

SHAFR Council Meeting Minutes
January 19, 2024
via Zoom, 11:30am-2:30pm (US Eastern)

Council members attending: Mitchell Lerner (chairing), Megan Black, Brooke Blower, Jessica Gienow-Hecht, Gretchen Heefner, Mary Ann Heiss, Chris Hulshof, Sarah Miller-Davenport, Melani McAlister, Christopher McKnight Nichols, Vanessa Walker, and Kelsey Zavelo

Attending: Amy Sayward (ex officio), Faith Bagley, Carol Chin, Elizabeth Ferguson, Anne Foster, Petra Goedde

Introductory Matters

Mitchell Lerner started the meeting with a welcome and asked everyone to introduce themselves. Amy Sayward reviewed the votes that had been passed since the fall Council meeting (minutes from fall meetings); there being no revisions or reservations, they were affirmed. A vote of thanks for retiring Council, committee, task force, and editorial board members was moved by Melani McAlister, seconded by Christopher McKnight Nichols, and passed unanimously.

Conference Matters

Upcoming conferences

Carol Chin, chair of the Local Arrangements Committee for the 2024 conference in Toronto, joined the meeting. She described the recent campus venue shift (“some hiccups”) necessitated by university convocation and provided information about the new conference venue in the Bahen Centre for Information Technology, which has a variety of classroom sizes and an atrium well suited to serve as the exhibitor and registration space. It is also still conveniently located relative to the Faculty Club (where the luncheons will be held), the two conference hotels, the dorms, the Hart House Great Hall (where the opening plenary and welcome reception will be held), and Spadina House Museum (where the social event will be hosted). There was a short discussion about the conference hotel venues’ relative strengths and as well as the cost of the dorm housing and the nature of the social event. Council was pleased that Chin was able to pivot so effectively with the last-minute change of venue.

Sayward gave updates about the 2025 conference in Arlington. SHAFR’s Conference Coordinator, Kaete O’Connell, is working to identify a relatively cheap option for the social event, which might be combined with the welcome event. There was a discussion of Council’s previous decision to discontinue AV due to the extraordinary rise in costs from the 2019 to the 2023 conferences. The focus of the conversation was on how to accommodate those with hearing challenges and to ensure that presenters are prepared for the lack of AV: frequent communication is a must, SHAFR will likely purchase table-top podia, the accommodations portion of the registration form will likely include very specific information about this issue, and SHAFR might also investigate the possibility of portable microphone systems for one or more rooms in need of accommodation.

Sayward also updated Council on the 2026 in Columbus, Ohio. Working with the Local Arrangements Committee and the new budget, she had re-approached the campus conference center and was awaiting a new proposal that will hopefully fit within SHAFR's budgetary guidelines.

Diversity at SHAFR Conferences

Lerner then shared several concerns that SHAFR had received about the diversity language in the Call for Papers and noted that he had referred these complaints to two SHAFR Committees for their input (the Conference Committee and CARE—the Committee on Access, Representation, and Equity). These committees agreed that while the goals of the diversity statement were well-intentioned, there were some concerns about current policy, including the fact that this policy had never been discussed by Council. Both committees advised that SHAFR should make a diversity statement an optional part of a panel application for the conference. Council agreed with this recommendation, but several editorial suggestions were put forward. Lerner proposed to work on adjusting the language in light of Council discussion and bring it back to Council and to CARE, before a final Council vote.

Melani McAlister pointed to other ways that SHAFR can make itself more welcoming to a diverse membership—including updates to the website's pictures—and that she would appreciate feedback on these areas as well from CARE. Kelsey Zavelo also said that she had heard concerns about diversity in the most recent set of SHAFR awards that were announced and asked if the prize committees had any guidance related to diversity in their charge. Sayward explained that there was no specific guidance on that issue currently and noted that such committees can only make choices based on the received pool. This led to discussion about how SHAFR might diversify the pool of applicants for these prizes. McAlister suggested that letters to presses about SHAFR's broad definition of foreign relations might result in a more diverse pool of books for our book prizes. There was also a suggestion for posting announcements—especially about graduate student-focused awards—in adjoining professional organizations. CARE and the Graduate Committee might jointly discuss these and further steps.

