

SHAFR Council Meeting Minutes

April 8, 2021

Present: Andrew Preston, presiding; Kelly Shannon, Karine Walther, Kyle Longley, Andrew Preston, Andrew Johns, Vivien Chang, Lauren Turek, Daniel Immerwahr, Peter Hahn, Barbara Keys, Shaun Armstead, Laura Belmonte, Kristin Hoganson, Emily Conroy-Krutz

Others present: Amy Sayward, ex officio; Faith Bagley

Meeting started 10:00 a.m. EST

Andrew Preston welcomed the Council members and thanked them for attending this first interim meeting between the main January and June meetings. He raised the first issue for Council consideration of the proposal for registration fees that had been circulated ahead of the meeting. Preston also presented the preliminary program to Council for its information.

Because of the unprecedented difficulties of this year and the challenges of organizing SHAFR's first entirely virtual conference under budget, Barbara Keys moved a motion of thanks for the two program chairs—Megan Black and Ryan Irwin—and proposed to recognize their extraordinary efforts. A variety of options were explored, and ultimately Kristin Hoganson moved that Council award them life memberships accompanied by a citation from Council citing their achievement, which would also be published as part of the conference program and in *Passport*. Daniel Immerwahr seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

Council then moved to consideration of conference registration fees. Preston argued that since the conference was projected to be less costly than initially thought and well under Council directives in terms of the maximum subsidy, it made sense to offer free registration to SHAFR members (especially as SHAFR membership is relatively low compared to other organizations), with a \$120 fee for those who either do not want to take a SHAFR membership or who have institutional support for attending, which would effectively function as a donation to the organization.

Some concerns were raised that free registration might mean that those who sign up are not as invested in showing up and participating in the full conference. But this concern was balanced with a concern that attendance might otherwise be low at the end of a difficult academic year in which many people are experiencing Zoom fatigue. There was also concern that a free conference might generate so many participants that the Pheedloop website might be overwhelmed. There was also concern expressed about communicating clearly about the membership discount and the desire to have those with institutional funding support SHAFR by paying the regular registration fee. At the end of the discussion, Preston moved the resolution in his report, which was seconded by Peter Hahn and approved unanimously.

The second item of business for the Council meeting was to revisit and clarify the sexual harassment procedures that had been discussed in January. Following January's discussion, there had been some confusion among Council members about what exactly had been proposed

and approved. Subsequent discussions about the minutes, with SHAFR legal counsel, and among Council members had helped to clarify issues and had been presented ahead of this meeting. But other elements of the procedures—including the appeals and sanctions processes—will require further discussion at the June meeting.

The task force proposed to revisit and reapprove the original motion. The proposal was to use SHAFR's external ombudsman, at \$375 per hour for approximately three hours (approximately \$1,125 in total) for a preliminary investigation of every complaint brought to the task force. Kelly Shannon explained that if there is a complaint at the conference, the proposed procedure would be to refer any complaints automatically to our external ombudsperson to do an immediate investigation—not a final investigation—and make an immediate recommendation whether anyone involved in the incident should be asked to leave the conference. This process would not involve SHAFR officers in the initial step, preserving the objectivity of this initial process. Another advantage of this immediate referral to the external ombudsperson is that it provides clarity for the task force members (who are volunteers and not trained professionals) and provides for a consistent process. The ombudsperson's investigation will be relatively quick and provide recommendations for the immediate term; SHAFR leadership will then follow up, deciding whether the complaint warrants further investigation and/or consequences. SHAFR's counsel agreed that this process was legal.

Shannon argued that the costs involved with referring all complaints to an ombudsperson were worth it, because it shows SHAFR takes such complaints seriously; and it removes any conflicts of interest, as members of the intake team and/or SHAFR leadership are likely to know the parties involved. In the case where someone brought a complaint but did not want to take action, the intake team could take an informational report and pass it on to the SHAFR Executive Director as part of its confidential record-keeping. Such informational/informal reports allow people to come to the intake team to figure out the process without jumpstarting an automatic investigation.

Shannon proposed a motion “to retain an external professional investigator to conduct a preliminary investigation for all formal reports of code of conduct violations to assist SHAFR in determining how to respond to such reports.” Emily Conroy-Krutz seconded; 11 voted in favor, 1 opposed, and 2 abstained. The motion therefore passed with a majority vote; Keys voted against the motion. She argued that automatic investigation did not allow for appropriate consideration of complaints, such as a complaint brought by someone experiencing a mental health crisis where an investigation might worsen that crisis and harm the reputations of those accused. Complaints brought over issues where the facts are not in dispute or where the police were investigating also might not warrant investigation.

Daniel Immerwahr proposed an additional motion based on the discussion: “Members reporting misconduct may opt to have their reports be informal, which would not trigger an automatic investigation - unless the report indicates that there is a reasonable risk of harm to SHAFR members or others. “Karine Walther seconded the motion, 13 voted in favor, and 1 abstained.

Amy Sayward also informed Council that SHAFR was close to having a contract with Tulane University for the 2022 SHAFR Conference. Initial estimates show that the conference will be significantly less expensive than SHAFR's traditional hotel-based conferences.

Meeting adjourned 11:30am EST.