History of Science Society Executive Director’s Report – July 2019

Overview:

This synopsis focuses on the Society’s 6 strategic goals.

Goal 1: —MEETINGS/NETWORKING: Create vibrant regular HSS meetings and facilitate networking through other associations and venues

The lion’s share of the Executive Office’s duties center on the annual conference, from the Call for Papers to the post-meeting survey. The 2018 conference in Seattle, judging from the post-meeting survey, was a success. We have signed a contract for a New Orleans meeting in 2020 with the Society for the History of Technology (SHOT), and we have an agreement to meet with SHOT again in 2021 in Mérida, Mexico. Our Coordinator, Ryan Feigenbaum, has introduced many efficiencies into the process, a crucial step for a 2-person office assisted by 2 part-time undergraduates.

We continue to rely on our contract workers who provide special expertise, including our auditor Owen Ronk of Plante Moran; our bookkeeper, Brian Davis; our lawyer Stephen Schaefer of Whiteford, Taylor, Preston in DC; our web service provider, Parker Web; and Craig Hendricks of Conference Direct for site selection and meeting support. All of these professionals help the Executive Office focus on programs and on the strategic plan.

Here is an attendance overview of the past 9 meetings:

Regular Members: 294 335 277 411 374 394 286 284 298
Student members: 138 145 95 103 114 128 100 118 113
Non-members: 100 77 58 111 113 121 87 62 79
Student non-members: 19 20 38 47 63 56 49 22 42
Low-income/retired: 68 53 66 31 46 53 34 26 48
Exhibitors/Workers/Press: 0 53 66 73 75 90 52 49 56
*One day: 32 31 21 14 23 15 35 23 22
Total 651 714 621 790 808 857 643 612 658

Key: 2018 Seattle, 2017 Toronto 2016 Atlanta, 2015 San Francisco, 2014 Chicago, 2013 Boston, 2012 San Diego, 2011 Cleveland (joint meeting SHOT and 4S), 2010 Montréal (even numbered years were joint meetings with the Philosophy of Science Association)

Paper Submissions Overall

For Utrecht, we saw 829 abstract submissions, over a 27% increase from Seattle’s 650 submissions, which obviated our fear of a lack of submissions for our first conference outside of North America. For comparison, we received 546 submissions for Toronto, 440 for Atlanta, and 624 for San Francisco. Because we were able to expand to 12 concurrent sessions and were also able to lengthen the meeting
by a day, the increase in submissions only slightly decreased our overall acceptance rate from last year’s 70% to 68%.

**2019-2023**

2019

Christine von Oertzen and Simon Werrett have been terrific program co-chairs. We have also been fortunate in being able to rely on a “dream team” for local arrangements. It has been a pleasure to work with them all, and I am deeply grateful to Bert Theunissen and the Descartes Center, to David Baneke, our local organizer chair, Annemarijn Douwes, and Odette Jansen who have been helping with dozens of details. I would like to single out Ariane den Daas of the Descartes Center who has been the indispensable person for the conference.

2020 and 2021 (Co-located with SHOT)

SHOT had a strong preference for the Oct 7-11 dates for the 2020 meeting in New Orleans (SHOT typically meets in October). We signed separate contracts for the Sheraton on Canal Street, a hotel large enough to house both groups. For Mérida we will be in two hotels across the street from each other, and we have agreed to meet in November 2021. Jan Korstens, SHOT’s Secretary, and I are planning a site visit later this year, and we will be able to finalize the dates then.

