

# **Minutes of the Fall 2009 ASTR Executive Committee Meeting Condado Plaza Hotel, San Juan Puerto Rico 12 November 2009**

Present: Tracy Davis (President), Ric Knowles (Vice President), Wendy Arons (Secretary), Tobin Nellhaus (Treasurer), Nancy Erickson (Administrator, *ex officio*), Matt Omasta (GSC Representative), Daphne Lei, Sandra Richards, Penny Farfan, Scott Magelssen, Harvey Young, James Harding, Patricia Ybarra, Brandi Catanese, Karen Shimakawa, Andrew Sofer, Rebecca Schneider

Absent: Ramón Rivera-Servera

Others Present: Rhonda Blair (President-Elect), Stacey Wolf (VP-Elect), Dorothy Chansky (Awards & Fellowships Chair & EC-Elect), Susan Bennett (Publications Committee Chair & EC-Elect), Tamara Underiner, Sonia Kufinec, Charlotte McIvor (GSC Representative-Elect)

The meeting was called to order at 8:30 a.m. President Davis introduced the newly elected officers and members in attendance.

## **1. Adoption of the Minutes of the Spring 2009 Executive Committee Meeting**

**MOTION:** to approve the Minutes of the Spring EC Meeting, including subsequent e-votes. Moved by Nellhaus, seconded by Knowles. **The motion carried unanimously.**

## **2. Adoption of the Agenda**

**MOTION:** to adopt the agenda prepared by the President for the Fall 2009 EC Meeting. **Moved and carried by acclamation.**

## **3. President's Report - Davis**

### **a) New Committee Appointments**

**MOTION:** to ratify the President's appointments to the Nominating Committee, as follows: Jonathan Chambers (chair), Tavia Nyong'o, Jean Graham-Jones, John Lutterbie, Amy Cook, Henry Bial. Moved by Nellhaus, seconded Knowles. **Motion carried by acclamation.**

### **b) Administrator's contract**

The Administrator's contract has been renewed.

### **c) Necrology**

The President noted that she will ask for a moment of remembrance for Brooks McNamara at the ABM on Saturday, and inquired of the EC if there was anyone else whose passing

should be noted. No additional names were put forward.

#### **d) Co-Sponsored Events**

No co-sponsored event applications are pending

#### **e) Membership**

The President called the EC's attention to a significant drop in membership numbers over the last three years, which has implications for the financial health of the organization. If we continue at the current rate of decline, membership numbers this year will be 15-20% below the mean. The trend predates the economic crash and the crisis in university funding. In the discussion that followed, the following comments and concerns were raised:

- What might help going forward is the planned expansion of the website, to give members a value they can access throughout the year that might help people recognize the value of membership.

- Many of the jobs currently available want someone with a PhD, but very few want the new hire to continue researching—these are primarily teaching and theatre production jobs. This may be affecting membership, if graduate students get jobs that don't require continued research and exposure to the field. Could there be a way to conduct a survey, get feedback from members on how we can better serve those in the profession who do not get research heavy positions, for example, more emphasis on Performance as Research.

- Who are we losing? Is it senior members, midcareer, graduate students? The President noted that while there is a significant decline in retired members, the big drop is among "regular" members (down by 150). EC members wondered if that decline was among more "senior" members of the organization who have become disaffected.

- Perception may be an issue—awards go to a very small minority of members. Numbers on the chart indicate that about 20% of members apply for awards, but only 3% receive them. Does this perhaps have a negative effect, creating the impression that the 'many are subsidizing the few'?

- Is this also a trend in ATHE? Nancy Erickson noted that their numbers are down about 100-150. The President observed that when she brought up our membership decline to representatives from other organizations at the ACLS meeting in the spring, they did not seem to be experiencing the same kind of decline.

- There seems to be a disconnect between conference attendance and membership. In 2008 we had high conference attendance, but a decline in membership. One question we need to ask is: What does membership provide that going to the conference does

not? One easily addressed issue: currently there is insufficient incentive to join as a member to get a reduction in the conference fee. Once someone is a member, we have a chance to retain that person.

- What do we do if someone doesn't renew? MLA shames members into renewing with pestering emails. The Administrator noted that we do three renewals, but we do not have any process to continue to pester non-renewers.

