

Official Reports and Proceedings

1998-1999 Council Minutes

Monday, August 9, 1999

President Alejandro Portes convened the Council at 2:30 p.m. He welcomed new Council members and elected officers. He thanked Past President Jill Quadagno and those Council members whose terms will be ending at the end of this meeting. He also indicated that, in deference to priority issues on the agenda, the full reports of Secretary Florence Bonner and Executive Officer Felice Levine would be covered in the first meeting of the 1999-2000 Council.

Present: Richard Alba, Catherine White Berheide, William T. Bielby, Florence B. Bonner, Diane Brown, Paul Burstein, Nancy Denton, Paul DiMaggio, Paula England, Joe R. Feagin, Michael Hout, Nan Lin, Carole C. Marks, Douglas S. Massey, Phyllis Moen, Alejandro Portes, Jill Quadagno, Patricia A. Roos, Ann Swidler, Robert Wuthnow.

Staff: Felice J. Levine, Carla B. Howery, Phoebe H. Stevenson, Edward Murguia, Roberta Spalter-Roth, Svetlana Durkovic

Absent: Cora Bagley Marrett, Melvin Oliver, Linda Waite

1. Approval of the Agenda and the Minutes

The agenda was approved as presented. The minutes from the February 1999 meeting had been previously approved.

2. Report of the President

President Portes expressed regret that the year is ending on a negative note, referring to the controversy about the American Sociological Review (ASR). He reminded Council members that, when Council is deliberating on confidential issues, the content of the proceedings are to be kept confidential. Adherence to confidentiality is a collective responsibility of everyone on Council. He noted that disclosure of confidential information had led to negative events that could have been avoided.

Council member England asked whether confidentiality as set forth in the Code of Ethics applied to all Council deliberations or only to issues related to selection of candidates for journal editors. Portes indicated that Council operates under rules of confidentiality only on specific issues like editor selection or other discussion or evaluation of nominees, editors, or staff. Otherwise, he indicated, Council discussion is open, although the custom is to report to the members on content and not the details of who said what.

3. Report of the Secretary

Secretary Bonner reported on the 1998 Audit Report, noting the strong financial state of the Association. She emphasized that the increased market value of ASA long-term investments as well as conservative spending on operating activities contributed to the increase in net assets. The auditor's management letter was also positive, showing that the internal control and adherence to accounting standards are sound.

4. Follow up Discussion on ASR Editor Selection

Background. President Portes introduced the topic by summarizing the events that led to the public discussion about the ASR editor selection process. He indicated that, when the Committee on Publications (COP) was briefed on Council action regarding the editor of ASR, the Committee expressed strong objections to Council's decision not to support its choice of ASR Editors. Portes reported that he recommended an additional meeting for the Publications Committee to discuss this issue. The meeting was held in May where agreement was reached on a series of recommendations to Council regarding editor selection. In June, Michael Burawoy, a member of the Publications Committee, made public a letter of resignation protesting Council's decision. Portes noted that the contents of his letter breached the confidentiality of the proceedings. What followed were numerous e-mail messages and comments as expressed in the ASA Business Meeting regarding the issues of confidentiality and democracy.

General Discussion. Council discussed at length the importance of both confidentiality and open communication between Council and the membership. Council members discussed the possible boundaries and balance among these principles. While they recognized the value of confidentiality, they emphasized that it was important that confidentiality not be viewed as hiding information from the ASA membership. Council believed that a great deal of its deliberation should be open and communicated to the ASA membership. However, on topics where confidentiality is needed, it is important to safeguard that principle, as per the ASA Code of Ethics. Potential candidates for editorships, for example, need to know that the discussion of their candidacy will be private and confidential. Council debated whether more public discussion would or would not discourage candidates from applying for these important professional posts and whether it would affect the quality of the deliberations.

Council member England, a former ASR editor, stated that the length of the recommended list of editors received from the Committee on Publications has varied throughout the years. Secretary Bonner reviewed the process of editor selection and read the relevant sections from the ASA By-laws (Articles 3 and 4). This document does not, however, go to a level of specificity about ranking or confidentiality, although the By-laws make clear that Council may add or delete names submitted by the Committee on Publications and that Council meetings shall be conducted according to Robert's Rules of Order.

