

ASTR American Society for Theatre Research

**American Society for Theatre Research
Executive Committee Meeting Minutes
November 15, 2018
University of California, San Diego**

Present:

Daphne Lei (President), Jill Stevenson (Vice President for Conferences), Esther Kim Lee (Vice President for Publications), Patricia Herrera (Vice President for Awards and Fellowships), EJ Westlake (Treasurer), Scott Magelssen (Secretary), Kate Bredeson, Debra Caplan, Chrystyna Dail, James Harding, Doug Jones, Rosemary Malague, Noe Montez, Elizabeth W. Son, Sissi Li (Graduate Student Caucus Liaison), Laurie Krueger (Managing Director), Arzu Alimohd (Assistant Managing Director)

Not Present:

Rhonda Blair

Guests:

Incoming EC Members 2018-2022 Sarah Bay Cheng, Aparna Dharwadker, Baron Kelly; Nick Ridout, Editor, *Theatre Survey*; Holly Buttimore from Cambridge University Press

The President Called the Meeting to Order at 8:15am.

1. Approval of consent agenda

- a. The consent agenda, made available to members beforehand, included: agenda for today, minutes from July Teleconference, minutes from Oct 23 Emergency EC meeting, minutes from Nov 1 Emergency EC meeting, updated Handbook.
- b. **MOTION:** to Adopt the Consent Agenda. Moved by Stevenson. Seconded by Westlake
- c. Yes: 14 Yes. 0 No: 0 Abstentions. **The motion carried unanimously**

2. President's report (Daphne Lei)

- a. The President described this year, in which ASTR canceled its conference at the Westin Hotel and held a smaller forum at UCSD, as a historic moment and called for a time of reflection to think about how we respond as an organization to crisis.
- b. The President described her proposal for a Transnational Scholar Award (described in the Fall 2018 President's Report. She offered to fund the first two years for the award (2019 and 2020) herself at \$500, then proposed to increase the award to \$1000 and have ASTR fund the award yearly starting in 2020. There was some discussion, but because this award is not part of the budget proposal we **tabled the discussion until the Midwinter EC meeting.**

3. VP for Conferences report (Jill Stevenson)

- a. The Vice President for Conferences recommended that ASTR change the leadership structure to empower program chairs to be more fully involved in decisions the EC makes about the conference (detailed in her Fall 2018 Report). The current and recent program chairs feel taken for granted and out of touch with the EC. This might involve disbanding the Committee on Conferences, and/or having the program chair elected by the General Membership rather than the EC. It may involve eliminating the VP for Conferences position entirely. ASTR has grown since the current leadership structure was put in place. We were on target to have more than 700 conference participants until we canceled. ASTR has become less elite and more responsive to the needs and desires of members, including improved accessibility, communication, and diversity. But the conference itself has become much more than a set of plenaries and working sessions and meetings. It has become the “go to place” for every new ASTR initiative and alternative offering.
- b. Stevenson called for the EC to be discerning in the future for how we select hotels and recommended that in addition to size, location, and proximity to food and other offerings we consider whether hotels are union friendly. She also recommended stronger force majeure language in our contracts with hotels in the future. There was some discussion.
- c. Stevenson presented two proposals from the Committee on Conferences for the ASTR 2020 Conference that come in the form of recommendations: one is on the theme of “monuments and mausoleums”; one is on the theme of “repetitions” (Stevenson distributed the two proposed themes and calls at the meeting). EC Member Doug Jones stepped off the conference call because he was one of the teams proposing a conference theme. Discussion followed. The EC favored the “repetitions” proposal but found it needed additional revisions. Stevenson will take the suggestions for revision back to the “repetitions” group and ask them to resubmit.

4. Administrator’s Report (Laurie Krueger via teleconference)

- a. Krueger described the next steps in negotiating with the Westin about our canceled contract. Ewald believes we are in a strong position to negotiate the Westin’s figure for liquidated damages down. She reported back on a question from the EC whether an insurance policy would cover fees resulting from canceling a contract with a hotel. The answer is no if it is the organization’s choice to break contract for political reasons, vs. a reason like a bad storm preventing many attendees from coming.
- b. Krueger reported on the process of handling refund requests from conference registrants and donations back to the organization. As of this morning, we have had 160 requests for refunds and \$5000 has come in donated back to the organization. She notes that an insurance policy would not cover refunds for this kind of cancellation.
- c. Briana Baker, Event Manager, is in the process of reviewing contracts for upcoming conferences and they are looking solid. She is ready to start planning for next year.

5. Treasurer's report (E.J. Westlake)

- a. Westlake reported that it is still unclear how the negotiations for the Westin penalty will go. We also don't know how many people will ask for refunds. In a worst-case scenario we will have to dip into our investments. We could either withdraw or borrow from our funds. If we borrowed, the rate would not be good because it has been a rough market. The hit to our investments we took with the economic downturn of a few years ago is a good comparison to this situation. It would make our budget smaller and would affect initiatives.
- b. There was some discussion about the way in which ASTR should refund registrants (e.g., do they need to opt in for a refund by clicking on a link to request a refund, or do we automatically refund everyone we can without registrants needing to take action). It was noted that communications with the General Membership have been unclear on this point. Krueger noted that a system for refunds is now in place. Ewald will follow up with registrants who have not completed the online form. For registrants who paid by check, it will take some time to make sure the refund will go to the right place.

