

A Proposal on How ASOR Can Best Reach the Public

Stefanie Elkins

Chair – Outreach Education Committee

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Introduction

The following proposal introduces ideas and suggestions as to how ASOR and the Outreach Education Committee can best reach out to the public in order to introduce and create interest in archaeological research throughout the Middle East. This proposal suggests ways in which ASOR and the Outreach Education Committee can interest the general public in Near Eastern archaeological research.

Outreach Education Committee Description:

The Outreach Education Committee was created in 1992 by Carolyn Rivers, a middle school teacher and ASOR member, in order to enrich the educational experience of elementary, middle, and high school students by introducing archaeology lessons into the regular curriculum. This was accomplished with teacher workshops that have typically been held during the ASOR annual meetings.

We hope to expand the idea of outreach by reaching out to the general public by introducing contextual links to the archeological past of the ancient Near East through workshops, lectures, and seminars.

Currently we are not named in the ASOR bylaws, however we are mentioned in the strategic plan and ITF documents. We would like for this committee to be added as a standing committee.

Current Outreach Education Committee members

- Stefanie Elkins – *chair*
 - Currently serving a four year term as of 1/1/10
- Ellen Bedell
 - Former chair
- Neil Bierling
- Eric Cline
- Jeanne DelColle
- Pamela Gabor
- Gloria London
 - Former chair
- Caroline Rivers
 - Former chair
- Maria-Louise Sidoroff

While teaching teachers has been our focus, we recognize that the strategic plan and ITF report conceive of the committee as broader with the intention of “outreach” to the public in general. It has been suggested that henceforth we be called, “Outreach Committee” - dropping “Education” from the name. However, we do not want to deemphasize the educational aspect of our committee. The goals of ASOR concerning outreach means that we as a committee need to think of broader ways to accomplish outreach. The education of young people and teachers still remains our primary goal.

Committee Challenges:

We currently have been offering educational workshops to middle and high school teachers that coincide with the annual ASOR meetings. These workshops have met with mixed success over the years. While partnering with museums has worked at times, the work involved is time consuming. The challenges with the educational workshops are as follows:

- The ASOR meetings are the only time committee members and workshop presenters meet.
- Much depends on the location of the ASOR meetings; different cities have different resources available.
 - A museum with a Near East collection and education coordinator is vital to the implementation of a workshop.
 - Distance and lack of personal connections with museums make it difficult and time consuming for committee members to arrange a workshop in an unfamiliar town.

- Reduced funding for continuing education makes it difficult for teachers to afford workshops.
- Thus far these workshops have not resulted in teachers becoming members of ASOR. While we believe the workshops are valuable, these workshops do not meet the related outreach goals of ASOR as set out in the strategic plan.

Until now, this committee has been informal, we have no official mechanism for appointing new members or having a rotation of service for members. Some of us have been serving for years and at least half of our members are elementary or high school teachers. As teachers, student education is our specialty and main interest. The committee needs to adopt some guidelines regarding term length, and how many consecutive terms one may serve.

A Note About Teachers:

As we have discovered, our past few educational workshops have not resulted in any additional members to ASOR. While we as a committee do feel that our service is valid, a point should be made about the teachers who are members of ASOR today.

- Jeanne Delcolle – Outreach Education Committee member and High School History teacher from New Jersey. Jeanne has participated in several ASOR sponsored excavations and has recently been awarded the prestigious Teacher of the Year award for the state of New Jersey; largely due to her innovative lesson plans on incorporating archaeology into the classroom.
- Ellen Bedell – Outreach Education Committee member and former chair who teaches world history at a private all girl’s school in Pittsburgh. Ellen has gone on to participate in several ASOR sponsored excavations and has been actively involved in the NEH Summer Institutes with Gloria London. Ellen has also co-chaired two ASOR annual meeting sessions with Dr. Eric Cline.

All of our ASOR teachers were recruited via NEH Summer Institutes in Archaeology; pioneered by our own Dr. Gloria London. A further look into creating joint NEH / ASOR Summer Institutes is warranted.

- The challenge for teachers is expense. They are not likely to join ASOR because of the cost of membership and because ASOR currently has nothing to offer them relating to educational resources.

Proposed Initiatives:

The following are six proposed ideas to bolster the work of the Outreach Education Committee. These suggestions are listed in order of reasonable implementation. It is the aim of these proposals to further the goals of ASOR as mentioned in the fifth bullet point of the ASOR Mission Statement.

