

ASOR Program Committee Annual Report 2024

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

Summary of PC Activities:

2023-4 was a year in which activities returned to “almost normal” for the Program Committee (PC) over the course of the year. We successfully navigated ASOR’s first fully hybrid meeting, although there were a number of technical and scheduling/timing issues that we addressed prior to the 2024 hybrid meeting. We also consulted on and continued to make program changes related to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion work happening across ASOR committees. Finally, we revised, discussed and voted on a new set of guidelines for the PC, which were forwarded to the CCC and EC. In the guidelines, we provided more transparency about our processes and practices, as well as useful information for prospective MOSW proposers and PC membership applicants. At some point, we will also provide a separate document for ASOR members that specifically supplies targeted information that they might need as they plan their MOSW proposals. Ideally, that document will be posted on the PC webpage as well as the AM CFP MOSW page.

The PC also voted to eliminate and change the titles/descriptions of a few standing ASOR sessions, to reflect changes in fields and member interests. “Archaeology of the Near East and Video Games” was changed to “Archaeology of the Near East and New Media”. The session “Career Options for ASOR Members” was eliminated as the PC felt these topics could be covered in other spaces at the AM.

In keeping with our new practice and timeline for nominating the plenary speakers, in May, 2024, the PC forwarded a 3-person list to the CCC and EC, who nominated/chose the plenary speaker for 2025. This is 1.5 years in advance of the in-person plenary and gives both ASOR and speakers more time to plan.

Program Committee Membership

The PC welcomed Robyn Price and Christopher Jones as its new members. Several people applied for the call for members, and we were pleased with the response. Several members also agreed to serve a second term on the PC, including Felix Höflmayer and Madadh Richey. The PC thanks with deep gratitude and appreciation the single member of our committee who is rotating off this year after two terms of service: Scott Moore. We sincerely appreciate the time, commitment, and engagement of Scott—especially in relation to all matters Cypriot—and we wish him the best of luck in future endeavors in service to our discipline! ASOR Staff and the PC will put out an open call for a new member with complementary expertise to the current members of the PC shortly. As the PC enters 2025, the PC and Co-chairs will work to identify possible replacements for Allison Thomason, who will rotate off the PC Co-chairship in 2025.

2023 Annual Meeting Recap (Hybrid/Chicago):

Shortly after the 2022 AM, ASOR Staff and the PC learned that we could produce a fully hybrid meeting in 2023, without the need for separate virtual and in-person events. The ASOR Staff and the PC enacted all of the proposed changes from 2022. The first hybrid AM in Chicago

was relatively well attended, considering the events in Israel/Gaza of Oct. 7, 2023, and it was exciting to be back and reconnect with our colleagues more fully in person after the disruptions of the Covid pandemic. Dr. Rubina Raja gave a very data-driven keynote, which was received well. We re-introduced the timestamps for individual presentations into the Program schedule for attendees' convenience. The idea was that PowerPoint slides would be pre-loaded onto laptop computers purchased by ASOR and supplied in each session room to avoid last minute technological issues. However, we found that despite PC and Staff requests for in-person presenters to submit their PowerPoint presentation files and for online presenters to submit recordings of their presentations ahead of the AM, there were still a number of difficulties related to technology, session chair training, and hybrid participation. Several papers did not, therefore, start on the time stamped in the program, and several sessions went over their allotted times. ASOR Staff, student helpers, and various PC members tried as best they could to solve the on-site technological and other issues, and by the third and fourth days of the hybrid meeting, sessions seemed to go much more smoothly than the first two days.

Planning for the 2024 AM (Hybrid/Boston):

Post-conference briefings in 2023 allowed us to make the decision to allow presentations no longer than 20 minutes each, therefore allowing a minimum of 4 and maximum of 5 papers for sessions (different for workshops). We also decided to add time to the program schedule each day in order to ensure proper "transition" time between presentations within sessions. Therefore, the first session of each day begins at 8:15 (from 8:20 am), and the final session ends at 6:30 pm. We also decided to move the presenters' submission deadline earlier to ensure proper pre-loading of the ASOR computers before the conference. ASOR Staff also indicated that the in-room ASOR attendants would stay within a single room for both of the two morning or afternoon sessions, rather than moving for each session, thus ensuring continuity of technological knowledge to help session chairs and presenters.

Special Note Regarding the Events in Gaza/Israel/Lebanon:

The events in the Middle East on and after October 7, 2023, have continued to affect our program for the Annual Meeting of November 2024, although with much less disruption than in 2023. Since last year, chairs of PC-approved MOSW were given the option to postpone their sessions until 2024, and some chose that option; many of those MOSW are on the program for 2024, although a small number of sessions have had to be cancelled, which we were able to determine far before the publication of the academic program. The expansion of the war into Lebanon in the second half of 2024 has led to difficulties for our Lebanese colleagues to attend in person; if technology allows, they may attend virtually with help from substitute chairs in person in Boston for the standing Archaeology of Lebanon session.

We are pleased that the AM program is quite robust and full with 67 MOSW time slots and 61 standing ASOR time slots, which is close to the maximum number of sessions the conference can run. This includes many presentations (online and in-person) by colleagues directly affected by the events in the Middle East, even as we meet with heavy hearts and concern for all of our colleagues and loved ones about the situation in Gaza/Israel and now also Lebanon.