6. Discussion of Immediate Post Fall 2018 Actions.

- a. There was discussion about what needs to happen immediately in order to ensure the health of the organization, communication with the General Membership, and where we go from here.
- b. We discussed the needs of members who might be in more financially precarious situations, such as independent and unfunded scholars and international scholars and whether some kind of fundraising was possible.
- c. There was further discussion about the process for registration refunds.
- d. Lei said she would plan to write her last quarterly email immediately after her presidency concluded and she would address the topic of financial distress and the importance of member donations. It was recommended that Lei and Incoming President Marla Carlson compose this next newsletter together. [Carlson has agreed to do this]
- e. There was a question whether there was additional labor required from Ewald staff to make arrangements and process these requests. Krueger noted that Ewald was using hours they would have spent in San Diego if they had come for the conference.
- f. We discussed immediate needs for the Forum, including arrangements/communication regarding working groups and roundtables, the plan for the awards ceremony, and whether we can do some kind of virtual book exhibit for publishers who lost a chance to have booths at the conference.
- g. We raised the problem of the unclear relationship and communication structure between TLA and ASTR. TLA has felt out of the loop on the conversations about the conference. They have some input on the plenary programming, but not a lot of say in the decisions, but also do not contribute much in the way of resources to the conference.
- h. We raised the importance of keeping several discussions at a high profile in the coming months were raised: the #metoo conversation, the importance of taking a

principled stance in support of labor and the desire to work with union-friendly hotels.

- i. The idea was raised of conducting a post-crisis survey soliciting input from members whether they were comfortable and confident with the EC making decisions like canceling the conference on behalf of the membership.
- j. We raised the idea of needing to increase conference fees to help with recovery and being transparent about our reasons with our members.
- k. We noted that the harassment of program chairs needs to stop, and that members could be made more clear about the relationship between program chairs and leadership.
- l. We discussed communications that have been handled by Jill and Daphne and how these would proceed after their terms are over. Communications can go through Magelssen, who will make sure they are handled by the right people.
- m. We discussed the items that may need to be cut from next year's conference (AV, Food and Beverage, Funding for Graduate Students) and the importance of communicating these things with next year's program chairs.
- n. Sissi Liu, GSC Representative, reported on several GSC matters. They would like a listserv, they've updated the handbook, there is a large desire for mentorship. 179 registrants indicated the desire to be involved in the mentorship initiatives. 21 offered to be mentors. 157 signed up to be mentees. Of these 157, 44 were junior faculty, and 4 were mid-career scholars. GSC has an inclusion officer and a GSC Inclusion Committee, but it is unclear how these work with the EC and ASTR standing committees. Graduate students face financial distress. Losing \$500 on a canceled conference is the equivalent of losing a month's rent.

7. VP for Publications (Esther Kim Lee)

- a. **MOTION** to approve the new Associate Editor of *Theatre Survey*, Brandi Wilkins Catanese. Moved by Lee, seconded by Westlake.
Yes: 14 Yes. 0 No: 0 Abstentions. **The motion carried unanimously**
- b. Lei reported that new social media guidelines have been approved by the publications committee.
- c. Nick Ridout, Editor of *Theatre Survey*, and Holly Buttimore, Commissioning Editor, Cambridge University Press, updated the EC on the process of updating the design of the journal cover for a more contemporary look and so that algorithms could more helpfully capture content. Cambridge University Press will pay for the redesign.
- d. Ridout noted that the cover redesign is not consistent with the style of the ASTR logo, and we discussed whether the ASTR logo needed to stay on the outside cover of the issues.
- e. Buttimore reported on *Theatre Survey*. The number of institutions able to access the journal has dropped a bit due to consortium shifts. The good news is that with these shifts, institutions who cannot or are no longer able to access the journal can apply for aid access and get the journals for free. There are improvements to online access through Cambridge Core, through which authors can share their own essays without hurting the journal's revenue.

- f. Lee noted that the *Theatre Survey* reception, offered every other year and funded at \$3000, will take place next year, not this year.
- g. Ridout noted that Associate Editor Marlis Schweitzer just edited a special issue on girlhood. The editorial team sees spikes in interest when special issues are announced and wonders whether we should do them more often.

8. **Other business**

- a. Stevenson requested that the Spring EC agenda include looking at union hotels.
- b. The idea was raised to recognize this year's awardees at next year's Awards Luncheon.

9. **Adjournment**

- a. **MOTION** to Adjourn. Moved by Stevenson, Seconded by Westlake
- b. Adjournment by Acclamation