Additional conference issues

Sayward reported that there were no reported Code of Conduct violations for the year, so no further action was required. She did note that members of Council can potentially serve on the Appeals and Sanctions Committee, so they will receive an invitation to the CCRT (Code of Conduct Response Team) training later this year.

Lerner presented the next agenda item about the timing of the annual conference, which for several recent conferences had been earlier than usual due to the availability of conference facilities. Council members expressed their strong preference for the later date, not only to facilitate broader participation but also to avoid conflicts with Father's Day and Juneteenth. There was general consensus that SHAFR will hold its conference later in June whenever that is possible.

Financial Matters

Sayward reviewed the fiscal-year-end report, current fiscal-year budget, endowment report, and long-range financial report. Lerner highlighted the long-range financial report, which now showed a generally balanced budget thanks to the hard work of Council this past fall. In reviewing the fiscal-year-end report, Sayward reminded Council that SHAFR's fiscal year runs from November 1 to October 31 and stated that

the deficit was largely due to the high AV costs at the past conference. She also pointed out that increase in the cost of SHAFR's membership has helped balance this year's budget. Asked about the assumption of 2% growth that was the basis for future projections of endowment growth (on the endowment report), Sayward said that Council (during her tenure) has always erred on the conservative side in regards to the endowment, which was also reflected in the previous 3% withdrawal rate that Council had increased to 4% in 2023-24 due to the new budget realities. McAlister, Nichols, and Lerner suggested that the Ways & Means Committee might report back to Council in June with a more detailed report on SHAFR's current investment and endowment policy.

Sayward reviewed her recommendation for no increase this year to the stipends for the IT Director, Conference Coordinator, and Executive Director. Lerner then offered a brief overview of his work on creating an endowed SHAFR Teaching Prize.

Committee Matters

Zavelo and Chris Hulshof gave an oral report from the Graduate Student Committee. Zavelo thanked Shaun Armstead for all of her previous work and welcomed Hulshof as the new committee co-chair. They will be discussing how to refine some of the ideas from previous conferences on establishing a clear presence and fellowship for graduate students. Additionally, fostering graduate student communication—for example, through an email list—will be a priority. Hulshof thanked Zavelo for already making him welcome and commended SHAFR for having two graduate student representatives with voting rights, which was unique in his experience.

Lerner gave an update on the Executive Director Search Committee, which now consists of eight SHAFR members and is chaired by past president David Anderson. The committee reported that it had received a good number of applications and anticipated conducting interviews soon. Lerner has asked the committee to provide a ranked list of choices with supporting information, which will facilitate Council's decision. He stated that Council might have to hold an additional meeting—perhaps in March—to make its decision so as to avoid having candidates wait until June for a decision.

Discussion of Internationalization Task Force recommendations

Lerner commended the Internationalization Task Force for its report and extensive set of recommendations. He thought the first question—and the one most appropriately considered by Council—was whether the task force should be restaffed, disbanded, or made a permanent committee. Brooke Blower iterated that it was not just important—but essential—for the field of foreign relations to integrate the voices of international scholars. Nichols suggested something along the lines of an implementation committee to keep these recommendations—and additional issues that may surface—in front of Council. It was also suggested that the new committee would benefit from having at least one U.S.-based member. Nichols moved to create an implementation committee, Hulshof seconded, and Council unanimously approved.

Council then considered the task force recommendation to include at least one non-U.S.-based member on the Nominating Committee and the Nominating Committee's response to this recommendation. There was discussion of whether there might be one or two additional members—if the latter, one might be based in Europe and one beyond Europe and the United States. There was also discussion of the

challenge in defining “international,” which was similar to the difficulty in defining “teaching-focused institution” when SHAFR created a Council seat with that definition. There were reservations based on the difficulties that a larger committee might pose in terms of efficiently completing the committee’s charge and that other sub-groups within SHAFR might similarly seek to have a specific representative on the Nominating Committee. There was some discussion of whether it would be appropriate for Council to advise the Nominating Committee on its composition, given the traditional “wall” between the work of the two organs of SHAFR. However, since the Nominating Committee had suggested in its report the potential of such an expansion, this was not interference by Council in the work of the Nominating Committee. Some wondered if such a change was necessary, since future committees could (as past committees have done) select international nominees as they deemed appropriate. Additionally, singling out one group for specific representation might come at the expense of other organizational needs in the future. Lerner stated that he would work with the Nominating Committee and Executive Director to draft by-law amendment language that would then be voted on by Council either via email or at its next meeting.

