

## **REPORT FROM THE GRADUATE STUDENT MEETING WITH STUDENT BOARD REPRESENTATIVES**

August 13, 2004

Graduate Student Board Representatives present: Aimee Van Wagenen & Luis Fernandez

In response to low attendance in previous graduate student meetings, this year we sought a somewhat new format for the meeting along with a new method to communicate with and encourage graduate students to attend the meeting. The results were quite successful, as we had 14 graduate students at the meeting in addition to Luis and myself.

On Friday evening, we met in the bar area of the Hilltop Restaurant. Thanks to the Budget and Finance Committee, we provided food and beverages to the graduate student attendees. This most certainly helped in attracting graduate students to the meeting and it also resulted in a festive and social atmosphere. As starving students, we all did a good job spending our allocated \$400 on food and drinks. We were scheduled to meet from 5-6, though many of us stayed much later. We also had visits from a few SSSP officers and long time members who introduced themselves and welcomed the students. Heeding recommendations from last year's graduate student meeting, Luis and I prepared a mini-newsletter, distributed via email, with information on events and sessions of special interest to graduate students. I asked many of the students in attendance if they remembered getting the email. They all did and thought it was a good practice—indeed, this email had gotten them to attend the meeting.

Feedback from the graduate students was overwhelmingly positive. Many expressed thanks to the Society for the food and drink. Students talked about the Annual Meeting and the Society in very positive terms, describing the meeting and its members as friendly and welcoming. I asked students about why they decided to come and, in some cases, keep coming to the SSSP meetings. In response, they talked about the social justice and activism mission of the meeting and about the opportunity to discuss their research in social problems areas. Students also said that meeting at the same time and location as ASA was very helpful in being able to stretch their minimal department funding for expenses to cover more than one conference. This should be an important consideration in our discussion about moving the annual meeting apart from ASA.

At least 3 students talked about having a positive experience with the meeting mentor program. Some of their meeting mentors had taken them to division meetings and this has been a step in getting at least 2 of the students their involved in organizing panels for next year and in doing other work for the divisions. One student talked about the roundtable discussions as very enjoyable with good topics and discussions. On the mundane side, another told me he really liked the black and red tote bags this year.

Notably absent was the negative feedback typical of the last few years around feeling alienated and unwelcome and also of presenting in sessions with few people in the audience. I attribute this to the vibrant attendance at the meeting this year. Additionally,

the graduate student meeting itself, instead of serving as a place that students vented about feeling disconnected from the meeting, served as a place where connection happened. I think students developed connection and relationships to each other and also to the culture, mission and members of the Society. Most of our meeting was spent doing just this—talking to one another about our research, our universities and experiences.

A couple of suggestions for improvement were made. One student said that it was tough to give feedback on the meetings so early in the conference. As such, we may try to schedule the meeting for Saturday instead of Friday next year. Another suggestion was that it would be helpful to have an orientation for attendees new to the meeting and the Society. Carrie Yang Costello's suggestion of a pamphlet/email on how the Society works and how to get involved might serve this purpose well. Finally, concern was expressed that there were few graduate students of color at the meeting.

Luis and I recommend that we continue the mixed meeting/happy hour format for the graduate student meeting and that the budget for food and beverage at the graduate student meeting be reauthorized for next year's meeting. We also think that the email newsletter highlighting events and sessions of interest to graduate students was a success and its preparation should continue to be a part of the duties of the graduate student representatives to the Board.

Finally, I think it is important that the Society continue the good work done at this year's meeting to differentiate itself from the ASA by emphasizing scholarship and activism, scholarship in pursuit of social justice and scholarship on the edge. ASA's theme of public sociology perhaps served as a challenge for us to distinguish ourselves. The public sociology of SSSP is different than the public sociology of ASA. We need to make an ongoing commitment to interrogation of the culture of the (study of) social problems and to exploring non-traditional forms of presenting knowledge, of producing knowledge and of staking our claims to truth. I submit that the commitment to these issues at this meeting, under the leadership of Kathleen Ferraro and the Program Committee, is in large part what distinguishes us so clearly from ASA and what attracted such a large number of us to the meeting this year.

Respectfully submitted,

Aimee Van Wagenen