

**SHAFR Council Meeting**  
**January 17, 2025, noon-4pm (Eastern)**  
**Meeting Minutes**

**Council members present:** Melani McAlister, chair (presiding), Megan Black, Brooke Blower, Brian Etheridge, Gretchen Heefner, Ann Heiss, Chris Hulsof, Elisabeth Leake, Mitch Lerner, Kaeten Mistry, Christopher Nichols, Jay Sexton, Alexandra Southgate

**Others attending:** Faith Bagley, Elizabeth Ferguson, Anne Foster, Petra Goedde, Richard Immerman (ex officio), Jay Sarkar, Amy Sayward (ex officio), Aileen Teague

**Introductory matters:**

Melani McAlister, SHAFR President, welcomed Council members, orchestrated a short round of introductions, and stated her pleasure in working with everyone this year, which included making new committee appointments. She also explained that graduate students are now members of all standing committees (other than prize and elected committees). She also pointed to a new “consent calendar” at the end of the agenda; this allows for the Council to address and approve routine matters.

**Conference matters:**

Amy Sayward presented an update on the final accounting for the 2024 Toronto conference. She explained that SHAFR was due to receive a refund of the amount deposited with the University of Toronto; the final amount would depend on the exchange rate. That refund can provide a bit of a buffer toward the projected, balanced budget for this current fiscal year that started on November 1. Sayward also reported that there had been no violations of the code of conduct in the previous calendar year. She notified Council members that they were all potential members of the Sanctions and Appeals committees, and in that capacity, they will be invited to attend the pre-conference, on-line training with SHAFR’s ombudsperson. Mitch Lerner highlighted the cost of the president’s brunch and *Diplomatic History* breakfast meeting at the conference and suggested that cost-saving alternatives be considered for upcoming conferences. He also praised the Conference Consultant and Executive Director for their work. McAlister commented that she would take cost-saving measures but the *Diplomatic History* editors and staff certainly should get breakfast with their early morning meeting.

Council then moved to discussion of the upcoming 2025 conference. Conference Consultant Kaete O’Connell’s report had requested Council consideration of a one-day registration rate for non-academic attendees. McAlister stated that she would like to see some specific language about that rate so that it is not generally available on the registration form, given the high costs that SHAFR pays to put on the conference for everyone. O’Connell’s report also presented the budget for AV for this year’s conference. Lerner pointed out that Council (in October 2023) had expressed consensus on not including AV for the 2025 Conference due to the cost. Given that Council had affirmed (but not formally voted on) the recommendation of the Ways & Means Committee to support O’Connell’s recommendation on negotiating a better AV price at its September 2024 meeting in light of an improved financial outlook, McAlister requested a motion to affirm O’Connell’s negotiated cost for conference AV. The motion passed unanimously. McAlister stated that the Ways & Means Committee can review this decision. Sayward also mentioned that a meeting with the Local Arrangements Committee for the 2026 conference in Columbus, Ohio, was upcoming soon.

For the 2027 conference, SHAFR signed a contract years ago with the Arlington Renaissance. However, given the rapidly rising costs at the hotel, Sayward and O'Connell have proposed a potential move to other event space in Arlington, provided by either Virginia Tech or George Mason. In relation to that potential change, Council has discussed keeping the housing block at the hotel. Council expressed consensus on authorizing SHAFR's hotel broker to see whether or how the contract can be amended and what the consequences might be so that Council can take final action at its June meeting.

Sayward then pointed out the draft request for proposals (RFP) for the 2028 conference. McAlister suggested a correction to the due date to ensure that proposals were submitted in time for a September Council meeting.