Council continued to discuss other elements of the International Task Force’s recommendations. Discussion of hosting a SHAFR conference outside of North America generated concerns about the affordability of such a conference, especially for graduate students and contingent faculty in North America. Several members of Council stated that they were surprised at the level of discontent expressed in the survey but were eager to move forward to address the concerns expressed. There was some discussion of having a SHAFR contingent at other international conferences, like HOTCUS (Historians of the Twentieth-Century United States).

Lerner stated that it would make sense to return these suggestions to the implementation committee for practical follow-up. Zavelo suggested that Council should take action on items that it could. Sayward asserted that a contact list or database can be created through Member Clicks and that some type of event at the Toronto conference (while keeping the conference budget in mind) could possibly be organized. Other members suggested that online conference elements would be easier to manage than hybrid elements, based on SHAFR’s experience with both an on-line and a hybrid conference in 2020 and 2021. Hulshof suggested that the recommendation on additional gradations of membership be taken up with some priority, as he believed that would attract significant new members outside of North America and Europe.

Publication matters

Anne Foster (co-editor of *Diplomatic History*), Petra Goedde (co-editor of *Diplomatic History*), and Elizabeth Ferguson (representative of Oxford University Press--OUP) joined the meeting. Goedde presented some of the highlights from the editors’ written report. Foster stated that the dip in submissions is tied to a structural problem across the History profession, as fewer positions exist that are focused on research and writing. Goedde was proud to report that the editorial team had worked successfully with some people whose first language was not English to increase international submissions. Goedde also thanked those rotating off the Editorial Board for their incredible service and welcomed its new members. She was also thankful to those members of Council and the SHAFR community at large for their time and efforts in reviewing article manuscripts and writing book reviews.

As part of a discussion of the “most-read articles” from *Diplomatic History*, the question came up of about which articles become open access, since that naturally increases readership. Goedde explained that the Presidential Address is open access and that other articles are made open-access for a short period, usually as part of an anniversary or other promotion from Oxford University Press, something that OUP has been “great” in facilitating. Ferguson explained that the “most-read” statistics are also influenced by class usage. Other articles are open-access with payment of a fee, which usually comes from a funder or an institution (especially in Europe and increasingly under “Read and Publish” agreements that include access to the journal and publication of a specific number of open-access articles for one institutional/consortia fee). In 2023, there were six articles published open-access in *Diplomatic History*. Ferguson, in response to a request from Goedde, stated that Oxford University Press will publish the Bernath Lecture open-access moving forward.

Additional committee matters

Sayward gave background for the report from National Coalition for History (NCH) representative Tom Zeiler. In June, Council can revisit its fall decision to discontinue membership, given the more optimistic tone of Zeiler’s report. SHAFR can cancel, retain membership at a lower rate, or restore full funding. The long-time lobbyist at NCH is also planning to retire, so that may affect how the organization develops moving forward.

Lerner highlighted the report from the Development Committee, which is very enthusiastic and has provided a list of action items. Lerner stated that he thought Council should approve them and then staff can move forward to figure out the appropriate mechanisms to achieve them, but he opened the floor for discussion. McAlister stated that SHAFR does not have a traditional culture of donating and suggested as a step in that direction ensuring that every council member has donated. Several members discussed the need to streamline the donation process and to facilitate monthly donations, which Sayward is working to implement. Others suggested that SHAFR can and should be more aggressive in fund-raising solicitations. Since the committee had specifically requested guidance on where to focus its efforts, Council focused on that issue. Consensus emerged to focus on general revenue funds, which would not restrict Council from allocating funds toward graduate students, but the reverse would not be the case. Lerner moved that Council empower him and Sayward to work with the committee to implement these recommendations, Brooke Blower seconded, and Council approved unanimously.

Sayward reviewed the report from the Committee on Women in SHAFR, which includes no new requests for funding. It already has a budget for its event at the upcoming conference, and Sayward is working with the Local Arrangements and Program committees on scheduling issues. She also averred that only minor updates had been made to the CCRT internal procedures, based on recommendations from the new ombudsperson. Sayward also pointed out that the money for new section editors for the next edition of *The SHAFR Guide* was already in this year’s budget.

The meeting adjourned at 2:50pm ET.