.

Comparing this year's information with 2018-2021 figures, I noted that in non-pandemic years, we tend to receive between 700 and 900 submissions and end up with between 150 and 180 sessions. Our 2021 meeting, planned as fully hybrid, resulted in 124 sessions. This year, our first in-person meeting represents an additional drop in numbers that would have been even greater without the steadfast support of the Administrative Office and Michele Koontz in particular. It is difficult to draw any firm conclusions about any effects of the conference format on participation because these last three meetings have been held during such extraordinary times, and we COVID-19 has not retreated.

In addition to the obvious impact of the pandemic, a challenge we had for participation rates has been the retrenchment of support for professional activities whether in academia or the nonprofit world. Of course, this is nothing new. Forty years of adjunctification of the professoriate and shrinking public funds for public and non-profit organizations has made it increasingly challenging to hold traditional conferences even for more equity-minded organizations like ours. All of that has been brought into stark relief because of steep retrenchment caused by the pandemic. We have seen budgetary shortfalls on the order of tens of millions of dollars even among the most financially robust universities. Add inflation, political unrest, war, mass gun violence, an increasingly draconian racist criminal "justice" system, a looming recession, and the revocation of fundamental rights. People are hesitant to commit to attending. I think this is certainly reflected in the registration challenges that we faced despite numerous reminders and extending deadlines. I do not believe that any of us are surprised by lower participation numbers this year.

These challenges, however, also bring the opportunity for us to step back and engage anew in the question of who we are and who we want to be as a Society. Are the things we are doing in 2022 going to lead us to a robust SSSP in 2032? In 2042? By the decisions we make now, who will we attract to membership? Who might become excluded? What

conversations and voices will we center? These discussions are critical to the future well-being of the Society.

In preparation for writing this report, I reviewed all Program Committee Reports from 2015 onward. There is a set of questions and themes that recur and are addressed in various ways. Sometimes we adopt a change only to revisit it again in a couple of years. I believe we should always maintain this practice of introspection. In that spirit, I offer the following topics for the Board to consider as preparations get fully underway for 2023. I must humbly state that these ideas are not of my own creation. Others have discussed and worked on them over the years. I raise these issues here because as Program Chair, I am uniquely positioned to draw attention and foster dialogue.

We must always balance the practical aspects of putting together a program with the more abstract goal of broadening interest and participation in SSSP. One of the most important questions shaping who participates is the number of times someone can appear on the program. The change to remove the limit on co-authored papers is an important step. More co-authored papers may mean more difficult logistics in laying out a program that works, and we may be concerned that it potentially limits room for others to participate. Because graduate students often co-author with their advisors who may support them on grants for conference travel, the change to co-authorship potentially broadens participation by this important group for SSSP, our graduate student members. SSSP is one of the few professional associations that I am familiar with that takes seriously the commitment to full participation of graduate students in the conference and the association. Is there more that we can do to maintain or even expand this rich tradition of the Society?

Are there other groups for whom we want to make participation in SSSP more appealing and accessible? It is noteworthy that our President, Noreen Sugrue, does not hold an academic appointment. Are we intentional about welcoming applied researchers or practitioners more broadly? Are we accessible to contingent faculty and to activists? Finally, I want to amplify the work of Dr. Tsedale Melaku, who as Program Chair in 2020, worked to center the work of Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) participants in that Program. Are there ways for the Society to institutionalize these efforts?

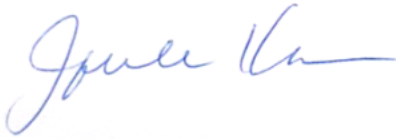
Intertwined with the question of participation and inclusion is the perpetually important matter of whether we have the right types of sessions and in the right numbers. There has been some discussion about both the number and the manner of organizing author-meets-critics and critical dialogue sessions. Do we need more or fewer? How can we be clearer about our expectations for these sessions? Are there other formats we might try out? In the spirit of innovation, might we intentionally and regularly pilot and evaluate new kinds of sessions? How do future innovations shape who participates and how?

Thinking through these questions and my experience as Program Chair has convinced me that now is a good time to examine barriers to participation inherent in traditional conference formats. While there are significant barriers to putting together a fully hybrid meeting including at minimum staff bandwidth and hotel costs and capabilities, we might consider opportunities for virtual presentations or some other format that would enable broader participation. For instance, might we designate some sessions as virtual-only? What about virtual poster sessions? Roundtables using zoom breakout rooms? Can we set

up some regional opportunities to ease the cost of and time spent traveling? Are there universities that can provide meeting space, technology support, and lower-cost housing to make that happen? While some of these ideas will require much reflection, debate, and operationalization, others can be tried more readily.

In closing, I extend my sincere gratitude to the Board, the Administrative Office, our President, and all of our members for the opportunity to serve SSSP this year. I hope that my reflections as Program Chair in Extraordinary Times is of use to the Board in pursuing its mission of stewarding the Society that I have held dear for just about thirty years.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Jackie Krasas", with a stylized, flowing script.

Jackie Krasas