**Financial matters:**

Sayward reviewed the fiscal year-end report (ended October 31, 2024) with Council, which showed a budget surplus sufficient to cover the projected deficit for the current fiscal year beyond the Leffler donation. She highlighted that during this fiscal year, royalties from *Diplomatic History* under the new contract with Oxford University Press are significantly lower (which is why Council has worked so diligently to reduce expenditures), and this year SHAFR still has to pay membership fees on last year's contract (which will not be the case moving forward). She also highlighted that the increase in the "office expenses" category was primarily to cover increased costs for software subscription increases (in Member Clicks and Quick Books). As an informational item, she stressed that the "Endowment Draw" is listed under the "income" category—because money drawn from the endowment moves into SHAFR's account to be spent in that fiscal year—but it is not income, simply a transfer from the endowment account to the checking account. Elisabeth Leake asked whether there were plans for *Diplomatic History* to become entirely open access, which would impact the revenue generated from publishing the journal. Elizabeth Ferguson from Oxford University Press later confirmed that that is not the direction that the press is pursuing at this time.

Council then turned its attention to the report of the Funding Task Force created at the last Council meeting to make recommendations to Council about the Leffler unrestricted donation of \$100,000. Following Mel and Phyllis Leffler's initial guidance, \$7,013 will be deducted from the gift to fully endow the new LaFeber-Wood Teaching Prize. Peter Hahn had chaired the task force to determine how best to steward the remaining gift; the task force recommended a named, endowed travel fund. Council discussed using such travel funds to support the annual conference and potentially the summer institute (especially in future years). There was significant discussion about the task force recommendation that these funds not be used for graduate student travel, as students have potential access to institutional funds as well as Divine travel grants. Leake, who served on the task force, pointed to decreased travel funding for faculty, especially in the United Kingdom, and no travel funding for most precarious faculty. There was also discussion about whether to use Leffler funds for travel to regional conferences (that is, SHAFR-approved conferences or workshops organized in non-US settings such as Asia or Europe). McAlister explained that Council could not make a final decision on this issue today, because it was lacking a recommendation from the Ways & Means Committee, which was not able to meet before Council. But having had a full discussion in person of this (and other financial issues on the agenda), Council will be prepared to vote over email following the Ways & Means recommendation.

McAlister closed the discussion of financial issues by encouraging all Council members to make a donation to SHAFR as an important first step in developing a culture of giving within the organization.

Council also considered the new memorandum of agreement (MOA) with O'Connell, which would expand her duties and change her title to Deputy Director. As Sayward had included in Council's document packet, a 2020 task force had recommended a similar set-up, and Council had suggested such a move when it hired Richard Immerman to serve as incoming Executive Director. Exactly what duties the new position would be responsible for had been the topic of several conversations between Immerman and O'Connell, resulting in the language included in this MOA. As the MOA calls for an increased stipend, a final Council decision will await the recommendation of the Ways & Means Committee, which can also make a recommendation on the start date. This had not yet been determined, though Immerman affirmed that O'Connell has already started undertaking some of the duties laid out in the MOA; McAlister therefore recommended that the start date be immediate. Council expressed no objections or reservations about the proposed MOA. Council also expressed consensus that it would be up to the Deputy Director to determine through which social media SHAFR messages should be disseminated.

#### **Publication matters:**

Anne Foster and Petra Goedde, editors of *Diplomatic History*, and Ferguson, from Oxford University Press (OUP), joined the meeting. Ferguson highlighted aspects of her publisher's report, which had a new format. She noted that about 20% of this year's research articles were published under open access, which will probably increase in the future, especially as OUP is about to sign contracts with some U.S. consortia. However, she expects the number of open access consortia agreements to plateau within five years. Ferguson highlighted that usage of the journal continues to grow, and it is cited heavily across the field.

Foster and Goedde then reviewed aspects of their editors' report. The biggest transition had been in the turnover of assistant editors last summer. But, they stressed, this transition had been seamless. They also commented that many of the rejected articles had been "paper mill" or artificial intelligence (AI) submissions. They added that they had conducted workshops to help new authors submit articles and have better chance of acceptance, which they see as part of their mission. They have also been thinking about how best to commemorate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the journal.