2022

PSA will be in Pittsburgh 8-13 Nov 2022. There is the possibility of meeting in the same hotel, the Wyndham, but that would introduce some of the same challenges we saw in Seattle regarding meeting space and sleeping rooms and there are no other properties that can be used for convenient overflow. The Committee on Meetings and Programs and the Executive Committee discussed the possible joint meeting at length and suggested that we poll our members. We asked members to list the 3 societies with which they would most like to meet. The number one group in the members’ top 3, by far, was SHOT, followed by 4S which meets typically in September; the American Historical Association (which meets in January); the British Society for the History of Science, which meets usually in June or July; and PSA (other societies that appeared in the top 10 were the American Association for the History of Medicine, American Association for the Advancement of Science, European Society for the History of Science, American Society for Environmental History, and Society for Literature, Science, and the Arts). Since any kind of joint meeting can double the amount of time the Executive Office spends on the conference we want to proceed carefully. PSA’s leadership has told us that they wish to continue to meet with us, and I will begin work in earnest on the possibility of a joint meeting in 2022 after Utrecht.

2023

When the hotels in New Orleans tried to push us toward September dates for the 2020 conference (the height of the tropical storm season), I looked at Portland Oregon as an alternative. SHOT officials had expressed eagerness to meet in Portland, as well, and my site visit there last November revealed at least two properties that could host both groups. My preference will be to see how the 2020 meeting unfolds before agreeing to a joint Portland conference but it continues to be a seller’s market and there is pressure to sign sooner rather than later. In any event, there remains a great deal of work before we can reach a decision.
Sustainability

Although intellectual enrichment remains the primary reason for meeting with SHOT and other groups, issues of sustainability are gaining ground in importance. Many of our members attend SHOT, AHA, and PSA meetings each year and by combining the conferences, we are able to lessen the environmental impact of the meetings. Our members know enough about science and technology to recognize how difficult it will be to contend with climate change and know that it is important that we look at ways to mitigate carbon use. Solutions will be hard, but this is expected. The Canadians offer a model in which the learned societies meet together for a week each year, rather than hosting separate annual conferences. The challenge in the US for such a model is size. It we look at just the 75 members of the American Council of Learned Society the combined attendance of our groups exceeds 100,000, which would create some logistical challenges. I welcome members’ feedback on this issue.

Related to this challenge is the importance of hearing as many ideas as possible when bringing people together from around the world. I continue to work with CoMP to re-imagine the meeting, looking for alternatives to traditional sessions where scores of people listen to one voice with minimal time for dialogue.

Respectful Behavior Policy

Former HSS President Sally Gregory Kohlstedt agreed to continue as our ombudsperson through 2019. She had nothing to report from the 2018 meeting, which makes 2 meetings since the inception of the ombudsperson with no reports. I still think we need to do more. I recently attended a workshop with Tarana Burke at Notre Dame, founder of the #MeToo movement and learned more about the issues surrounding gender bias. I wrote a short article for the April Newsletter, outlining some steps.

Goal 2: Publications/Standards: Foster a publishing environment that promotes top quality history of science scholarship in diverse media for diverse audiences.

An action step for Goal 2 is the promotion of digital works. We awarded the first Ron Rainger Prize this past November, and that prize specifically mentions digital work in its call for nominations. Likewise, we continue to encourage nominations with a digital component for the Hazen Education Prize, and this emphasis paid off with the 2018 Hazen Prize, which went to Arizona State’s online Embryo Project: https://embryo.asu.edu/.

And thanks to the work of the Technology and Communications Committee (TCC), the Society now has a section of its website devoted to digital work: https://digital.hssonline.org/. Council approved the Digital Scholarship statement on the site. We look forward to expanding and deepening that resource for members and for the public. Utrecht will mark 5 years for THAT Camp and over 100 people indicated that they plan to attend the 2019 Camp.

Web site

Ryan Feigenbaum continues to enhance our web site, a special strength of his. In addition to many technical improvements, such as decreased load time, he has created a more visually appealing experience. Our upgrade of server space has solved the “noisy neighbors” problem with a 300% improvement in load time. He has some ambitious plans for redesigning the site, plans that he will
coordinate with our new Editors. He and I will continue to look at ways that we can address our members’ needs first, followed by the interests of the general public.

