

The Last Word: SHAFR and Internationalization

Brian Cuddy and Sean Fear

We recently completed our term as co-chairs of SHAFR's Task Force on Internationalization and we are writing to provide updates to SHAFR's membership on the work of the Task Force and, in particular, on the views of non-U.S.-based members surveyed by the Task Force.

As has often been noted, our field has a twin mandate, its attention fixed at once on both the United States and the wider world. This dual focus at times gives rise to tension over the essence of what we research and teach. Most readers of *Passport* will be familiar with debates over the purpose, the direction, and even the names of our organisation, its journal, and the field in which we work. (See Ryan Irwin's "Requiem for a Field" in the September 2023 issue of *Passport* for the most recent survey of questions that have defined and divided our field.) The Task Force deliberately did not engage with these debates. As interesting and generative as the tension inherent in our field can be, our mission was not so much intellectual as social: to better understand and to amplify the views and interests of SHAFR's international membership within the organisation.

The Task Force originated with an early 2020 petition co-ordinated by Barbara Keys, "A Call for the Genuine Internationalization of SHAFR." The petition made several requests "intended to address the under-representation of the concerns and interests of non-U.S.-based members in SHAFR and more broadly to ensure that SHAFR more effectively grows and adapts to changing conditions in the 21st century." These requests included proposed by-law amendments to hold at least one conference every decade outside North America, and to include at least one non-U.S.-based member on Council (SHAFR's governing body). The petition's final request was to "ask SHAFR's President to establish a Task Force on Internationalization and to consider surveying SHAFR's non-North America-based members about their concerns."

Council considered these requests in 2020 in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, and so postponed a decision on hosting annual meetings outside the United States. But it did endorse the petition's proposal to include at least one non-U.S.-based member on Council, and it accepted the request to establish a Task Force. SHAFR's then-president Kristin Hoganson invited us to co-chair the Task Force, and took the lead in assembling a wonderful group of scholars to serve as Task Force members: Jessica Gienow-Hecht (Freie Universität Berlin, Germany); Gökser Gökçay (Üsküdar Üniversitesi, Turkey); Hideaki Kami (University of Tokyo, Japan); Carlo Patti (Universidade Federal de Goiás, Brazil); Vanni Pettinà (El Colegio de México, Mexico); Doug Rossinow (Metropolitan State University, United States); Jayita Sarkar (University of Glasgow, United Kingdom); and Taomo Zhou (Nanyang Technological University, Singapore). We are grateful to these colleagues for serving on the Task Force with us and for contributing their expertise, insight, and dedication to our field.

The Task Force understood the idea of "internationalization" loosely and broadly. SHAFR's international membership includes members based outside the United States (including U.S. citizens based overseas), but also members based in the United States who might not identify solely or at all as American. There is also, of course, a significant share of SHAFR's membership whose scholarly interests include countries and regions outside of the United States. While the Task Force was originally set up

to ensure the views of members based outside the United States were heard, we worked wherever possible with all the different international elements of SHAFR in mind.

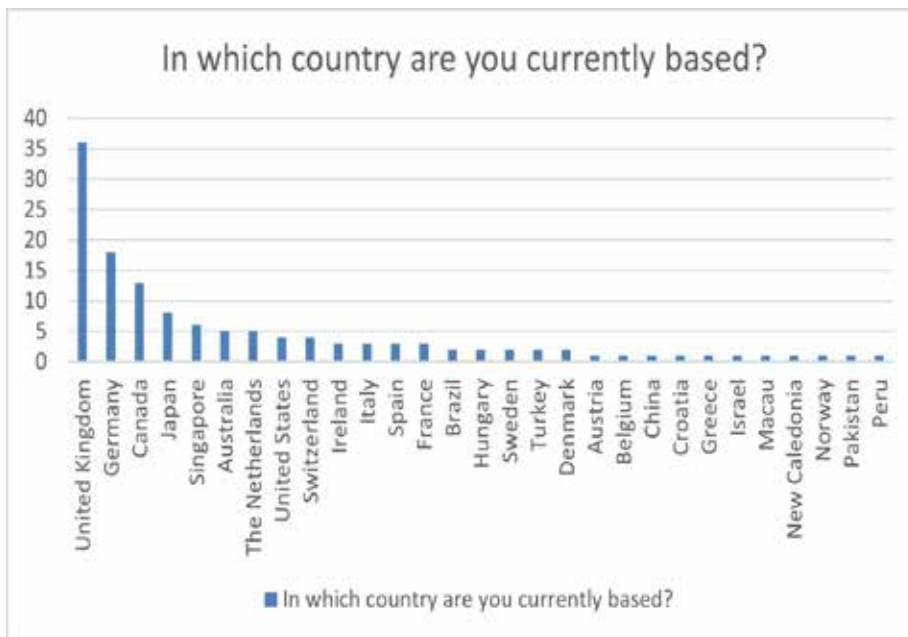
One of our principal tasks was to survey current and potential international SHAFR members. We were delighted by the level of engagement with our survey, which received over 140 responses from 29 countries.

