

## **Executive director's annual report (April 8, 2009)**

### **Fiscal update.**

In last year's report I noted that ASOR had a balanced budget for the third year in a row, and in fact we ended up with about a \$40,000 surplus. In addition, we placed \$31,000 from a previously unrestricted into the endowment account. Our annual fund was one of the best ever (over \$140,000), and our revenues were strong. Fiscal year 2009 has been more challenging, and much of my time has been spent managing the ASOR business components in these economically challenging times. We decided not to fill an opening in publications, and that decision has allowed us to reduce staff costs (there are other drawbacks there though). At the writing of this report, it is unclear if we will have a balanced budget for fiscal year 2009. If we are able to raise \$100,000 in the annual fund, then we will have a balanced budget and small surplus. If we fall short of about \$82,000 in the annual fund, then we will likely have a small deficit. Fortunately our surplus from last year can made up the difference, but we cannot let this situation continue.

The annual budgeting process is flowing much smoother than when I first started the job. The economy makes it harder to put together a budget with revenues and expenses that balance, but the process has improved. The reason is thanks primarily to the work of Sheldon Fox, our treasurer. Of course Selma Omerefendic continues to perform outstanding work, and her reports and records make all of the fiscal planning possible. This year he took my first draft and had much more control over the crafting of the final budget. He has also introduced new features of reporting that make the budget more understandable to our board members. In my annual report last year, I had a goal that the budget would take less time—I am pleased that the amount of time that I had to spend on the budget was dramatically reduced so that learning curve is less (as stated above, Sheldon also did much of the work). The process still took the better part of a month, but it was less than last year

Last year I also noted that we needed to incorporate strategic planning more into the budget process. This continues to be a need. The budget for FY2010 was constructed more by taking the revenues that we could likely anticipate and figuring out a way to accomplish all of the critical tasks that we are already doing together with the NEH archives project. The one exception is the annual meeting component. The FY09 budget included a large increase in this program area because it was identified as one of our central strategic areas. We thus allocated more funds for a director of events, and the results have been outstanding. Part of our strategic planning also identified the need for a publications director, but we have not located the revenue to pay for such a position. It is my hope that the economy and ASOR's revenues will allow future budgets to allocate more resources to areas that we have identified as critical.

### **Supervision of ASOR staff**

FY2010 has been a year of relative stability in staffing after 18 months of much transition. Although Alexandra Ratzlaff abruptly left ASOR in September, there have not been any other major departures. The addition of Kelley Bazydlo as director of events and

assistant director has been a tremendous help for staffing (see more on this below with regards to the annual meeting). In the past there have been tensions between the staff and the executive director (this was true with my predecessors as well), and these tensions and unhealthy dynamics have greatly improved. I have worked on better communication (including posting my schedule online and having more frequent consultations). We also have a better team in place, and there is a sense of loyalty. We still have work to do in this regard, but things are much improved.

During the next year I want the staff to work on a better sense of responsibility. With a few exceptions, we have had a loose atmosphere in the office in the past. I do not want to lose the friendly atmosphere, but I want us to work on “running a tighter ship.” I think that we have the right time in place for this to happen, and all of the staff are working hard. I sense that there has been and will continue to be some push back in this regard, but I think that we can work through that. The key will be better communication and better discussions about how each person’s job description fits the employee’s day-to-day responsibilities.

## **Membership**

My involvement with the membership committee has been limited for much of FY09 because of other commitments. We have had interactions to address problems, but we have not had adequate long-term planning until just recently. As mentioned above, the new database will greatly facilitate our ability to do membership recruitment. We are now able to generate lists of members very quickly and to generate reports containing demographics and trends in expiration dates. I have consulted several times in the past few weeks with Tammi Schneider, and we are formulating a plan to recruit and expand individual membership committee (including a new chair) to utilize these data effectively. We had previously focused on institutional memberships, but the present economic situation makes such recruitment more challenging. We are thus focusing our present efforts on the recruitment of individual members. We have already developed a webpage with a “dashboard” that is updated weekly so that we can keep track of our progress, and we are making good progress on our recruitment goals. In addition, Sara Deon will devote more of her time in the future to membership development now that the transition to Auctra is almost complete. I anticipate that I will devote much more of my time to membership recruitment in FY10, and this is an area of strategic importance as we look for ways to address expected shortages in gifts to the annual fund.