Newsletter

At last year’s Spring meeting, the Executive Committee suggested that we call on volunteers to create and edit the Newsletter, including a volunteer editor who can commission pieces and work in concert with our new Society editors. Such an appeal appeared in the October and January Newsletters. I was delighted when Neeraja Sankara answered the call. She and I worked together on the July 2019 issue and the October 2019 Newsletter will be the first one under her editorship.

I have also been in touch with Lloyd Ackert, chair of the Committee on Education and Engagement, and hope to resurrect our Innovations in Education series, which highlights model syllabi. Lloyd and I have discussed the desirability of creating a syllabus resource on the HSS site that can help college educators, as well as secondary school teachers.

Transition of the Editorship

I had been working with Matt Lavine and Alix Hui (our new editors, effective 1 July 2019) over the past year on the contract between HSS and Mississippi State University and that is now finished. I was pleased to see that Projit Mukharji (University of Pennsylvania) has agreed to serve as Book Review Editor and hope everyone had a chance to read his January Newsletter article.

Goal 3: Professional Development: Support professional development of emerging history of science scholars in and outside the academy.

NASA Space History Fellowship

By creating a common pool of applicants and a fellowship committee comprising members from each group, the partnership among the American Historical Association, HSS, and SHOT for these 3 fellowships seems to be working well. Although the number of applicants for 2018-2019 fellowships was disappointingly low (8 applications), Ryan sent reminders for the 2019-2020 fellowship and we saw over 47K Twitter views in the first couple of days. This helped us more than double the applications for the 2019-2020 fellowships. The HSS Fellow who was chosen for 2019-2020 is Claire Webb, a graduate student at MIT.

Annual Meeting Travel Grants (NSF and HSS)

Our 9-Societies NSF grant, which HSS administers, actually includes 11 groups: (HSS, PSA; SHOT; International Society for the History, Philosophy, and Social Studies of Biology (ISHPSSB); the International Society for the History of Philosophy of Science (HOPOS); the American Society for Environmental History (ASEH); Integrated History and Philosophy of Science (&HPS); the Society for Literature, Science and the Arts (SLSA) the American Association for the History of Medicine (AAHM); IUHPST’s Division of the History of Science and Technology (DHST), and IUHPST’s Division of Logic and Methodology of the Philosophy of Science and Technology (DLMPST)). This past year we were able to offer more than $100,000 for travel to the meetings and the data show that the grants have contributed to the success of these meetings, especially by increasing the number of graduate students who are attending. I was able to secure a $20,000 supplement to the current grant due to the four large international meetings this year—HSS in Utrecht, SHOT in Milan, ISH in Oslo, and DLMPST in Prague—
and this will help ease the pressure on travel funds. The demands on the Executive Office to administer these grants are considerable, but we consider the travel grants to be a vital component of professional development. We continue to make strides in collecting data as we strive to standardize all of the societies’ processes. The current grant expires in May of 2020 and I plan to apply for a new grant in February.

For the Seattle meeting we received 74 NSF grant applications from graduate students, independent scholars, and recent PhDs who were participating in the program, compared to 75 for Toronto. For Utrecht we received 63 applications but the amount requested was over $66,000, almost double the amounts requested for Seattle. With the grant supplement and extra funding for grad students from the 2017 meeting rollover, we were able to award approximately $31,000 in travel funds.

To help those ineligible for NSF grants, we build into the meeting budget funds to subsidize these groups’ costs. For Utrecht we received 61 applications for HSS grants (a record), totaling $34,692 in requests. This is almost twice the number of applications we received (32) for 2018 and more than double for 2017 (27). The total amount requested for 2018 was $31,382, but we had only $10,500 to give and could award only 49% of the researched costs for travel. For 2019, I was delighted that we were able to use $5,000 of our past meeting funds to help grad students with travel to the Utrecht meeting, and we were able to make awards totaling $15,247, but that is still less than half of the requested amount.