Executive Officer Levine said that ASA's customary practice is for Council to hold open meetings except for executive sessions. In past years, a number of members attended meetings as observers. Council minutes are provided in detail to members in Footnotes, but not with attribution about who said what (as might be found in a transcript). She noted that the rationale for this approach is that Council members should feel free to share and test ideas and discuss and change their views as preparation for taking formal votes.

President elect-elect Massey said that confidentiality in the deliberation process encourages individuals to speak frankly. In the case of selecting journal editors, confidentiality may encourage more timid candidates to apply.

Council discussed various mechanisms for calling for an executive session when a significant number of Council members believe this option is needed to fully discuss a topic. Some Council members felt that calling for an executive session might bring negative reactions from the membership. There was consensus that discussions on publications policy should be open, but, when candidates for editorships are being discussed, the normal procedure should be to have an executive session.

Secretary Bonner said that resolutions for editor selection among Council members should be conducted in a way that the discussion is not shared outside. Portes informed Council that the Publications Committee discussed the issue of confidentiality during their meeting on August 8. Vice President Roos expressed concern about the possible gap between the Publications Committee and the Council if Council treats its discussions and decisions as open while Publications still treats its discussions and decisions as confidential. President-elect Feagin suggested that confidentiality needs to be constructed narrowly and not broadly.

Council member Hout suggested that Council needs to respond to the concerns voiced by members at the Business Meeting, preferably in a motion. Council discussed how to convey most accurately clear criteria on how Council bases its editor selection decisions and the rationale behind them. Council member Marks stated that the criticisms concerning the ASR editor selection process and concerns of African-Americans feeling left out of this whole process need to be addressed.

Motion: To hold open Council meetings except when the meeting is called into executive session (according to Robert's Rules of Order) when evaluating candidates for ASA positions and ASA staff. Withdrawn.

Council discussed the motion at length and the merits of this approach versus other actions. President-elect Feagin suggested that an ad hoc committee be appointed to develop a better articulation of issues relating to confidentiality.

A motion was made and seconded to establish such a subcommittee. As a friendly amendment, England suggested that this subcommittee should consist of COP and Council members.

Motion: to appoint a joint subcommittee of Council and the Publications Committee to articulate a policy regarding confidentiality and accountability that addresses the interests of both candidates and the ASA membership. Carried.

Consideration of Resolutions from the Committee on Publications. Council next turned to the specific resolutions of the Committee on Publications regarding how the Committee and Council should operate on matters considered by COP. Council overall responded favorably to these recommendations for improving communication between these two bodies, especially for editor selection.

The first resolution of the Publications Committee was briefly discussed. Bonner said that COP agreed that the Chair of the Publications Committee should present the recommendations coming from the Committee given that the Secretary has a dual role as a member of the Publications Committee and of Council.

Motion: The Chair of the ASA Committee on Publications, or his/her representative, will present the Committee's recommendations to Council on the selection of editors, and other matters deemed of importance. Carried.

Council next took up the second resolution of the Publications Committee. Council was concerned that one implication of a resolution that would return decisions to COP if Council cannot give support is that this procedure would create delays in taking action. Council considered whether COP and Council should meet together to avoid the delay of appointment of six months or more.

Council decided to table this motion and move to the third motion, which, if approved, would make this motion unnecessary.

Motion: If Council rejects the recommendations of the Committee on Publications, Council must return the decision to the Committee with Council's rationale and alternative proposals. Tabled.

Council turned to the third motion. The brief discussion centered on whether Council should establish a subcommittee of COP and Council when selections are in dispute, or whether Council should proceed with its responsibility to make an editor choice. While there was a difference in view, it was more about the appropriate procedure than about the intent for these committees to work together constructively. Council voted and passed the following resolution:

Motion: As a matter of Council policy, if Council rejects all of the recommendations for an editorship by the Publications Committee, a subcommittee of Council and the Publications Committee will be formed to discuss and ultimately prepare a mutual recommendation for Council's consideration. Carried (8 yes; 5 no)

Council members discussed the need to work out the timing of this process so that it did not delay the editor transition process. Also, a question was raised about what the meaning of "mutual recommendation" in the resolution passed by the Publications Committee. President Portes clarified that the subcommittee would arrive at a consensus recommendation but that this recommendation will still require Council's consideration.

Motion: To arrive at a process and schedule for editor selection that, if necessary, can accommodate a subcommittee of Council and the Publications Committee without delaying the transition to the new editor beyond the anticipated date. Carried.

