

ASOR Program Committee Annual Report 2023

Kiersten Neumann and Allison Thomason, Co-chairs, Program Committee
Arlene Press, ASOR Director of Meetings and Events

2022–3 was another rewarding and challenging year for the Program Committee (PC) in terms of planning and executing one large hybrid meeting, and events in the Middle East, specifically Gaza/Israel. We also consulted on and made program changes related to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion and sustainability work happening across ASOR committees.

2022 Annual Meeting (Boston):

The in-person AM in Boston was well attended and it was exciting to be back and reconnect with our colleagues more fully in person after the disruptions of the Covid pandemic. Dr. Solange Ashby gave the keynote, which was received well. The virtual meeting in October was also fairly well-attended, but with fewer participants/registrants than the in-person meeting. Still, the virtual meeting allowed several of our colleagues who could not travel to Boston to attend the October virtual event. We found that the early upload for presentation recordings for the October virtual component created a hardship for many presenters, who could not always upload their presentations by the early October due date. Also, there was some repetition amongst sessions if sessions/workshops were on both the in-person and virtual programs. We also found that relatively few registrants could attend more than one virtual session or workshop, thus there was an increased urgency from ASOR Executive Director and staff, as well as the PC, to try to eliminate all of the extra time and staff workload required for the two-component AM, and to move towards a hybrid single-event meeting.

2023 Annual Meeting Planning and Scheduling:

After both discussion at our in-person PC meeting in 2022 in Boston and some members attending the AIA's hybrid meeting in January of 2023, along with reading the report of ASOR's Ad Hoc Committee on Sustainability, Sharon Herbert and Andy Vaughn indicated to the PC that a **(one-way) hybrid meeting** would be possible for the AM 2023, such that we would not need to plan two entirely separate meetings/dates. The PC welcomed this announcement, which includes understanding of extra costs that ASOR might incur to produce such a meeting. Andy and ASOR staff researched the extra costs, and indicated that, in hotel contract negotiations, streaming costs for hard-wired (one-way) hybrid presentations would be reduced compared to previous years and (one-way) hybrid sessions/presentations were therefore possible. Also, **ASOR would provide laptop computers for every single room/session**, with pre-loaded PowerPoint presentations (but not fully pre-recorded presentation videos for in-person presenters) to reduce technical difficulties. Again, the PC welcomed such support from the EC and the Board of Trustees and thanks ASOR staff for helping to make this hybrid possibility become reality. In later discussions with the PC, Arlene Press (ASOR Director of Meetings and Events), and Andy Vaughn (ASOR Executive Director), the plan for preparing for the 2023 AM in Chicago was adjusted, as follows.

The PC decided that we would prefer to have **“time-stamps” or scheduled times** for each presentation added back to the AM program. The PC also requested that, to avoid any potential delays for streaming, we would ask ALL presenters to upload PowerPoint slides to the ASOR

Annual Meeting platform (through Oxford Abstracts) by Nov. 12, 2023, for the start of AM sessions on Nov. 16. Virtual presenters were asked to record and upload videos of their presentations for “backup”. Although the intention is for virtual presenters to present live on the projection screens in session rooms, videos will be available for backup in case of technical issues due to local internet and streaming live/hybrid. Jared Koller (ASOR Information and Website Manager) and the ASOR staff will work to ensure that each ASOR-provided laptop in each session room had the appropriate presentation slides ready to deploy for each session.

In order to ensure that all papers ran on time, and aware that some technical glitches could occur, the PC decided to request that all time slots be **limited to 4 or 5 papers/time slot**. All papers could be no longer than 20 minutes, with 5 minutes discussion between papers. No sessions will be allowed six 15-minute papers, rather two smaller slots would be preferred. Workshops, of course, would retain their format of several brief presentations and then discussions.