The survey reinforced the diversity of views on SHAFR as an organisation with a global membership. When asked "What does internationalization mean for you?" survey respondents replied with a variety of answers. For some, "internationalization" is primarily an intellectual commitment, which could include "intellectual diversity [and] different historiographical worlds colliding against one another creating new knowledge otherwise impossible"; "engagement with different non-U.S. perspectives on how history is made, perspectives that do not speak to U.S.-focused issues, methods, or ways to study diplomatic history"; or, for instance, "Being part of a global community of scholars whose work focuses on international history and the history of U.S. foreign relations but whose perspectives genuinely reflect as broad a cultural and intellectual diversity as possible."

Others, however, emphasised the need for tangible changes to facilitate greater international outreach and a stronger sense of belonging among members based overseas. For one respondent, this meant "An appreciation that U.S. foreign relations history is of interest not just to Americans, and an attempt to make non-Americans feel welcome in the organisation." Others called for action to ensure that internationalization represents "more than a buzzword." "SHAFR has spoken of internationalising for years (if not decades)," they continued, "but has not implemented a sustained plan." High on the list of concrete suggestions to improve SHAFR's international representation were greater sensitivity to the increasing cost of travel to the annual conference, organising SHAFR events in non-North American locations, and pro-active efforts to recruit overseas scholars whose research is relevant to the international history field.

Perhaps the most consistent suggestion for increasing SHAFR's international profile and representation was seeing greater international representation on SHAFR's key governing bodies. Respondents called, for instance, for "greater involvement in SHAFR committees and leadership from scholars based outside North America"; for increased "diversity of SHAFR board members for the organisation, the journal [*Diplomatic History*], and *Passport*"; and for "having scholars who are not based in the United States serving on Council, particularly as President, having editors for *Diplomatic History* that are not based in the United States, and holding the annual conference outside of North America." To that end, in its interim report (December 2021), the Task Force recommended mandatory international representation on the annual meeting's program committee, which Council accepted. In our final report (December 2023), we further identified Council and the nominating committee as bodies that would benefit from greater and more consistent international representation. A designated non-U.S.-based member on the nominating committee could be given a mandate to include international representation in SHAFR's leadership ranks.

Given the annual meeting's centrality to our organisation, it is no surprise that survey respondents wanted to see some changes to



the way it works. SHAFR’s international members shared a broad range of constructive proposals, including “Online networking events and article/book manuscript workshops”; and some sort of provision for hybrid conference engagement given that (as several respondents noted) “mid-June is in the middle of the semester in some countries.” A recurring theme was the desirability of experimenting with regional “sub-networks” within the broader international SHAFR umbrella, with dozens of suggestions for such initiatives, including: “Further strengthening of regional networks”; “Sub-networks by region (such as Northeast Asia)”; “regional chapters and meetings”; and “a series of regional (outside the U.S.) seminars/mini conferences.”

Thus, to expand SHAFR’s international membership and to strengthen its sense of community and inclusion outside of the annual meeting, our final report proposed that Council explore the establishment of regional networks modelled on the successful SHAFR United Kingdom and Ireland discussion group, which since September 2020 has met informally via Zoom several times per semester to discuss members’ works in progress. Our survey indicated that such regionally focused networks (possibly in conjunction with smaller regional in-person events) would be much appreciated by SHAFR’s international membership. In response to the question “Would you be interested in joining a network in your region of fellow SHAFR members and scholars?” 90 percent of respondents answered “yes.” This enthusiasm extended not only to participating in such networks, but also in helping to organise them. In response to the question “If you answered yes, would you be interested in helping to organise a regional network in your region/area of expertise?” 69 percent of respondents answered “yes.” While ticking a box on a survey

form does not always translate into action, the high number of prospective participants and volunteers suggests that two or three additional regional networks could be sustained, including one in the Asia-Pacific region. We recommended that Council consider establishing such networks.

Perhaps surprisingly given widespread international inflation and mounting cost-of-living difficulties, only 15% of respondents cited cost as a prohibitive factor in seeking or retaining SHAFR membership. However, our final report noted, while the overall number of survey respondents who cited cost as a significant consideration was proportionally low, most respondents are based in high-income countries. Cost remains a significant challenge for members based in lower-income countries especially given the recent relative strengthening of the U.S. dollar against dozens of international currencies. And it was the leading prohibitive factor (29% of respondents) identified by non-members for not joining. We proposed therefore that SHAFR adapt a more detailed membership fee structure, with dues varied

along a greater range of income bands, drawing on the example of other international academic societies such as the Association for Asian Studies (AAS).

Other points from our final report to Council included recommending a networking and social event for international members at the annual conference to strengthen the sense of global community; commending and encouraging ongoing efforts by the *Diplomatic History* team to provide editorial support to prospective authors for whom English is not a first language; and suggesting a regular feature on international members in *Passport* to increase the profile of individual overseas members, raise awareness of the extent of internationalization within SHAFR to date, and foster a sense of welcoming and inclusion to international members.

Reflecting on several years of service as co-chairs of the Internationalization Task Force, we are struck most of all by the passion and enthusiasm of SHAFR members for further developing our international representation and engagement, reflected in the dedication of our fellow Task Force members and in the volume and depth of consideration of international members’ survey responses. The strength of feeling in support of greater internationalization of SHAFR is clear. We encourage all SHAFR members to share your suggestions on internationalization with SHAFR’s leadership and to promote SHAFR to likeminded overseas-based colleagues. We ask international members in particular to consider participating in, if not leading, any new initiatives which may emerge from the Task Force, including regional networks and greater opportunities for overseas-based members to serve on SHAFR committees and Council.