

Executive Director's Report  
April 2016 ASOR Board Meeting

The fiscal state of ASOR continues to be solid. I forecast that we will once again have a balanced budget (see the Finance Committee Report), and our membership and subscription revenue for next year looks secure. While subscription revenues continue to be flat, our membership is growing, and we are starting to move beyond a couple plateaus that I have described in previous annual reports. Our membership has swelled to about 1,700. We had 1,575 people with current memberships as of March 31, 2016. If we look back to December 31 at the people who had current memberships at the end of 2015 plus those who joined ASOR in the first quarter of 2016, then highest number is 1,768.

Not all of those people whose memberships expired in December will renew, and we should note that our peak membership is always around 12/31 of each year. Yet, we should be pleased with our progress. When we passed our last strategic plan five years ago, we had around 1,350 members. I stated in my report five years ago that I hoped we could reach 2,000 members by 2016. We haven't achieved that level, but we are reaching new highs and moving past previous plateaus. I am excited about this, and Inda Omerehendic and all of the ASOR staff should be congratulated for their good work.

In short, I think that we are poised for growth rather than staying on a plateau, and I am pleased that Strategic Goals Nos. 5-8 (new initiatives that address our members' needs) chart a course for where ASOR might go with regards to that growth.

My comments below provide some fiscal or structural observations about each of the eight strategic goals or areas.

**Annual Meeting:** Many people commented that the meeting in Atlanta was our best yet. Certainly the venue and hotel staff were among the best that we have ever had (and almost infinitely better than Baltimore). The attendance was slightly lower than previous years, but we were still around the 900 mark. Most importantly, the academic program continued to be strong, and attendees reported that the conference was an important place for the exchange of ideas and for making connections. We did not have many complaints about being further away from the SBL conference, and we will need to track how many of our members are affected by the 2016 location, which is about 18 miles away from the SBL venue (President Susan Ackerman has already started a committee [chaired by Gary Arbino] to study this issue, and the executive office will support that committee in its work). Please see Susan's report for more on the "SBL question" and future meetings.

The early indicators point to the 2016 annual meeting being even bigger and better. We have a record number of paper proposals, and registrations are higher than last year at this time. The hotel has facilities and a staff that will be very comparable to 2015. We anticipate that revenues will be consistent with last year. Our expenses may be somewhat higher than in Atlanta because we do not have

as many hotel concessions (e.g., free drinks at the opening reception and a credit towards food and beverage). When we take into account salaries, the annual meeting will probably “cost” ASOR about \$40,000 in FY17 (or about \$10,000 more than FY16). The strategic plan charges the ASOR staff with increasing revenue for the meeting, and attracting new exhibitors will be one strategy for accomplishing that goal.

Various members and committees have suggested that we consider lowering registration fees for students and early career scholars. We are exploring what other organizations are doing in that regard, and I think that it is likely that we will try some new rates on a trial basis for the 2017 meeting (see below for comments on fostering the next generation with membership rates). Our registration rates remain much lower than many other academic conferences, but our rates are on par with those of AIA/SCS and AAR/SBL. Relatedly, member feedback indicates that the registration rate is a fairly small percentage of the overall cost to attend the annual meeting, so reductions of \$10 or \$20 do not have a large impact on the decision to attend the meeting.

**Publications:** Our journals are of a high quality and continue to be produced on time. Revenue from journals continues to be part of our core funding, and that revenue stream seems secure in the short and mid-term (the next 3–4 years). Many scholarly publishers worry about the future of academic publishing and journal sales, and ASOR is no exception. That being said, we have had consistent revenues for the past 3-4 years.

At the request of the NEA editor, COP commissioned Mitch Allen to conduct an external assessment of NEA, and especially its production and business model. This assessment reveals that ASOR could save a significant amount of money (probably around \$8,000 to \$10,000) by outsourcing the prepress and copyediting work. It was also suggested that our printing costs might be lower as well. It was also suggested that the quality would actually increase. Another major recommendation was use part of that savings to provide increased editorial (not just copyediting) support in order to help make the workload for the editor more manageable. Mitch just submitted his report to COP Chair Chuck Jones last week, so it is premature to say what specific changes will be adopted in the next 3-6 months. The process of the external review worked very well, and I hope that we might conduct similar reviews of other journals.

A major part of the strategic plan is to increase our book production and sales program. Right now our book publication program loses money, and it probably will continue to lose money. However, this is an area identified in the strategic plan where we should raise money to expand one of our core areas that also would expand our services to members. The staff has several ideas in addition to seeking gifts. We do not do much with sales to members other than as part of March Fellowship Madness. We could expand direct sales that would be fulfilled through ISD (for a nominal price per volume mailed), and the funds could be used to publish more books. If we revive the ASOR Books series, we could have some backlist sales that could help support our publications program. Another idea is to

work with the development committee to publish select books as open access with sales to libraries of hard-bound volumes that would print-on-demand only.

**Fellowships, Grants, and other member support:** The strategic plan stresses the need to raise funds for grants for fieldwork and funds to support our members in other of their scholarly endeavors (publishing subventions, travel-to-collections grants, funding support for travel to the Annual Meeting). We have made much progress in raising funds for endowed scholarships for student participants in excavations, but we are not close to meeting the demand. At the same time, we need to do much work in raising funds for our members (and not just students). Past experience from the foundational campaign indicates that this will take thoughtful conversations with our donors. In the next five years we may want to think about applications to foundations' scholarships programs that ASOR might administer.