HSS at Work

I met with Tania Munz and Carin Berkowitz (the co-founders of HSS at Work) at AHA in January, and we discussed strategies for re-energizing this group, which has played a key role in professional development. I have shared with them the list of PhDs in the history of science, which is still under development in the hope of finding leaders. The Caucus has been inactive for over a year now and absent future activities the Caucus will likely be disbanded.

GECC

GECC’s leadership, primarily due to Kris Palmieri, has been active and the mentorship event in Seattle, hosted in the presidential suite, proved popular. The Executive Committee has invested considerable time in trying to foster mentorship activities with GECC, and there is another presidential mentorship event planned for the first night in Utrecht. I am grateful to the officers who answered the call to serve as mentors. GECC officers have invested a lot of time in planning numerous activities for Utrecht. Our use of university space has provided us some options that we do not typically have in a conference hotel, such as being able to devote a room to GECC for the entirety of the meeting.

Goal 4: Broadening Our Reach: Promote general interest in history of science among educators at all levels and the public, in part by providing opportunities to scholars to expand their audiences and make their work more effective and relevant.

Elizabeth Paris Engagement Event

I experienced considerable difficulty in trying to line up an engagement event in Seattle in partnership with National History Day (a relationship that is part of our strategic plan). The Committee on Education and Engagement and the Committee on Advocacy met together in Seattle, and we began making plans
for an NHD event in 2020. Tentative plans are to hold a program in the World War II Museum, which is involved in NHD (it will be the 75th anniversary of the war’s end) and/or to focus on the 15th anniversary of Hurricane Katrina. Marissa Petrou, part of our local team, has already lined up support for an exhibit at the Louisiana State Museum, which is a short walk from the conference hotel. Marissa will also help us with a land acknowledgement ceremony in New Orleans.

Because of the lack of an engagement program in Seattle, we were able to focus more on 2019. The plenary, organized by Lissa Roberts, emphasizes engagement and we will use some of the Paris funds to support that event. On 26 July, Jeroen van Dongen will deliver the Paris Lecture at the Railway Museum (Het Spoorweg Museum). The Descartes Center is covering all of the costs and this promises to be a fabulous event to which the public is invited. I am hopeful that the talk will attract a wide audience.

Relations with Other Societies

I represented the HSS at the AHA in Chicago this past January, the AAAS conference in February (where I also served as delegate to Section X), the National Humanities Alliance in Washington and the Midwest Junto in Kansas City in March, the American Council of Learned Societies (centennial celebration in New York), and the American Association for the History of Medicine in Columbus Ohio in April. I finished my term as chair of the AHA’s affiliate committee this past January. I have been spending a great deal of time liaising with SHOT as we prepare for our co-located conferences in 2020 and 2021. The best opportunity to confer with leaders of academic societies is the ACLS meetings. Unfortunately, I have been unable to attend many of the ACLS fall meetings since they conflict with the HSS conference, but that will not be the case in 2019.

Goal 5: Advocacy: Promote history of science in the United States by advocating on behalf of the field and its practitioners to the public, to government officials, to universities, and to potential employers of historians of science; and support advocacy of history of science in other countries.

As mentioned above, the Committee on Advocacy met with CoEE in Seattle and we discussed ways to advocate for the history of science. Lloyd Ackert is serving as a liaison with the Joint Caucus for Socially Engaged Philosophers and Historians of Science and JCSEPHS is eager to help with 2020 events. Marc Rothenberg continues to explore priorities in advocacy and for the HSS to provide big ideas.

I participated in the National Humanities Alliance Advocacy Day in Washington this past March, visiting legislative aides and one of our Senators for Indiana (NHA advocates for the National Endowment for the Humanities, Title VI programs, etc.), as well as the newly elected Senator for Mississippi, whom I informed that Isis is coming to Mississippi. I could not attend the advocacy event run by the Consortium of Social Science Associations (COSSA), which Jessica Baron had attended in the past. I am glad that we continue to support the National Coalition for History, a consortium of over 50 organizations that advocates on federal, state, and local legislative and regulatory issues.