- “And by offering educational opportunities in Near Eastern history and archaeology to undergraduates and graduates in North American colleges and universities, *and through outreach activities to the general public.*”

1. Archaeology Seminars and Public Lectures

Currently, ASOR has partnered with BAS to provide a Seminar on Biblical Archaeology in Orlando, FL (January, 2012). This trial seminar will enable us to determine if this type of outreach will be beneficial to the overall goals of ASOR as well as being cost effective. This type of event will cater to interested individuals who may be willing to invest in ASOR and archaeology. These individuals will receive an ASOR membership with their seminar registration. The challenge will be to encourage them to renew their memberships annually. This challenge can only be accomplished by meeting the following needs of a lay-member:

- ASOR must offer lay members something on a regular basis that caters to the needs of the public. This could be accomplished by the remaining five ideas.

2. Monthly Email Blasts

Each new member would be put on a server list to receive a monthly online newsletter. This newsletter would feature announcements, events, and other ASOR related activities as well as archaeology in the news and links to interesting articles and events that might appeal to the layperson. This could be accomplished in one of two ways:

- The newsletter links automatically to the ASOR website.

- The newsletter is a separate PDF that goes out only to lay members.

The challenges with email blasts is that they create additional work for the web specialist(s) who work for ASOR. Collaboration and agreement with these computer specialists would have to be discussed. These online newsletters could feature articles written by ASOR members.

3. Facebook, Twitter, and other Social Media

ASOR already has a Facebook page but has few “friends” when compared to other archaeological organizations. How can we change that?

- By linking ASOR’s Facebook page to a Twitter account and/or other Social Media (Google +, LinkedIn, MySpace, etc.) we could improve our audience exposure.
- By encouraging all ASOR staff and committee members and all ASOR affiliated dig directors to add a Facebook “like” button as an email tag.
- Adding the Facebook logo and website to all printed ASOR material will alert people to the existence of an account as well and will help further public awareness of ASOR.
- Creating an ASOR advertisement on Facebook. This does involve a cost (FB suggests up to \$0.83 per click), but it could have the potential of reaching over 100,000 people and would expand the message and awareness of ASOR, leading to new members.
- In addition to the “archaeology in the news” posts, the ASOR FB account could also alert viewers to updates on the ASOR website.

4. Tours

By collaborating with an established travel agency, tours to Jordan, Israel, Turkey, and Egypt would be a way to form life long relationships and support for ASOR. Participants in these tours could be recruited from ASOR sponsored archaeology seminars and public lectures. An ASOR one year membership could be built into the cost of the tour for non-members.

5. ASOR Website

The following are suggested additions to the ASOR website. While some suggestions could be implemented right away, others are listed for future reference and expansion. In bold are proposed menu tags with suggested links and information pertaining to the tag.

ASOR in the News

- This could replace the blog link where news is currently posted.

Events

- Annual Meeting
- Public Lectures, Seminars
- Archaeology Weekends
- Workshops (teacher workshops, NEH Summer Institutes)

Fieldwork Opportunities

- Digs accepting volunteers with links and photos of ASOR members in the field.

Education (*this tag would pertain specifically to activities sponsored by the Outreach Education Committee*)

- Outreach Education Committee
 - Outreach statement and goals
- Lesson plans & Curriculum
 - Archaeology lesson plans created by teachers for elementary school through college
 - Lists of bibliographies, books, and recommended or reviewed TV programs/movies

- Highlights on current sites – ex: Umm el-Jimal Educational Curriculum (Jordan)
- Articles written by teachers for teachers (could be linked to Dig-it-al)
 - Corresponding to lesson plans
- Careers in Archaeology – resources and links
 - Links to colleges and universities
- Ask the Experts
 - Rather than have specific email links, have a “Post a Comment” button to which ASOR members, who agree to volunteer their time and information, will be sent an email by ASOR alerting them to the question. This will allow many professionals to be able to answer the question.
 - Have an available FAQ to the most Frequently Asked Questions which people in our field receive from laypeople.
- Events
 - This link would take visitors back to the Events link on the main page.
 - Archaeology fairs and events nationwide could be listed here as well.

6. Chapters *(This suggestion is for future consideration)*

ASOR chapters could provide a forum for members to benefit from the abundant educational and cultural resources related to the Near East within their localities and beyond. Chapters are formed of individuals who share a professional or layman's interest in Near Eastern art, archaeology, history, politics, and culture. Most chapters would be based in or near cities with universities or museums institutionally affiliated with ASOR, and they would provide a conduit for internationally known experts in fields related to the Near East to share the results of their recent research. These chapters could create ownership, encourage professionalism, and assist in the arrangement of seminars and public lectures.