-Why do people join? We might think about giving a reason to join other than the conference. We don't want to just self-perpetuate, we ought to be an arena for scholarly exchange and professional development. How does ASTR contribute to people's career—is there a negative effect of not getting the print newsletter?

-Are people going elsewhere? We should find out what those other organizations are offering that we are not. In addition: what conferences do we compete against in November? American Studies, National Communications Association, African Studies, Modernist Studies. We might want to think about more cooperative conferences.

Brainstorming on the discussion of membership was broken off to be continued during the lunch break; the results of those discussions are recorded later in the minutes.

#### **4. Secretary's Report - Arons**

##### **a) Archives**

Records of ASTR business are being regularly sent to the ASTR Archives.

##### **b) Electronic Voting**

The Secretary thanked the EC for their participation in the electronic voting between meetings, and reminded them to weigh in on electronic discussions in order to have some record of a quorum attending. A question was raised about when a vote would be recorded as an abstention. A person must vote yes, no, or abstain by email; if they do not vote, it is as if they were absent from the meeting (that is, there are fewer than 16 votes recorded).

#### **5. Vice President's Report – Knowles**

##### **a) 2010 Conference**

The text of the Call for Papers and Program Committee for the 2010 Annual Meeting was approved via email.

**MOTION:** to approve the Contract for the 2010 Conference with CORD. Moved by Knowles, seconded by Nellhaus. Vote: 15 yes, 0 no, 0 abstain. **The motion carried unanimously.**

##### **b) 2011 Conference**

We are looking at Montreal as a first choice, Nashville as a second choice. Nicolas Ridout will be Program Chair; the theme is "Economies of Theatre."

**c) Role and operation of the Committee on Conferences and its relationship to the EC.**

The process has been frustrating at times. Issues are deliberated by subcommittee, then brought to the CC for consideration, then to the EC. This is not the most efficient way to use the time and expertise of the membership and committees. Would it be better to have the EC as a whole function as the CC? The President noted that while the duplication of executive function is an issue of concern, we cannot eradicate the CC quickly, it would require a bylaw amendment. The Vice President observed that the CC was most useful in its first year, when we had subcommittees review the structure of the conference; it allowed time that EC doesn't have for reflection. However, the routine review of CFP's and program committees could certainly be done by the EC. Some noted that the CC allows for more participation in governance by members of ASTR. Another argument in favor of keeping the CC is that it keeps members invested, and serves as a conduit into other functions of the organization. Redundancies should be done away with; the EC should view the CC as a strong committee, and not rehash the same discussions that have already been resolved by the CC. This is an issue the new Vice President will take up as she moves into office.

**6. Treasurer's Report - Nellhaus**

**a) Budget**

The Treasurer presented an overview of the current financial situation. The portfolio is recovering better than expected; in addition, conference attendance is higher than originally anticipated. The Administrator estimates 400 attendees after onsite registrations.

A question arose about the 65 stock/ 35 bond split in the portfolio. The Treasurer explained that while our target is 70 stocks/ 30 bonds and cash equivalents, the decline in the stock market changed the stock/bond balance of our portfolio. We currently have a more conservative allocation, which has in fact helped our recovery from the market crash. It would be unwise to rebalance at this point—we have gotten better returns than the benchmark, we've been shielded from many losses; there would be no benefit to moving to a more conservative 60/40 position either.

**b) Conference Fee Waivers**

**MOTION** to establish the following policy on waivers of conference fees for Award recipients: "ASTR conference fees are waived for recipients of the Distinguished Scholar award, publication awards, and awards primarily related to conference attendance or participation; and for student volunteers providing conference assistance." Moved by Nellhaus, seconded by Arons. **Motion withdrawn and referred to ad hoc subcommittee.** The EC's suggestions and comments during discussion of the motion have been collated separately and will be forwarded to the subcommittee for its consideration.

## **7. Conference Chairs – Kuftinec & Underiner**

- The 2009 Conference planning has gone smoothly, however, the Conference Chairs noted that it would be helpful to have some of the protocols regarding the conference (i.e., for whom are hotel room costs covered, etc) more clearly defined for future chairs. There still seems to be a good deal of ad hoc decision making.

- President Davis congratulated Kuftinec and Underiner and thanked them for their hard work on the conference.