## **Archaeology and Policy Support (CAP)**

CAP is another area that received more limited support from me in FY09 than I would have preferred. My main area of support has been in providing administrative assistance in the posting of CAP applications and overseeing the various grant applications and reviews. Sophie and other staff in the ASOR office have provided much support in these areas. The oversight of CAP applications did not run smoothly in the fall because of some IT problems (including the switch to a new website when the applications were due) and because I had other responsibilities when the reports were due. However, we now have protocols in place to handle the applications next year, and the forms on the new website

are working correctly. Our new system and protocols allowed us to handle the grant applications this spring effectively, and these protocols will facilitate the process next fall.

Just like CAMP, I would like to reallocate more of my time so that I can better support and facilitate the activities of CAP, especially with regards to long-range and strategic planning. Sten LaBianca and Benjamin Porter (CAP secretary) have been hard at work, but I need to find more time to facilitate and support their work. With this in mind, Sten and I had some extensive conversations about 10 days ago in Boston, and we discussed many different initiatives and strategies.

## **Publications**

FY2009 has been a busy year in publications with most of our journals getting “caught up.” I cannot overestimate the importance of our journals being up-to-date for our revenues and customer satisfaction. In addition, Jeff Blakely’s report on claims demonstrates that this is also important for our expenses. FY09 also saw the publication of two ARS reports, and this is to be celebrated. The key now will be to get the annual and the ARS reports coming out on a consistent basis (and progress is being made there).

Publications is also an area that needs improvement in the coming fiscal year and beyond. We need to develop ways that the office can better support the editors (both journals and books) and also generate more revenue. Our new database system will play an important role with these tasks, but we need to hire a trained publications director who can oversee these tasks. Such a position in the annual meeting area has paid off tremendously, and I am confident that we would see similar results in publications. Sara is working very hard, but we need a person with expertise in publications and especially online publishing. Until we are able to make such an appointment (and we don’t have the money to do it right now), I fear that we will not accomplish our larger goals. In addition, the executive director’s time (my time) will be taken away from long-range planning and development.

FY09 also saw ASOR transition to a new database and membership platform. This has been a very positive move, albeit filled with bumps and problems along the way. The decision to move to Avectra was made by me in consultation with Sara Deon (and other ASOR staff), Jeff Blakely, and Tim Harrison. The reason that we moved from iMIS was that we increasingly could not trust the data that we received from reports. iMIS is a complicated database system that requires strict adherence to methods of entering data. It is certain that some of problems occurred when Trina Arpin tried to “fix” problems that we had with reports (errors were corrected in one place so that the reports would run correctly, but the backend data were not always changed or multiple records created). In hindsight it is now apparent that these problems existed in the Atlanta office as well. It was clear from invoices that ASOR had been paying between \$3,000 and \$5,000 per year in consulting fees for iMIS (also when the publications office was located in Atlanta), but we had not fixed the underlying problems. I spoke with our consulting firm (C Systems) and obtained a bid to fix the problems—it was an estimate of \$5,000 with annual costs after

that plus licensing fees for iMIS and a related program called PCQ (point, click, query). After consulting with the ASOR staff and Jeff Blakely, I decided against “fixing” iMIS because of the cost and because I thought that similar problems would creep back in without lots of expensive training for the ASOR staff (who then might leave ASOR employment). In short, iMIS had errors, and it was too complicated for the staff that did not have focused training and expertise in database management.