Goal 6: Membership/Governance: Produce a sustainable governance and financial system for HSS that will promote a welcoming, culturally and internationally diverse and interdisciplinary organizational culture.

Membership Development
The Sponsor a Scholar (SAS) program requires constant oversight. We have more money than scholars, and I continue to spread the word about the program’s availability. The Committee on Membership arranged for the SAS opportunity to be translated into Russian, Chinese, Arabic, and Portuguese, which has not (yet) translated into applications for the program. I would be grateful if members spread word of this important program. The Committee has also been discussing diversity and other elements found in the strategic plan and intend to coordinate with the new Committee on Diversity and Inclusion.

**Finances**

My impression that our finances were on the right track were reinforced by our principal auditor. We continue to work with our new bookkeeper, Brian Davis, to streamline the finances with a goal of simplifying our budget so that it is easier to pull P&Ls. It takes an enormous amount of time and money to keep track of the finances, and Gwen Kay and I are in constant contact.

**Nominating Committee**

Paola Bertucci chaired the Nominating Committee that generated the 2019 slate. Again we see impressive diversity among our Council nominees, and the committee was able to secure two terrific vice presidential candidates, resulting in the election of Karen Rader. Paola is the first Council delegate to agree to chair the committee, and I am grateful for her and for the committee’s work on the 2019 election.

**Program Continuity and Committee Oversight**

I am trying to be more proactive with the main committees, scheduling regular conversations and sending numerous email prompts. I would like to have more time to work with the committee chairs as they try to fulfill their goals. Toward that end, the Executive Committee decided to convene the committee and caucus chairs to hear their concerns and to share information since so many elements of the strategic plan involve multiple groups. We have also invited the committee and caucus chairs to attend the Council meeting to afford more dialogue.

Committee oversight has become more demanding with the formation of the Committee on Diversity and Inclusion and the introduction of 3 new prizes. Each new prize committee requires considerable work and stretches the office, especially when there is complete turnover in the students who have handled the prizes in the past. We have now completed the second year for the new Rainger and Pauly prizes and that is becoming normalized. A new independent scholar award was made possible by a generous donation by Virginia Trimble. It is planned as a permanent endowment for what will be called the Edward Gerjuoy/John Michell Award and will be given to an independent scholar whose abstract for the annual meeting is judged the best submission by our program co-chairs. Approval of the award is on the Council’s agenda.

**Interest Groups and Caucuses**

Our 8 Interest Groups are as follows: Forum for History of Human Science, Earth and Environment Forum, Forum for the History of the Mathematical Sciences, Forum for the History of Science in Asia, Forum for the History of the Chemical Sciences, the Physical Sciences Forum, the Early Science Interest Group, and our newest group the Forum for the History of Medicine, Health, and the Life Sciences. Each group is engaged with a subset of the membership and most of them actively plan for events at the
annual meeting, including prizes, lectures, lunches, and other special gatherings, creating an increased dynamism at the conferences. It is my hope that the challenge in trying to find space for these groups to meet during the annual meeting will be largely solved by moving those activities to a conference morning. If the experiment is successful in Utrecht, we will want to re-create it for 2020 when we meet with SHOT (N.B. SHOT’s interest groups meet on Sunday, the last day of the meeting).

The Women’s Caucus discussed the gift for the permanent endowment for the Caucus breakfast at its meeting in Seattle and unanimously agreed to accept the terms of the agreement. That recommendation was approved by Council at its mid-year meeting. We plan to begin drawing on the endowment in 2020, ca. $2,500 (based on a 4% draw). Although that amount will help us make the breakfast free everyone, we will still seek support for the event. I am especially grateful to the Linda Hall Library for its sponsorship.