## **8. Administrator's Report – Erickson**

- A mailing has gone out to those who have not renewed their membership; there will be an additional mailing in December.

- We have grids for hotels in Montreal & Nashville for a decision about the 2011 Conference.

- The receptions for this year's conference have been well sponsored by *Modern Drama* and the Hemispheric Institute, and there have been good sales of ads in the program. Routledge & others paid for inserts.

-President Davis noted that Erickson has been effective in increasing advertising and sponsorship revenue.

## **9. GSC Report - Omasta**

- GSC Representative Matt Omasta introduced Charlotte McIvor, the GSC Representative-Elect.

- There is a new listserv for graduate students, which primarily compiles a monthly list of CFPs from all relevant organizations; this very useful and positively received. The dissertation support group has been difficult to keep going. At the Saturday GSC meeting some discussion will be devoted to how to provide more effective dissertation support.

- The Silent Auction this year has received many donations, in particular theatre memorabilia, theatre tickets, and books. The bidding this year will be open throughout the conference, in hopes that an extended time period might generate higher bids.

- The Ambassador program this year will be more formalized, with a table next to the registration desk.

- The fact that there are currently 677 graduate students pursuing PhDs in theatre is a dilemma—it is unlikely there will be that many positions in the next five years. Many graduate students are unprepared to do something other than become faculty. What can you

do with the degree other than teach? The odds are against getting a job. Are there too many programs? Too many students being accepted? This is a real concern for graduate students. There are probably also a couple of thousand MFA's competing for jobs. Looking on bright side, Rep-Elect McIvor noted that there are a lot of graduate students to network and pull new members in. The GSC might make some of its initiatives members-only. In addition, they are looking for ways to make the GSC a yearlong presence for grad students; McIvor appealed to the faculty on the EC to let the GSC know if there can be a way to serve their graduate students.

- President Davis alerted members of the EC to the extensiveness and impressiveness of the activities of the GSC—if we can retain these members it speaks well for future ASTR leadership.

- Members of the EC suggested to McIvor that the GSC might send a letter of invitation to faculty that they could pass along to graduate students.

## **10. Nominating Committee - Davis**

**MOTION** to ratify the 2010 elections slate. Moved by Magelssen, seconded by Sofer.

Vote: 14 yes, 0 no, 1 abstention. **Motion carried.**

## **11. Awards and Fellowships - Chansky**

A minor amendment to the submitted report—the Kahan Prize also did not carry a monetary award this year.

### **a) Award Submissions Statistics**

President Davis presented a chart of the number of submissions for awards, as a way of tracking the awards process. EC members were struck by the decline in the number of books submitted for the Hewitt Award; this appears to reflect a decline in the number of books published in theatre studies. We may wish to revisit the decision made in Spring of 2009 to reduce the number of Keller awards, given the high number of applicants this year. A brief discussion about establishing a policy on honorable mentions yielded consensus that this decision should continue to be made by the committees.

### **b) How to adjudicate the Selma Jean Cohen Award?**

This was a new award this year, which provides up to \$1000 to fund someone presenting at the conference on intersections of theatre and dance. Currently, the selection of the winner is up to the Program Chairs, who were caught unawares this year. They assessed the applications and came up with a winner, and then suggested it should fall to a committee. The rationale for giving this task to the Program Chairs was that they would already know who was in the program and could best make a determination. President Davis requested input from the EC on the matter.

Most on the EC agreed that these applications should be adjudicated by people who have

some expertise in dance; the Awards Chair noted that the Sally Banes committee not only is the logical committee to adjudicate, but also has a biennial award in their portfolio and thus is not over tasked. Some members worried that this further concentrates decision-making in the hands of a few, and might add to a perception of elitism; it was also noted that there are over forty ASTR members serving on awards committees, and that the process already can get unwieldy for the Awards Chair. Among those who weighed in on this issue, support seemed divided between those who wanted to see a separate committee for this award (in order to further democratize decision making) and those who felt the decision was best lodged with the Banes committee.

It was suggested that perhaps we should ask candidates to submit a full draft of the presentation to be able to better vet the quality of work, especially given that these proposals will be coming from outside the field. However, it was also noted that we grant the Marshall and Keller (and slots in plenary sessions) based only on an abstract. Yet the Marshall and Keller are not just based on the work but also the applicant's history of service to the organization; this award seems only based on scholarship. A fuller example of the work, or a letter of support from an ASTR member might solve the problem of adjudicating these proposals.