The decision to choose Avectra was made after consulting with other executive directors of learned societies about alternatives. These conversations revealed that the directors who were most satisfied in terms of databases were those that developed a specialized software package. These packages were tailored to their particular needs and included support by a professional staff, but the costs were between \$100,000 and \$200,000 for development and then ongoing annual costs for a professional staff with IT and database expertise. Avectra is a company that is actively marketing its product to learned societies, and the 3 directors with whom I spoke were relatively pleased with the product. Each director had reservations or problems, but each said that it was the best choice available for their society at the price. We received a detailed proposal from Avectra that demonstrated that the system could handle our essential needs. They confirmed in writing that this would be the case, and they included screen shots of how this would happen. All of this information was shared with the ASOR staff, Jeff Blakely, and Tim Harrison.

The implementation of the Avectra system has taken a long time. I made the decision that we needed to either fix iMIS or move to a new system after receiving many strong requests from Sara Deon and Kevin Cooney last summer. It took about two months to evaluate Avectra and iMIS and consider the costs and advantages. After we decided to go with Avectra, the contract negotiations took slightly more than 2 months because their standard contract had many clauses with which were not comfortable. In the end, we decided to go with the best contract that we could get and the written assurances that the program would do what we needed. Unfortunately, it does not yet handle subscriptions adequately (although they claimed in the proposal that it would), but they are working to fix those problems. While I am disappointed that the package does not work exactly as described, I am pleased with the support from Avectra and that they are working hard to fix the problems.

I am pleased with the decision to move to Avectra. For the first time since the closing of the Atlanta office, I feel that we have a real plan for publications and fulfillment. We have data that we can trust, and we can access those data very quickly and provided needed reports to the ASOR staff and ASOR volunteers. The membership modules are working very well, and they are facilitating better service of members and membership recruitment. As mentioned above, the subscription modules are still “in progress” as of the writing of this report. There are two problems with subscriptions: 1) the software package needs some improvements (the company promises that they are forthcoming; and 2) we still need to reconcile our data from iMIS and Avectra. I anticipate that the latter problem will be resolved within 30 days, and we will be able to work around the former problem until Avectra fixes the software problems.

In summary, I think that the move to Avectra was the right move. iMIS was too complicated for staff without focused training in IT and database management, and we could not afford to hire such staff. Avectra is reasonably priced (about \$4500 per year), and it is easy to use. Our staff has already begun mastering the package, and they feel confident in the data. The downside is that it is an “out of the box” package. Just like MS Word, if the package does not do what we want, it cannot be customized. However, it is a system that handles our needs adequately, and it allows us to receive online payments securely (something that was a continual problem with the previous system). We have challenges with declining subscriptions because of the economy, but I think that we are positioned to utilize the new software to meet these challenges. We probably will not accomplish all of our goals without hiring a professional with focused training in databases and online publishing, but we are positioned to do much better than we have in the immediate past.

### **Annual meeting and other programs (CAMP)**

FY2009 saw the annual meeting move to being one of our programs that is focused and operating well. Much of the credit for this goes to the decision to hire a professional who can take control of the meeting and make sure that it runs well. I have spent a large percentage of my time (up to 50% in the fall) working with Kelley on the annual meeting to make sure that she understood ASOR and the needs of our program. However, my direct time is decreasing rather quickly as Kelley learns more about ASOR. We also have two new program chairs (Elise Friedland and Andrew Smith) who are doing an outstanding job.

The 2008 AM in Boston was a highlight. We had about 750 registrations, and we were able to generate much more in revenue versus expenses than previous year. This strong financial picture will help pay for the increased staff costs, and we need to grow this side of the meeting in the future.

Kelley and I visited 5 properties in Chicago for the 2012 meeting, and we selected the Marriott Magnificent Mile. Kelley’s expertise in contract negotiations really showed in this process, and we have a much better contract than in previous year. In addition, Kelley and I worked well together in the negotiations, and we were able a better rate for the rooms and a few other concessions. Whereas last year I had to take over the negotiations, Kelley and I worked together to get a much better deal for ASOR.

My work with CAMP has expanded from last year, and I hope to be able to reallocate more of my time to be more involved in the coming fiscal year (FY10). Kelley will take the lead with many of the programs, but I want to be involved in offering support and helping Morag Kersel and Michael Homan develop goals for CAMP. With this in mind, I just recently had a good meeting with Morag in Boston, and we discussed various CAMP initiatives and how the ASOR office could help. Yet, with the time required to oversee the NEH grant, the responsibilities in publications and fulfillment, development, and the supervision of staff, I fear that this goal will be difficult to achieve.