Business Meeting and Member Resolutions on the ASR Editor Selection. Council expressed the view that the concerns articulated at the Business Meeting required a thoughtful response. Council member Marks indicated that Council needed to consider a number of issues relating to the recent ASR editor selection process. She noted that Council needed to consider whether President elect-elect Massey's letter read to Council was confidential. Also, Council's decision to put forward a third proposal for the editorship of ASR after rejecting the first two needs to be revisited. She also expressed concerns that Council did not allocate sufficient time for Council members to review the third proposal.

Levine clarified the sequence of events that led to the distribution to Council of the additional proposals. She indicated that several Council members had requested seeing one of the unranked proposals which, according to the ASA By-laws, Council may consider. She reported that, after consultation with Secretary Bonner and President Portes, she prepared packets for distribution at the Council meeting of all three candidates considered, but not ranked by the Publications Committee. She also noted to Council that it was only in recent years that Council received ranked material in advance; prior to three years ago, all materials from the Publications Committee were distributed at the Council meeting.

Portes said that the two original recommendations for ASR editors from the Committee on Publications were discussed at the Council meeting. He reminded Council that a motion to approve the ranked list submitted by the Publications Committee failed and the resolution to table these recommendations carried. The consideration of additional candidates was allowable under the current By-laws. While at the time Council discussed whether there was sufficient time to read the new material and took no action to defer deliberation, in retrospect, perhaps the agenda did not allow enough time for the review of all proposals. He noted, however, that the process and outcome were legitimate according to the existing By-laws.

Council indicated consensus that the process was legitimate, but chose to discuss three issues: (1) the addition of another proposal to those advanced by the Committee on Publications; (2) whether the presentation of a letter written for one purpose breached confidentiality when shared with Council for another purpose; and

(3) whether the process permitted sufficient time for adequate discussion and deliberation.

Secretary Bonner said that, since there was a request from Council, unranked proposals were made accessible at the meeting so as to facilitate the process of decision making among Council members. President elect-elect Massey stated that he read a portion of his own letter to provide his evaluation of the candidate for consideration by Council. He apologized for adding to the difficulty. President-elect Feagin stated that the issue of (lack of) time contributed to rushing the process of decision making and deliberation.

Council turned its attention to the resolution passed at the Business Meeting regarding the ASR editor selection process: That the publications schedule of ASR be continued and the current editor(s) be asked to continue for one year while the entire slate of editorial candidates be revisited by the Council and Publications Committee to be either ratified or revised. Council members thought that they needed to identify meaningful steps that could be taken to respond to the concerns expressed at the Business Meeting. Council thought, however, that the general discussion that took place in offering this resolution could best be addressed by other actions. Also, Council concurred that it should reaffirm its decision to support Camic and Wilson as the duly appointed ASR editors based on their merit and according to the procedures in place.

Motion: Move to table the motion to ask the immediate-past ASR editor to continue as editor until the process could be reviewed and either ratified or revised. Carried (approved 7; rejected 4; abstain 3).

The issue will be revisited at the 1999-2000 Council Meeting chaired by President Feagin.

5. Committee on Publications

Council turned to a consideration of the proposed candidates for editor of the new journal as recommended at its August 8 meeting by the Committee on Publications. Council members with a possible conflict of interest recused themselves.

Motion: To meet in executive session. Carried.

Council discussed the Committee on Publications' recommendations and rationale. President Portes stated that the Committee on Publications had a strongly preferred first choice but was providing Council with a very acceptable alternate candidate so as to move expeditiously forward.

Council initially discussed the proposals of the two candidates who were advanced by COP. Some members of Council expressed concerns that the material was just distributed and that they should have more time to review the proposals. A suggestion

was made and accepted that the topic and final action should be deferred until the first meeting of the 1999-2000 on the following day.

6. Update on Council Recommendations on ASA Policymaking and member Resolutions

President Portes provided a summary of the background and history, including the outreach efforts undertaken this spring to solicit member input and the current year-long comment period. Since no in-depth discussion was afforded during the Business Meeting, Executive Officer Levine suggested that additional outreach efforts should be made in the fall (e.g., through the use of Footnotes and the ASA homepage) to solicit member views. Council members supported this idea especially given the sentiment expressed at the Business Meeting that Council was perceived to proceed too quickly on certain issues without giving members enough time to debate and provide feedback.

Council adjourned at 6:35 p.m.

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