President Davis closed the discussion by noting that it seemed that incoming President Blair had enough input from the EC to make a decision on the matter.

### **c) Raising Awards Profiles**

President Davis asked for suggestions from the EC about how to raise the profile of the awards. EC members observed:

- Perhaps we need to look at what goes into applications so that the work involved is proportional to the money available. Do we care about uniformity of applications?
- We should not be concerned about the number of applications; we should aim to pull in good applications from people who need money to accomplish their research.
- We stripped money from some of the awards, which also strips away incentive.
- Many will only apply if they think they have a very high chance of getting an award.
- We need to increase profiles of awards individually. The more we separate the awards from each other, the better. Perhaps we should categorize them on the website in terms of "Awards for graduate students/ senior scholars/ etc."
- Raising profile of award winners is the best way to raise the profile of awards.
- In addition to making editors and presses aware of the subvention award, we need to get word of our awards to institutions that have grants offices.
- Principle outreach has to go to ASTR membership. Members need to apply. We might have a career session on publication subventions in general; that might help as a means of publicizing the Brooks McNamara award.

### **d) Proposal: Best Essay Prize**

The EC discussed the following proposal for a new Essay Prize (included in the Awards and Fellowships Report):

Purpose:

The American Society for Theatre Research offers an annual award *of \$500\** for the best essay written and published in English in a refereed scholarly journal or volume published by an academic press. The essay can be on any subject in theatre research, broadly construed. The ASTR *Senior*-Essay Prize presentation at the ASTR annual meeting includes an acknowledgement of the editor's contribution to the work.

Eligibility:

The author must be a member of ASTR for at least three years and be at least seven years beyond the Ph.D. Essays must have been published in the calendar year preceding the year in which the award is given. Essays in edited anthologies may not have appeared elsewhere previously.

Nomination:

Nominations may come from the author of an essay, any member of ASTR, or the editor of a journal or volume in which the essay has appeared. Authors may nominate only one essay. Editors may nominate one essay per volume.

Evaluation:

The winning essay will be judged *for its originality, critical rigor, and fluency in related research, and significance to the field. It will be both compelling and pertinent.*

Three friendly amendments were offered to the wording of the prize (highlighted in italics above) and the President called for a **vote of affirmation** on the proposed changes to language, and to refer this to the fundraising committee to advise the EC on naming the prize and/or getting it endowed, and to bring it back to the EC for formal approval in the spring. **The vote was unanimously affirmative.**

**e) Proposal: Chairing Fellowships and Awards**

**MOTION** to change the title of the position of "Awards and Fellowships Chair" to "Director of Awards and Fellowships" and to strongly recommend that the President attempt to find a member of the EC to serve in this capacity. Moved by Arons, seconded by Knowles. Vote: 14 yes, 1 no, 0 abstentions. **The motion carried.**

**12. Publications Committee - Bennett**

**a) Theatre Survey**

- *Theatre Survey* is looking for a new Book Review Editor.

- The contract with Cambridge University Press (CUP) will expire 12/31/2010; the Publications Committee seeks input from the EC regarding the benefits that currently accrue from our relationship with CUP. Currently the relationship works well for the editors. However, we also need to assess what is best financially for the organization. *Theatre*

*Survey* is being courted by Routledge. Individual subscriptions to the journal are down; increasingly, revenues will come from electronic access, whether packaged by publishers or by third party aggregators. CUP does not make clear what kinds of revenues the electronic version of *TS* generates for the press. CUP seems to strike different deals with different aggregators, who pay more for more access/ more recent issues, one would assume. So far this year is the first year that the revenue coming in is higher than the money going out to Cambridge, but if membership numbers go up, we'll owe CUP more money. Input from the EC centered on the following:

