

**2022-2023 Society for the Study of Social Problems  
Annual Report from the Membership and Outreach Committee  
July 7, 2023**

**Chair:** Amaka Okechukwu, George Mason University (2022-2023)

**Members:** Cynthia Baiqing Zhang (2020-2023), Andrea D. Miller (2021-2024), Morena Tartari (2021-2024), Christina Barmon (2022-2025), Jacqueline M. Zalewski (2022-2025), Martin Jacinto, Student Representative (2020-2023), Greer Hamilton, Student Representative (2021-2024), Kenya L. Goods, Student Representative (2022-2025)

As of June 30, 2023, the following three divisions of SSSP are the largest in terms of membership:

- Critical Race and Ethnic Study: 479 members
- Poverty, Class and Inequality: 269 members
- Gender: 254 members

Notably, the Gender division replaced last year's third largest division (Conflict, Social Action, and Change) by 132 members; however, each of these sections have lost membership since last year.

**Promotional Efforts, as of July 7<sup>th</sup>, 2023:**

Members of the Membership and Outreach Committee recognized challenges that the Society continues to face due to pandemic related shifts in membership and annual meeting attendance. Members of the Membership and Outreach Committee struggled with how to respond to these challenges, raised a lot of questions, and continued with ongoing recruitment efforts. This included the following:

Social Media

Committee members contributed monthly social media blasts for posting on Facebook and Twitter. The content of these posts varied from highlights of current social problems to announcements regarding annual meeting registration. As of July 7<sup>th</sup>, 2023, the SSSP Facebook

page had 4,600 followers and 4,489 likes (a nominal increase from last year); the SSSP twitter page had 6,036 followers.

### Graduate Student Spotlight

Last year, the Graduate Student Spotlight was approved as a pilot program. The program goes as follows: the Graduate Student Representatives select several students to be highlighted on the SSSP website (solicited through a nomination process, including self-nominations). The graduate student representatives conduct a short interview with the graduate student, with emphasis on their scholarly work, and a selection of that interview is transcribed and featured on the website with their picture. This website entry is then promoted on social media. Additionally, the featured graduate student does a takeover of SSSP's social media for a day. As graduate students are a target audience for Society membership, this effort promotes the work of SSSP affiliated graduate students and could incentivize future graduate student membership. I would like to commend Greer Hamilton, graduate student representative, for developing this idea, proposing it, and taking leadership over the pilot program. While this was approved as a piloted program, it is my suggestion to make it permanent (see recommendations section below).

### Targeted Emails

Reports reveal that targeted email blasts are a successful means of generating membership. On January 9, 2023, targeted emails were sent to current graduate and undergraduate student members, directors of graduate studies programs, and "renew and recruit" announcements to 2022+ members (not including graduate and undergraduate students), yielding 78 members. When new members are asked how they heard of SSSP, the most selected options are "from a current member," "SSSP Annual Meeting," and from a "Professor of During Class," which point to the importance of word-of-mouth promotion and the significance of student memberships.

### Other

Society mailings of brochures (Postage was \$113.61) are not generating any memberships (this was also the case last year). My suggestion is we end this practice and put these money towards additional membership benefits, virtual events, etc.

### New Member Breakfast

Lastly, the Membership and Outreach Committee will resume its tradition of hosting the New Member Breakfast at this year's annual meeting in Philadelphia. It is scheduled for Saturday August 19<sup>th</sup> from 7:15am to 8:15am at Horizons Rooftop Ballroom, Sheraton Philadelphia Downtown Hotel. Though I am unsure of the RSVP count as of July 7<sup>th</sup> 2023, this event will hopefully be an excellent way to introduce new members to each other, and be a space of networking, mentorship, and new member on-boarding.

### **Recommendations**

- The Graduate Student Spotlight should be adopted as a permanent program. While the committee can decide on the number of students that they would like to spotlight each semester, the graduate student representatives should lead this program. Additionally, the graduate student representatives should be in touch with the graduate student's department administrator and university media relations office, so that the final posts will also be shared by the student's home institution.
- We should continue to encourage membership among graduate and undergraduate students. Word-of-mouth works, so faculty should communicate the benefits of membership to their students and labs and provide gift memberships when/if possible.
- We should stop paper mailings; it is not an effective means of recruiting members.
- Targeting academics: in trying to recruit more academic members, we should potentially focus on scholars outside of sociology who might appreciate the insight of social science scholars---such as social workers, policy scholars, etc. We also need to think more about how to distinguish ourselves from the other major competing sociology conferences.
- Targeting non-academics/activists: members have long expressed the desire to attract more activists and those working in non-profits to SSSP. Increased membership in this area would better help the Society meet its social justice mission. However, we must ask ourselves, what benefit do we offer non-academics? We want them to be here, but why? Why would they join us? I have yet to hear compelling reasons articulated (which is central for a pitch to activists and non-profit professionals), and so we need to get clearer on this before we develop a strategy to attract them.

- Some members have suggested more virtual events throughout the year to keep membership engaged beyond the annual meeting. These events could be free for members, and a cost for non-members (that is just above the membership price to incentivize membership). These events could feature public scholars in conversation with each other, activists, etc. I suggest that if more of this programming emerges, it be scheduled for times in which the membership regularly dips (fall, spring).
- Finally, if there are things that divisions are doing successfully to recruit members that could better be promoted to the full membership (or adopted by the Membership and Outreach Committee), this communication might be helpful for the greater organization.

The Chair would like to thank all Committee members for their work this year. I give special thanks to Michele Koontz, as well as Elroi J. Windsor, Kelsey Whitaker, Rachel Cogburn, and Jeremy Booth for their support of the Membership and Outreach Committee's efforts this year.