Andy and the ASOR staff also suggested that best practice would be to have an **ASOR-trained facilitator in each room** at the AM Hilton Chicago to help session chairs with the technical issues with slides and to handle questions from the virtual audience (in the Zoom chat). Andy mentioned that ASOR could provide some travel or registration cost-support to hire students to work as in-room facilitators. Again, the PC welcomed this support for a hybrid AM, to allow equity for remote attendees and avoid as many technical glitches as possible.

With so many changes in how sessions were to be run and new “best practices” ideas from the DEI committee for how to run sessions, the PC decided to offer **augmented session/workshop chair training sessions**. Two such live sessions were held in October 2023, with Jared Koller, Arlene Press, a PC Co-chair, and a member of the DEI committee present at each. A recording was also made available for session chairs who could not attend either of the training sessions. Best practices for how to run inclusive sessions, and the new ASOR session intro slides were discussed in the training sessions, as well as new technical requirements for hybrid meetings.

Special Note Regarding the Events in Gaza/Israel and the Annual Meeting:

The events in Israel and Gaza on and after October 7, 2023, affected our program for the Annual Meeting of November 2023. Many presenters or chairs had to drop out of the meeting entirely or move their presentations to remote. Each registrant that could not attend this year had the option for a full refund of registration fees, to save the fees as credit for ASOR AM 2024 in Boston, or to donate to ASOR. Chairs of PC-approved MOSW were given the option to postpone their sessions until 2024, and some chose that option. Alternative chairs were found for ASOR standing sessions if the appointed chairs could not participate this year.

Arlene Press and the ASOR staff have worked tirelessly to accommodate such last-minute changes to the program schedule, which was completely full (120+ time slots) prior to these events. Regretfully, a few entire sessions were canceled and there were many challenges to our attendees’ ability to participate. In ASOR concierge-service manner, papers in sessions that were canceled, but whose authors still wished to present in 2023, were re-homed to other standing ASOR sessions or MOSW. We also allowed sessions that dropped to only 3 papers to remain on the program. As of Nov. 13, we have 113 time slots on the program, and a total of 511 paper and workshop presentations (virtual plus in-person). We appreciate the efforts of

Arlene Press, Jared Koller, and our session and workshop chairs for their flexibility. We are pleased that the AM program is still quite robust and full, even as we meet with heavy hearts and concern for all of our colleagues and loved ones about the situation in Gaza/Israel.

Poster Session:

The PC, led by Sarah Wenner (PC member and Posters Chair), also allowed both in-person and virtual poster participation for the 2023 annual meeting. Poster submissions could be digital in PDF format, or in the traditional large-scale printed format for in-person presenters. ASOR will have both the physical posters displayed throughout the in-person conference and a page on the AM website with access to the virtual Poster Gallery. A poster session Q&A with all in-person authors present takes place at lunchtime on Saturday in Chicago, with laptops available for virtual poster presenters and Q&A.

Recordings of the Annual Meeting:

ASOR will be recording each session (with a one-way camera aimed at podium/screen) for registered attendees to view presentations following the conclusion of the hybrid meeting. This allows ASOR and the PC to “extend” the meeting virtually into the near future with password-protected access to registrants. All presenters were sent a form to request to “opt out,” or remove their presentations from the recordings that would be made available online after November. Approximately 15–20% of presenters have requested to keep their papers out of the recording. ASOR staff will then remove such paper presentations from the recordings of sessions after the meeting in November and before making recordings available online to registered attendees. In addition, with presenters’ and chairs’ consent, some recordings of live hybrid meeting sessions may be made available to the wider public (no password required) on the YouTube channel, ASORTV.

Other Events and Co-Offerings:

Most business meetings return to the in-person format for Chicago, with ASOR providing gift cards for purchasing breakfasts at many of the meetings in the hotel. The ASOR Book Awards and Service Awards will be presented as usual during the annual members’ meeting in-person, with pre-recorded announcements, which will then be uploaded to recorded platform and ASORTV for attendees to view after November. Awards for service in Cultural Heritage and student paper awards, offered in 2022 for the first time, will continue to be offered in addition to ASOR’s other book and service awards in 2023.