- What are we doing to raise awareness of and access to *TS* worldwide? This is where a press like CUP with a worldwide presence is an advantage.
- One drawback with CUP in terms of accessibility and international profile is that people tend to go to Project Muse before Cambridge Online. It might be good to send Johns Hopkins an email letting them know they could put their hat in the ring, to get us onto Project Muse.
- We have a new online management system, we'd have to revamp that, as well as have the full run re-digitized if we moved to Routledge.
- What would Routledge do in terms of access? Bennett noted that Routledge has one person on their team whose main job is to liaise with JSTOR. The energy and direction of Routledge's marketing is way ahead of Cambridge's. We may need to ask Cambridge if they can provide similar marketing support. Schneider noted that the Routledge database Taylor and Francis is the third most used database at Brown, and possibly the top humanities collection.
- Negotiations should include abstracting and indexing; the indexing of recent issues is not bad, but the coverage in terms of the run of the journal is very limited.
- We need to think about what barriers are currently in place preventing access to our scholarship. Digital access to the journal will become increasingly crucial to teaching and scholarship.

Bennett requested the EC to send any additional feedback and suggestions for negotiating the contract to her.

- *Move to tri-annual publication.* The press and editors want to expand to 3 issues a year; the Publication Committee seeks input from the EC regarding this move. CUP has not been very forthcoming about the financial implications, so it is difficult to make a decision without more data. The editors feel that they are getting enough submissions to fill 3 issues. Input from the EC included the following:

- Would this be an increase in workload that might act as an incentive or disincentive to potential editors and associate editors? Using Scholar online has taken a lot of pressure off the workload—they have more space to do real editing. Moreover, the handbook envisioned the possibility that we'd move to three issues, and the suggestions there factor in the new workload.

-Current practice is that the Associate Editor does a Special Issue, which often creates a backlog. An issue that needs to be addressed is authors' desire to see their work in print in a reasonable amount of time. Moving to three issues has real advantages here, and also in terms of the editor's relationship to authors.

-In the online environment, prominence of a journal is correlated to hits; more articles, more hits; more issues, more articles.

-Would move to three issues mean more special issues? Currently this is a decision the editors make, but it's something we could contract with the editors if we expand to three issues. Moving to three issues may give editors more opportunity to put their imprimatur on the field, either through special issues or through finding the right guest editor on the right topic at the right time.

President Davis directed Bennett to take this input back to the Publication Committee, and to come back to the EC with real data from CUP to help guide a decision on a move to tri-annual publication.

#### **b) On-line News Editor and Webmaster**

President Davis presented a prototype for the new website design proposed by ONEW Jim Groom. Members of the EC approved of the new look and functionality, and gave the go-ahead for continued development of the site along the lines proposed.

**MOTION:** to renew Jim Groom's contract on the same terms as last year. Moved by Knowles, seconded by Omasta. 15 yes, 0 no, 0 abstentions. **The motion carried.**

#### **c) Theatre Survey Editors**

President Davis welcomed *TS* editors Catherine Cole and Leo Cabranes-Grant to the meeting. Cole noted that the new online submission system has been a big help in reducing the editor's workload. She reiterated the interest in expanding the journal to three issues per year.

-Members who are not receiving their hard copy of the journal should contact Nancy Erickson.

### **13. Fundraising Committee Report – Davis**

- President Davis reported that in 2008-2009 fundraising efforts had raised \$15,292.00 in cash and stocks; in 2009-2010 we have raised an additional \$9,848.00. The conference is a good opportunity to raise money; she reminded the EC that the priorities of the campaign are support of graduate research, international outreach, and the research mission of the organization in all of its dimensions. The committee also has plans to make approaches to senior members to keep ASTR in mind in their estate planning; this needs tact.

- Our fundraising efforts are primarily aimed at soliciting contributions from ASTR members; however, Ken Cerniglia has suggested creative ways ASTR might be able to tap

into foundation funding. While we are not directly eligible for foundation funding, we can form relationships with nonprofit and commercial/LORT theatre companies to assist with archiving records and materials, and apply for foundation funding to support those efforts. An ad hoc subcommittee has been struck, chaired by Stacy Wolf, to create guidelines for theatre companies that are considering donating materials to archives and/or that can be used to advocate for their deposit, cataloguing, and preservation. These guidelines would also serve as an opening gambit with the NEH to discuss a possible funding program for processing donations of this kind.