**Fostering the field:** ASOR has certainly been doing this for 116+ years, but I think that there is even a greater need for advocacy and fostering of the field today. As we have seen in the current election cycle in the U.S., many candidates are questioning the role of the humanities in higher education. Stated another way, the public and politicians want to see education as teaching “21<sup>st</sup> century skills.” I think that ASOR and other learned societies have a role to play in demonstrating to the public why our fields are important for “21<sup>st</sup> century skills.”

One way that our ASOR budget can help with this goal is to continue and increase our involvement with the National Humanities Alliance (NHA). To date our dues have been rather minimal (\$1,000 per year). The NHA just last week asked ASOR to consider increasing our dues to be more in line with a percentage of our budget—previously our dues were set by membership numbers, and our budget is higher than most learned societies with a similar membership. Another way that we might contribute is to be a sponsor of Advocacy Day that is sponsored by the NHA (it costs about \$640 to be sponsor). As the president report shared, we are very pleased that the NHA included a cultural heritage briefing sheet in the materials distributed to U.S. senators and representatives on Advocacy Day 2016, and ASOR is poised to play an even greater role in this type of advocacy in the coming five years.

Another budgetary way that ASOR can foster the field is through providing scholarships and reduced membership rates for students and early career professionals. We introduced an undergraduate membership category on a trial basis about 4 months ago, and the results have been very encouraging. Ina and I have prepared (in just the past three weeks) a two-page information sheet with financial details about student and early career memberships. We plan to share this information with the Committee on Outreach and Membership and with the Jr. Scholars Committee to see if we might come up with some reduced membership rates for students, non-North Americans, and early career professionals. There may be an impact in terms of membership revenues, but we need to consider sacrificing some revenue in order to encourage and support the next generation.

**Increased international identity:** I was very pleased that CAP decided (unanimously) to change its policy to allow non-North Americans to have ASOR-affiliated excavation projects. I saw this move as very appropriate because almost 25% of our membership comes from outside the U.S. From a business or fiscal standpoint, the internationalization of ASOR is also an area where we have much room for potential growth and increased revenues. While we have a high percentage of professionals in our fields in the U.S. who are involved in ASOR, that percentage is much lower in Europe, the Middle East, and other parts of the world. It will be hard for ASOR to reach 2,000 members unless we continue to attract members from outside North America.

We also need to make sure that we provide benefits to non-North American members so that they consider their participation in ASOR to be a good value and something that they want to continue in the long-run. Our partnership with JSTOR and the access to our journals will certainly help, but we need to develop member benefits beyond our publications. I think that providing opportunities and venues for exchange of ideas with international colleagues is one such crucial benefit, and we should explore gatherings in Europe and the Middle East where this might happen. Our advocacy work is another way in which international members see ASOR as playing an important role, and we should consider allocating part of the budget for advocacy outside the United States. Finally, we should consider ways that we can make fellowships and grants that are specifically designed for non-North Americans. We may not be able to accomplish all of these things in one budget cycle, but it might be good for the board to consider modest initiatives so that we make progress in each of the next five years with supporting our non-North American members.

**Outreach:** this is an area where ASOR has made a lot of progress in the past five year. Much of the progress was made possible a one-time gift to start the Friends of ASOR program. The Lanier Library also provided one-time funds to “jump-start” our online presence. From a fiscal standpoint, some of those funds remain, but the Temporary Restricted Account will be depleted in two to three more budget cycles. I am pleased that the Kershaw Family Trust is providing annual support for News@ASOR, and the Trust has made a legacy gift to ensure that the e-newsletter continues to be supported in perpetuity.

On the other hand, the Friends of ASOR program is being funding with soft-funding, so we need to work towards making Friends of ASOR self-sustaining. We are currently at 11,500 members, and the goal is to reach 25,000 Friends by the end of five years. A certain percentage of these Friends will join ASOR or make contributions, so that is one method of making the program sustainable. The board voted for us to try a raffle or sweepstakes as another method. We are working on the details, and we should know in about 3-4 months if that will help with the sustainability issue. I think that everyone agrees that the FOA program is one of the most exciting new things that ASOR has done, and the above comments are merely intended to highlight the need to continue to think about ways to make the program sustainable once the soft funding runs out.

**Cultural Heritage:** With the work of ASOR Cultural Heritage Initiatives over the past 18 months, this has become an area of strength for ASOR. We have become known (again) as one of the major players internationally for protecting and preserving cultural heritage. As Susan Ackerman pointed out in her report, NEH Chairman William Adams referred to ASOR's work as one of the key ways that the NEH was supporting humanities work that addressed a 21<sup>st</sup> crisis. The NEH Deputy Chair Peggy Plympton will be one of the featured speakers at our event on Sunday night. When I attended the AIA Annual Meeting in San Francisco, ASOR was mentioned frequently (even in the AIA Counsel Meeting) as a leader in the cultural heritage discussion. We are often contacted by international groups such as the DAI (German Archaeological Institute), the Antiquities Coalition, and UNESCO to sign statements relating to heritage issues and to weigh in on heritage matters. I do not mention all of the above to say that we have already achieved our goals. Rather, these things are evidence that we stand poised to accomplish the goals set forward in the strategic plan.

**Summary:** I will end as I began—the state of ASOR is strong and we are poised to move forward and upward. We are poised to make much progress towards the goals outlined in the strategic plan, and I look forward to working all of you as we work to advance ASOR.