Ferguson then discussed how OUP has been approached to "rent" its data to be used to train large-language models to improve the quality of AI models. OUP is considering this arrangement, because it is limited to trusted partners, it generates revenue for the journals (potentially \$10,000-\$15,000), and the licenses prohibit the summarizing or citing of journal content and ends all access after expiration. Council expressed appreciation for OUP's careful approach and appreciated how working with ethical partners can help them succeed in the larger industry. In response to a query as to whether article authors need to be notified about that their article would be used for the purpose of AI training, Ferguson explained that OUP legal counsel had been consulted and that article agreements do not require this, because OUP maintains full copyright to the work and the articles do not generate author revenue. Chris Hulshof moved that SHAFR accept participation in OUP's proposed licensing agreements, Megan Black seconded, and Council voted unanimously in favor.

Council then moved to discussion of the draft memorandum of agreement (MOA) with incoming *Passport* editors Brian Etheridge and Silke Zoller. Etheridge recused himself from this discussion. Council was in support of the language of the MOA, which the editors had also reviewed, and was prepared to approve it following a recommendation from the Ways & Means Committee. Etheridge then rejoined the meeting.

Sayward reviewed the transition to Sheridan as the printer for *Diplomatic History*, now that OUP will no longer publish it in paper nor will it print *Passport* under its new contract. McAlister asked for two council members to work with the *Passport* editors to make recommendations on moving forward with print publications in order to reduce printing and mailing costs. Alexandra Southgate (who already works with *Diplomatic History*) and Lerner (former *Passport* editor) volunteered. It was also recommended that O'Connell participate in these discussions, since there might be a social media component.

#### **Advocacy matters:**

Immerman—after reminding Council that the National Coalition for History (NCH), to which SHAFR had belonged, had dissolved the previous fall—presented the information he had gathered about the National Humanities Alliance (NHA). He emphasized that it does not advocate in the same way as the NCH had, but it does a lot of good work (demonstrated in the year-in-review document) and advocates for the humanities in general. Its membership fee (\$1,000) is significantly less than the NCH. Asked for his recommendation, Immerman responded that he was in support of joining.

McAlister presented on the American Council on Learned Societies (ACLS); she serves on the board currently. While ACLS is best known for its grants to individual fellows, it is also working on the future of the humanities and provides excellent training for member societies' executive directors and boards. SHAFR would have to apply for membership; the annual cost is approximately \$2,200.

Council members noted NHA's work with admiration, and some thought that its lobby days might meet some SHAFR members' desire to more personally lobby for issues—such as declassification and support for the U.S. National Archives—about which they are passionate. Concrete action needed to await a recommendation from the Ways & Means Committee.

#### **Council matters:**

SHAFR's new contract with OUP requires a conflict-of-interest policy, which SHAFR does not currently have. McAlister solicited Council members to work from the draft general policy included in the document packet. Mary Ann Heiss and Jay Sexton volunteered.

#### **Committee matters:**

Council then turned to the report of the Bernath Lecture Prize Committee, which had recommended measures aimed at better publicizing the prize and making the application process clearer. Easy adjustments included highlighting the award in SHAFR communications, including *Passport* and the monthly e-blast. Discussion about the nomination process—especially the number of recommendation letters—opened a larger discussion about how much supporting material is helpful and/or desired by the selection committees across SHAFR, including the Nominating Committee. There was a general consensus to pick up this conversation (with additional information from the affected committees) at the June Council meeting. There was also a mention that the Bernath Lecture Prize Committee's deadline

might shift from October to February now that the lecture itself is presented at the June conference meeting rather than the January American Historical Association conference.

McAlister also requested and received support from Council to standardize the expiration dates of committees, which is also a need following SHAFR's withdrawal from formal activities at the AHA.

Council then turned to a series of recommendations from the Internationalization Task Force. Its first recommendation dealt with membership rates, with a number of changes suggested. McAlister highlighted the creation of a rate for those making less than \$25,000 per year, which might best represent the need of those in countries whose currencies have especially high conversion rates to U.S. dollars. This recommendation as well as the others will be referred to the Membership Committee, which will make a recommendation ahead of the June Council meeting.