Poster Session:

The PC, led by Sarah Wenner (PC member and Posters Chair), also allowed both in-person and online 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 online Poster Gallery. A poster session Q&A with all in-person authors present takes place at lunchtime on Saturday in Boston, with laptops available for online 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 will be in the in-person format for Boston, 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. The Plenary address will be delivered by Dr. Fikri Kulikoglu on his work in Anatolian archaeology. The part of the program involving ASOR-organized Roundtables will continue for the second time, scheduled on Thursday at lunchtime, with CFP for informal Roundtables managed by ASOR Staff (separate from the academic program managed by the PC).

Finally, because the location of Boston for the in-person component was chosen in part due to museums of interest to ASOR members, we are delighted that the **Harvard Art Museums** will host for pre-registered attendees a workshop entitled “The Museum is Your Classroom” on Wednesday at 3 pm, and the **Harvard Museum of the Ancient Near East** will host a reception in their galleries for badge-holding attendees on Saturday evening in Cambridge (with attendees pre-registering for free). ASOR will also provide shuttle transportation from the Park Plaza Hotel in Back Bay Boston to the HMANE. ASOR badge holders will also be able to visit the **Museum of Fine Arts** for the duration of the AM. Finally, many of the familiar extra-program events are occurring in Boston, including: the Session Chair reception on Wednesday afternoon, post-plenary all-ASOR reception, affiliated society receptions, and the ECS brown bag lunch and evening reception, among other events.

Sustainability Efforts:

The ability of ASOR to offer a hybrid format for the AM for the second time, and this time on the East Coast, is a great stride forward in achieving sustainability efforts. Again, for the in-person VAM, as with the 2023 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 Boston hotel for convenience, as well as the online program through the Guidebook App. This will be a first use of Guidebook, and ASOR Staff and PC will monitor feedback about it from attendees. Finally, the PC will continue to schedule in-person AMs in travel-friendly hubs such as Boston with related cultural interest sites, and will continue most dissemination of information and schedules through PDFs and the AM webpage and the online conference program, which is now integrated with ASOR's membership portal.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Initiatives:

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 in the AM program book.

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 urges the ASOR EC to consider fully funding any travel arrangements and registration for the Plenary speaker(s), especially if those speakers are traveling from outside of the US. The DEI committee recently submitted a recommendation that ASOR switch to a sliding scale cancellation fee for members unable to participate in the meeting. The PC forwarded this request to ASOR's Executive Director and ASOR staff, who determine these fiscal matters.

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 Boston, the DEI Committee will have a welcome desk next to ASOR registration as well as a dedicated communal lounge space for 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. The DEI Committee and PC Co-chairs also attended chair training (online) sessions to encourage best practices related to DEI for both running sessions and creating accessible visuals in presentations.

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 was the challenges regarding the institutional affiliation and geographic

terminology references for institutions/sites in occupied regions or areas of conflict. In 2024, the EC and BoT discussed a report prepared by the ad hoc committee looking into the issues, and decided to keep ASOR policies and practices more or less unchanged with respect to these issues, thus the PC at this time will continue its current practices of monitoring (along with session chairs) current geographic language acceptable/used by ASOR for presentations.

The DEI Committee worked diligently with PC Co-chairs and ASOR Staff to create ASOR intro slides for hybrid and inclusive meetings, which were pre-loaded and shown at the beginning of every session or workshop (on the ASOR computers) for the hybrid meeting in Chicago; however the time constraints that resulted from the technological issues often made such slides difficult to broadcast adequately. Hopefully, the technological and scheduling changes we have enacted for the hybrid AM 2024 will better allow the ASOR intro slides to loop fully on the ASOR laptops at the beginning of all sessions.

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. The PC Co-chairs and DEI Committee recommended that we utilize similar statements from institutions (museums, universities) in the cities of the AM. This discussion was passed up the line, and the decision by the EC and the BoT was to include a link on the AM webpage to a host city webpage and a QR code to information about the history of the city hosting the AM, including discussion of the indigenous, enslaved, dislocated, and diasporic peoples of the region. This will be in place of a specific oral or visual land acknowledgement at the in-person meeting.

Planning for AM 2025 and future years:

Planning for AM 2025 is just getting underway. For 2025, ASOR will meet in-person/hybrid at the Boston Park Plaza once again, and in conjunction with SBL. The 2025 call for MOSW proposals will be open from December 15, 2024, to January 15, 2025. The 2025 call for papers will be open from February 15 to March 15, 2025. The PC will meet in late January 2025 to discuss the proposed MOSW for AM 2025, and March to discuss the 2026 plenary speakers.

In our in-person PC meeting in Boston, we will continue to discuss the successes and challenges of the hybrid meeting format and the new online platform/AM website, as well as the feasibility of the early upload (by November 6 for the November 20–23, AM 2024) for presenter slides and presentation recordings, which has caused some concern among presenters and session chairs leading up to the AM. We will also revisit how the technological challenges and scheduling changes are working out.

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

2024 ASOR Program Committee membership:

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

Allison Thomason, Co-chair (2019-2025)

Hanan Charaf (2020-2025)

Petra Creamer (2022-2025)

Debra Foran (2020-2025)

Felix Höflmayer (2022-2027)
Christopher Jones (2024-2026)
Kate Larson (2020-2025)
Scott Moore (2019-2024)
Robyn Price (2024-2026)
Madadh Richey (2021-2026)
Sarah Wenner, Poster chair (2020-2025)