This year, ASOR initiated a CFP for informal Roundtables at the AM. Roundtables will be designed as mini-meetings to be held during the brown-bag lunch period on Thursday of the AM. They will take place in-person at round banquet tables in a large room at the conference hotel. Each discussion group will consist of the organizer and any ASOR AM attendees who sign up in advance (space will be limited according to the size of the table).

Finally, because the location of Chicago for the in-person component was chosen in part due to museums of interest to ASOR members, we are delighted that once again, the **Institute for the Study of Ancient Cultures Museum (ISAC Museum, formerly the Oriental Institute Museum)** at the University of Chicago will host a reception in their galleries for badge-holding attendees on Saturday evening in Hyde Park (with attendees pre-registering for free). ASOR is

also provide shuttle transportation from the Hilton Hotel in downtown Chicago to the Museum in Hyde Park. In addition, the **Field Museum of Natural History** is holding a special curator lecture walk-through of its current exhibition *First Kings of Europe* on the Wednesday afternoon before the conference plenary (Nov. 15). ASOR badge holders will also be able to visit the ISAC Museum and the Field Museum free of charge for the remainder of the weekend of the AM. We thank Kiersten Neumann, PC Co-chair and Curator at ISAC, for her initiative and help in organizing these splendid events. Finally, many of the familiar extra-program events are occurring in Chicago, including: the Session Chair reception on Wed. afternoon, post-plenary all-ASOR reception, affiliated society receptions, the ECS brown bag lunch and “Listening Session”, an open ECS welcome space, and the Initiative on the Status of Women mentoring lunch, among other events.

Sustainability Efforts:

The ability of ASOR to offer a hybrid format for the AM for the first time is a great stride forward in achieving sustainability efforts. Again, for the in-person VAM, as with the 2022 meeting, ASOR will only print a limited number of hard-copy program books, for those who specially request them (per ASOR communication to all attendees). There will be a very limited number of printed books available in person at the meeting, as we feel that attendees are familiar by now with virtual formats and the AM website/platform.

Happily, ASOR will still provide the sustainable and much-loved tote bags for participants and plenty of maps of conference areas in the Chicago hotel for convenience! Finally, the PC will continue to schedule in-person AMs in travel-friendly hubs with related cultural interest sites, and will continue most dissemination of information and schedules through PDFs and the AM webpage. In 2023, as a committee, we will analyze the response to the hybrid meeting and discuss any potential improvements in process or practice.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Initiatives:

At our 2022 in-person meeting, members of the PC each signed a pledge to increase awareness and take measures to ensure that the ASOR AM is an inclusive space for all through the efforts of the PC. We are actively engaged with service to this pledge in many ways. The PC is continuing the practice of eliminating the second line of institutional affiliation on nametags at the in-person AM (exhibitors excluded) reflecting our complex discussion of equity issues and balancing that with expectations of members around networking. Affiliations will still be listed on the AM Program. Although there were a few anecdotal concerns, the PC was satisfied overall with attendees’ responses to this decision at the 2022 AM.

ASOR’s Board of Trustees and Executive Director have continued to work tirelessly to develop scholarship funds to eliminate or reduce registration fees for all attendees who wish to attend, and to particularly target and support those from BIPOC communities, who have been under-represented at the AM and in ASOR’s membership ranks.

The PC also worked with the ECS Committee to create a more welcoming atmosphere at the in-person AM for DEI attendees, many of whom are also EC Scholars. At the in-person meeting in Chicago, the ECS will have a welcome desk next to ASOR registration as well as a dedicated communal lounge space for ECS members to relax, meet, work, etc. The PC also

added a DEI-related question to its Session Chair post-session surveys to help gather information about the atmosphere and culture at the AM.