The next recommendation requested the establishment of regional network steering committees. Sayward replied that these could be created by the President (who has authority over all committees under the by-laws) and could then function like all other committees—e.g., being asked if they had a report and any actions requested of Council ahead of each meeting. In considering the question of funding regional activities, Council members expressed some concern that regional conferences could hurt attendance at the main SHAFR conference, especially from international members, which would be the opposite of the goal of the Internationalization Task Force. There was consensus on the need to balance the needs of the central and regional organizations, especially in times when SHAFR has had to make a series of budget cuts over the past decade. Hulshof did, however, talk about his experience with the Association of Asian Studies and the ways in which its Asian-based conferences allowed a significant number of Asian members without travel funding to attend an excellent conference. There were also concerns expressed about whether and how SHAFR could balance funding of three or potentially more regional networks. Leake spoke about the work of the UK-Ireland seminar series that she had organized and stressed how its on-line seminars focused on works in progress and therefore had been significantly different from the conference and had not required additional funding. Gretchen Heefner suggested that there might be a network enhancement fund added to the next budget, and any regional organization could apply to Council for those funds with a budget. A consensus emerged about prioritizing travel funds to the main conference, especially as an increasing number of international and even U.S.-based scholars lack access to travel funds. Hulshof suggested that this might be an area that the Development Committee could focus on in some of its fund-raising efforts. McAlister suggested creating a task force (Kaeten Mistry, Chris Nichols, and Leake volunteered) that would work toward a specific proposal for Council (and the Development Committee).

Program Committee chairs Aileen Teague and Jay Sarkar then joined the meeting. Sarkar highlighted several aspects from their written report, including the international and diverse nature of the Program Committee; the inclusion of a coffee break for international scholars; the emphasis on themes, anniversaries, and co-sponsorships; the keynote from Maggie Blackhawk, which will foreground the intersections between foreign relations and indigeneity; the plenary; the series' editors' panel; a guided tour of the Smithsonian Institution's "Giving in America" exhibit; a film screening; the career mentorship workshop; and a careers roundtable—all of which promise to make the upcoming conference particularly vibrant. Teague reported that they had received a total of 142 proposals, 30 of which were

Individual submissions. The Program Committee was currently trying to figure out how best to configure some of those individual submissions into panels.

McAlister commended the Program Committee for its diligent work and also highlighted the welcome reception being at the Spy Museum—and Council also thanked them!

Council then shifted to the request from the Committee on Women in SHAFR for funding for an in-person, second-book workshop at the upcoming SHAFR Conference. McAlister was an enthusiastic supporter, as was Leake. Since the budget could be accommodated within an existing budget line-item, this proposal did not require Ways & Means Committee review. Sexton made a motion to support this proposal, which was seconded by Heiss and received unanimous Council support. Sayward also mentioned that she and O’Connell were already working on the committee’s suggestion to facilitate dinner plans for SHAFR members and pointed out how the Program Committee had already integrated a number of mentorship opportunities into the conference program (another suggestion from the Committee on Women in SHAFR).

Immerman then briefly discussed the Advisory Committee on Historical Diplomatic Documentation (Historical Advisory Committee or HAC) to the State Department Office of the Historian and its traditionally strong ties with SHAFR, which had become less robust in recent years. McAlister asked him to make further inquiries and report back to Council in June with specific recommendations.

Hulshof then turned Council’s attention to the report of the Graduate Student Committee, which had been exceptionally active in recruiting new graduate student members and in hosting webinars on SHAFR’s grants, conference proposals, and conference attendance. He especially thanked the outgoing co-chair, Dr. Kelsey Zavelo, and welcomed the incoming co-chair, Alexandra Southgate. He also highlighted the process that McAlister had used in appointing graduate student members to all standing committees, who would then be part of the Graduate Student Committee as a whole. With Council consensus, Sayward affirmed that the document outlining this process would be added to the President’s Google Drive folder on committee appointments to institutionalize that practice.

The consent agenda included approval of the minutes of the last Council meeting as well as a resolution thanking all of the volunteers who had worked with SHAFR over the last several years, including those who have rotated off Council, the various committees, and the editorial board of *Diplomatic History*.

The Council meeting adjourned at 4:14pm (EST).