### **Website**

As the board members already know, ASOR moved to a new website in November just before the annual meeting. This moved took much of my time during the fall, and that

time commitment continued into the winter. My direct involvement was necessitated because Alexandra Ratzlaff left ASOR in the middle of the implementation stage, and she had previously been the main contact person with IT. When I consulted with the BU web developer, it was clear that much less had been completed by ASOR than previously reported, so I had to work on learning a new software package (Dreamweaver) and transferring all of the old pages to the new website. That process took about 6 weeks, and the new system is functionally well.

We have begun the transition to give more people access to the system so that updating can be done quickly and without the need for me to make the updates myself. This process has been slow because of a complicated system at BU for getting access for none BU employees. However, we now have complete access for Jennie Ebeling to update the NEA pages, and we are in the process of getting complete access for Sten LaBianca for the CAP pages. In addition, Kelley and Sophie have complete access to the entire site to make changes in a program called Contribute. They are still receiving training, but the system is working adequately and getting improving as they receive further training from BU.

Michael Homan has taken the lead on developing a new ASOR blogsite, and that is functioning well. It has a link from the ASOR website, and is hosted off the BU system. That arrangement may not be ideal, but we decided that it was the best choice because of all of the complications with having a non-BU employee have access to a blog site at BU. Michael has done great job, and I appreciate his generous help.

Just as was the case with publications, there is a need to hire someone with focused training in website development. However, we cannot afford such an appointment at this time. I am able to manage the site in the meantime, but it means that I have to do this in addition to my other responsibilities.

## **Development**

After a banner year in fiscal year 2008, ASOR is facing a challenge meeting its Annual Fund commitment. Last fiscal year we broke records with almost \$260,000 in total giving, and \$124,000 in annual fund giving. In addition, we redirected \$31,000 of previously unrestricted giving to the endowment. ASOR's budget for FY09 (ending June 30, 2009) includes \$100,000 for the Annual Fund. To date, the Annual Fund has received almost \$40,000 in contributions (with an additional \$5,000 committed in pledges), well short of the amount we will need to meet our budgeted commitments this fiscal year. The need is even greater this year, because we will not be able to draw down income from our endowment due to the historic losses in the equity markets. These are difficult economic times for everyone, and ASOR is no exception.

Charitable giving has been down all across the United States, and ASOR has felt this reduction acutely. I have been focusing on development more and more in the spring, but I often cannot give it the attention that it needs because of my other responsibilities. In light of this situation, we should look to fill the opening for a VP of development so that there is someone who is coordinating our efforts in this challenging environment. We have a

number of efforts planned for the end of this fiscal year and for the beginning of FY10, but we need a person to think about development in the long-term and to recruit volunteers in ASOR to help.

## **Summary**

In last year's report I stated that I needed to find a way to reallocate my time so that I was working on long-range goals and planning rather than just reacting to daily problems or crises. While such reacting remains a large part of my job, there has been much progress. We are still reacting to challenges with the annual meeting, subscriptions, and revenues, but the "reacting" involves a long-range solution rather than just a band aid. There is still a learning curve for the job, but I am starting to understand ASOR better and have developed goals for addressing some of the most critical challenges in FY10.

At the same time, there will be challenges during FY10. We face a very difficult environment for development, and I fear that this environment may extend to registrations for the annual meeting and to subscriptions and memberships. We are already seeing a reduction in institutional memberships, and this trend may grow in FY10. It is thus more important than ever that we have good plans in place to develop revenues in these areas. All of these initiatives will be difficult because of our staff size. We have not filled an opening for a publications director, and we have added responsibilities for all of the staff from the NEH grant. Therefore, if we are not able to increase our revenues in FY2010, I think that we may need to seriously consider cutting back on some of our programs and goals. Stated another way, if ASOR cannot raise \$100,000 for the annual fund, then we will either need to develop other revenues or cut back on our programs.