

Report from the Executive Officer – 2023
Prepared for the Board of Directors by Elroi Windsor
June 29, 2023

It is an honor to submit my first report as the Executive Officer for the Society for the Study of Social Problems (SSSP). My role as Executive Officer began in January 2023, and this report offers reflections from the first half of this year.

Transitions in the Executive Office

Transitioning into a new role within SSSP has been exciting. After serving this organization in many different capacities since I first became a member in February 2003, I am thrilled to enter my third decade within SSSP as its new Executive Officer. The Executive Office of SSSP was in good hands due to the 13 years of leadership provided by former EO Héctor Delgado. I am inspired by his dedication to the Society, especially during these times of critical social movement and a global pandemic. I am also thankful for Susan Carlson's willingness to serve as the Interim EO during this transition. Both Héctor and Susan possess immeasurable skills and a great deal of wisdom; I will continue to seek their keen insights as I take on the tasks ahead.

The support of Michele Koontz, our Administrative Officer, helped make my transition into this role as smooth as possible. Michele provided guidance and insight throughout this year and I am incredibly fortunate to have such an outstanding and knowledgeable colleague working alongside me. As I have learned about my roles, duties, and tasks – an ongoing process for this first year – Michele has been pivotal.

Throughout this first half of 2023, I have relied on many individuals to understand more about what the Society needs to flourish in the coming years. I have sought and received feedback, and I remain open to hearing the perspectives of all members of SSSP – present and past. In this report I would like to highlight two interrelated issues that I believe are fundamental to the success of SSSP.

Investing in Membership – Retention and Recruitment

SSSP exists because of its members and for its members. We must improve our efforts to retain our existing members and recruit new ones. Our membership numbers have declined. Although anecdotal evidence suggests membership declines are being experienced by similar organizations across the board, I recommend that we think proactively about what we can do to reverse these trends and minimize their impact on our ability to operate.

To retain members, we need to continue doing the things that keep us here and engaged. We must ask: why do people stay? And then we must make appropriate efforts to ensure we don't lose those features. But we must also ask, why do some people join, but not return? And, what can we do to attract and welcome new people?

To this end, I recommend exploring the following ideas and strategies over the next year:

- Listening to what is working for our members and thinking about what we can be doing better. Ongoing efforts include:
 - Town Hall at the 2023 Annual Meeting – panelists include our President, President-Elect, Vice-President, Vice-President Elect, EO, and AO. We have created space for an open forum to discuss what SSSP has to offer and learn more about what our members need. This is an opportunity to be intentional in how we show up for members and respond to their suggestions.
 - Investing in mentoring initiatives and building on the work done in the Committee on Mentorship.
 - Reviewing results from the Annual Meeting Survey closely and using these data to adjust how we conduct future meetings.
 - Working to make SSSP more inclusive and welcoming, and building the goals of the Anti-Harassment Committee into the culture of SSSP to create safer spaces where harassment and discrimination are not tolerated.
- Working in solidarity with organizations whose missions align with our own and collaborating with them on events and activities.
 - Examples include the upcoming Tri-Sponsored Virtual Social Hour between SSSP and the Association of Black Sociologists and Sociologists for Women in Society and the Special Session co-sponsored by ABS and the SSSP Program Committee at our 2023 Annual Meeting.
- Facilitating strategic partnerships with non-profit and community organizations where people are applying sociological lenses to address social problems.
 - By connecting with non-academic organizations we have the potential to build mutually beneficial collaborations.
- Rebranding the SSSP logo, website, and promotional materials.
 - The last rebranding occurred over a decade ago in 2010. Engaging strategic communications and marketing expertise to update our look, messaging, and web presence may aid in recruiting new members.

Improving the Financial Status of SSSP

The economic changes impacting the larger society have affected the SSSP. Like many other organizations, SSSP was hit hard by the pandemic and is still recovering. We need to be forward-thinking to reverse a deficit and bring in new income streams. Our current model is simply not sustainable. Turning around trends in membership decline, as briefly noted above, is one way to address the deficit, as membership dues and income from the Annual Meeting represent two of the top three revenue streams for the Society. But the primary revenue source is from publications.

Currently, the Society has contracted the publishing of *Social Problems* with Oxford University Press (OUP), and is currently negotiating a contract with them for the next term. OUP has projected major changes in the publishing industry which will impact publishing revenues. Even if the Society were to change publishers, it is likely that similar changes are affecting other companies as well. These industry changes make it difficult to count on revenue from publications.

Therefore, the Society needs to think seriously and creatively about alternate revenue streams. Efforts to explore revenue generation are underway. The Board should consider implementing additional fundraising, such as through a capital campaign and pursuing grants. The Board should also consider cutting certain expenses – even if temporarily. The Budget, Finance, and Audit Committee is undertaking budget exercises to reduce expenses and balance our budget. Fortunately, we have many smart and financially savvy people in the mix who are helping in this regard.

With Gratitude

As we prepare to attend the 73rd Annual Meeting of SSSP, I am eager to engage with the theme chosen by our President, Shirley A. Jackson: “Same Problem, Different Day: Recognizing and Responding to Recurring Social Problems.” We have a fantastic program created by this year’s Program Committee, Chaired by Mary Romero, along with Committee Members Angus Nurse, Ranita Ray, Mangala Subramaniam, and A. Javier Treviño, and a variety of exciting sessions organized by the Division Chairs. I thank each of these people for putting together the invigorating content that brings us together to share our scholarship and strategize for social justice. May we all heed President Jackson’s call “to embark upon deep introspective research into where we are, where we have been, and how we might truly progress structurally and culturally as we engage the future.”

Beyond our Annual Meeting activities, so many people volunteer their services to make SSSP the professional home it is today, dedicating their time and skills to ensure the work gets done throughout the year. I want to thank all the members who serve on the many committees within SSSP – so many important tasks get accomplished in these groups. I am grateful for the work of all our Division Chairs and Newsletter Editors, our Elected Officers, Board of Directors and Committees, our Appointed Position and Committees, and the Editorial Team responsible for publishing our prestigious *Social Problems* journal.

I have the privilege of working alongside amazing staff members, and want to extend my thanks to each of them: Michele Koontz (Administrative Officer and Meeting Manager), Kelsey Whitaker (Assistant to the Administrative Officer), Rachel Cogburn (Information Technology Specialist), and Jeremy Booth (prior Graduate Research Associate and Webmaster). Each of these individuals has been instrumental in supporting the work of the SSSP, oftentimes behind-the-scenes, but always expertly executed with professionalism and care.

This report is not exhaustive nor comprehensive. I have not thanked every individual who has played an important role within our organization, nor have I named all our wonderful accomplishments as a Society and as individual members of SSSP. But with this first report from my term as EO, I hope to provide the Board with context for future decision-making and action. I look forward to continuing serving the SSSP and am ever grateful to work for an organization that is unabashedly committed to social justice.