In its meetings, the PC continues to discuss ways that ASOR could augment a climate of inclusion of diverse participants across all of its programs, events, and policies. ASOR's PC strongly supports this mission and will continue to work with ASOR's standing DEI committee to increase such participation in all aspects of the AM. One issue that we discussed at our in-person PC meeting in Boston 2022 was the challenges regarding the institutional affiliation and geographic terminology references for institutions/sites in occupied regions or areas of conflict. At our in-person meeting in 2022, Sharon Herbert announced that she would form an ad hoc committee to discuss such issues to come up with appropriate language regarding ASOR policies for presenting research and institutional affiliations in occupied territories. Hopefully a revised general ASOR policy will arise to guide the PC here. Such new language would be incorporated into the revised PC Guidelines that will be developed as well in the near future.

We are happy to report that after a discussion of the PC and with the chairs of the DEI Committee, the DEI Committee worked diligently with PC Co-chairs and ASOR staff to create such **ASOR intro slides for hybrid and inclusive meetings**, which will be pre-loaded and shown at the beginning of every session or workshop (on the ASOR computers) for the hybrid meeting in Chicago.

The PC also discussed with the DEI Committee and President Herbert whether ASOR should provide a **land acknowledgement statement** mentioning indigenous peoples and homelands for the meeting in general, and/or for individual sessions. Also, we discussed how such a statement should be created. The PC Co-chairs and DEI Committee recommended that we utilize similar statements from institutions (museums, universities) in the cities of the AM. Dr. Herbert will present a slide at her welcome remarks before the Plenary with ASOR's first official land acknowledgement statement for the Chicago AM in 2023.

Planning for AM 2024 and future years:

Planning for AM 2024 is just getting underway. For 2024, ASOR will meet in-person/hybrid at the Boston Park Plaza once again. MOSW postponed from 2023 due to the events in Gaza/Israel will automatically become part of the program in 2024. The 2024 call for MO Session and Workshop Proposals will be open December 15 and close January 15. The 2023 call for papers will be open February 15–March 15. The PC will meet in late January 2024 to discuss the proposed MOSW, and March to discuss the 2025 plenary speakers.

In our in-person PC meeting in Chicago, we will discuss the successes and challenges of the hybrid meeting format and the new Oxford Abstracts platform/AM website. We will also begin discussions of revising our operating guidelines, with the proviso about ASOR's occupied territory language incorporated once it is determined.

On another planning note for 2024, as a new practice, the PC had a special meeting in March 2023 to recommend a list of potential plenary speakers for 2024. We then forwarded a 3-person list to the CCC and EC, who nominated/chose the plenary speaker. This is 1.5 years in advance of the in-person plenary and gives both ASOR and speakers more time to plan. The PC forwarded an unranked list of potential speakers, and a speaker was chosen by the CCC. Previously the plenary discussion had occurred in January, therefore only 10 months before the

in-person AM. This was not an extra burden for the PC and we see it continuing as a good practice.

Program Committee Membership

A big welcome to PC member Kiersten Neumann who stepped into Helen Dixon's big shoes as Co-chair of the PC this year. The PC also welcomed Petra Creamer as its new member this past year, who replaced Helen Dixon. Several people applied for the call for members, and we were pleased with the response. The PC thanks with deep gratitude and appreciation the members of our committee who are rotating off after two terms: Gojko Barjomovic and Jennifer Gates-Foster. We sincerely appreciate the time, commitment, and engagement of Gojko and Jen and we wish them the best of luck in future endeavors in service to our discipline!

Respectfully submitted,
Allison Thomason and Kiersten Neumann, Co-chairs
on behalf of the Program Committee

2023 ASOR Program Committee membership:

Kiersten Neumann, Co-chair (2022-2025; member 2021-22)

Allison Thomason, Co-chair (2019-2025)

Gojko Barjamovic (2018-2023)

Hanan Charaf (2020-2022)

Petra Creamer (2022-2025)

Debra Foran (2020-2022)

Jennifer Gates-Foster (2018-2023)

Felix Hoffmayer (2022-2024)

Kate Larson (2020-2022)

Scott Moore (2019-2024)

Madadh Richey (2021-2023)

Sarah Wenner, Poster chair (2020-2022)