- President Davis congratulated the members of the committee who put together this year's silent auction, which has many valuable items, including rival gift baskets submitted by Brown and Berkeley. Thanks to all the donors who have generously given. EC members suggested that with the redesign of the website, future auctions might include an online bidding period in advance of the auction. President Davis suggested that members could send a copy of the auction catalog to their institution's Special Collections Librarian, ask them to choose an item, and then pledge to buy that item. Bidding closes just before the luncheon on Saturday.

## **14. New Business**

### **a) Frequency of Awards**

At the Spring meeting, we planned to review the possibility of alternating some awards biennially if the budget remains tight; at this point in time, our useable revenue in Spring 2010 should be similar to 2009, but if there is another downturn we may need to make more economies in that area. It is premature to decide at this point.

### **b) Consortium of Doctoral Programs in Theatre and Performance Studies**

ASTR co-sponsored this meeting, which took place in September 2009, and included representatives from thirty-five programs in the US and Canada. Some of the data gathered in conjunction with the meeting was useful and will be cleaned up and presented in some format; a committee of Esther Kim Lee, Charlotte Canning and Emily Roxworthy are continuing to work on that data. The Consortium will meet again in 3 years; President Davis took the liberty of expressing ASTR's desire to continue to be associated with the Consortium. Members of the EC stated a desire to see the information gathered, and in particular the report of the group on multicultural curriculum issues, circulate back to the people and institutions who were polled for information (including the Black Theatre Network). Some concern was expressed that the surveys were unscientific and anecdotal; perhaps ASTR can play a role in helping conduct a more systematic survey in future. The summary of the meeting is on the ASTR website, and documents generated will also be posted to the website.

### **c) Reports from lunchtime breakout sessions**

During the lunch break, EC members met in groups to brainstorm ideas for retaining/increasing membership. Ideas that emerged included:

- *What are the "Benefits of Membership" and how can we make them more attractive?*
  - intercareer generational interchange—can we increase these opportunities outside the conference (i.e., working sessions)?
  - good place for faculty members to help grad students develop professionally
  - opportunities to serve the profession
  - hard copy of *Theatre Survey*
  - intimacy of the organization is a plus for networking and meeting future colleagues.
  - area/field research groups are helpful-can we make them ongoing, to allow scholars to reconnect with those in similar areas of interest even if the conference theme is out of their field?
  
- *Use the ASTR Website as a service to members*
  - list "Benefits of Membership" prominently on home page
  - ours should be the website of choice for theatre scholars; we have no competition on the website front, we should capitalize on this.
  - adopt the 'monthly digest model' to push information to members
  - make ASTR a clearinghouse of opportunities for members, for CFPs, for jobs, and also for non-stipendiary residencies, listing all universities that might have useful archival resources; perhaps ASTR could also provide a small stipend for these?
  - create members-only web content
  - clarify categories of awards on the website to make them more of a draw
  
- *Increase the availability of career mentorship through ASTR*
  - organize career sessions three times per year online
  
- *Resurrect the Newsletter*
  - paper newsletter seems to be missed; if we want to continue to be eco-friendly, we should at least 'push' the newsletter into member's inboxes.
  
- *Compile a list of "experts" willing to give talks for expenses only*
  - encourage members to invite someone they do not know to speak at their institution; this could be tied to a fundraising effort for grad support, if we ask that any honorarium be donated back to ASTR.
  - possibly post these talks on website.
  
- *Partner with other organizations, to have more year long visibility*
  - look into ASTR getting a guaranteed session each year at MLA, ATHE, PSi
  
- *Create financial incentives for membership*
  - make sure that it costs less to attend the conference as a member than as a non-member

-offer a discount for a three-year commitment to membership with automatic renewal

**d) Spring meeting site/format and date**

President-Elect Blair reminded the EC that the dates for the Spring meeting are March 5-7 2010. The format of the meeting is still to be determined, depending on the financial situation.

**15. Adjournment**

- Outgoing members of the EC were thanked, and President Davis expressed best wishes to Blair and Wolf as they embark on their new tasks. Blair and Wolf expressed their gratitude to Davis and Knowles for their help with the transition.

**MOTION:** to adjourn the meeting. Moved by Schneider, seconded by Richards. Vote: 16 yes, 0 no, 0 abstentions. **The motion carried.** The meeting was adjourned at 2:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,  
Wendy Arons, ASTR Secretary

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Approved by the EC: