Minutes from the December 3-4, 2011
Meeting of the ASA Committee on Publications

Elected members present were Catherine White Berheide (ASA Secretary), Karen Cerulo, Jeremy Freese, James Jasper, Peggy Levitt, Steven Vallas, Erik Olin Wright (ASA President), and Robert Zussman (Chair).

Editors present for the open session were David Bills, Tony Brown, Karen Hegtvedt, Lauren Krivo, Tim Futing Liao, Kathleen Lowney, Jodi O’Brien, Alan Sica, and Debra Umberson.

Present from the Executive Office were Sally T. Hillsman (Executive Officer), Karen Gray Edwards (Director of Publications and Membership), and Janine Chiappa McKenna (Journals and Publications Manager).

Executive Session

The executive session convened at 8:30 a.m.

The Committee on Publications made the following decisions:

1. To approve the agenda with minor reordering. Carried unanimously.
2. To approve the August 2011 meeting minutes. Carried unanimously.
3. To ask the ASA editors during the open meeting to discuss with the Committee the following issues with regard to the ASA financial support of the editorial offices:
   a. Why do they hire certain types of staff?
   b. Do we need a formal policy on editorial office support?
   c. If so, what should the policy cover?
   d. What help do editors get when putting together budgetary proposals?
   e. What are their views on the ASA policy of not requesting host institutions to provide information on funding when editor candidates apply?

Open Session

The Committee open session with the ASA editors began at 9:30 a.m. Introductions were made and a reordering of the agenda noted.

Report of the Executive Officer
Hillsman discussed press coverage for ASA journals and noted that some ASA books are now available on iTunes. She distributed materials on a bill that passed in the House, which requires making public the names of reviewers on grant-funded research.

Penn State has requested to destroy approximately 500 boxes of rejected journal manuscripts in the ASA archives. The university has no legal right to the papers and they cannot be released to the public. ASA legal council says the Association has no right to retain the papers either and that they should be destroyed. Hillsman isn’t sure what should be done about it, if should they be destroyed or stored somewhere else. A storage facility aside from the archives would not be as secure. The ASA attorney does not know of any other organization that retains rejected manuscripts.

Sica discussed how he tried to set up the archive at Penn State 20 years ago; at that time everything was archived. If we destroy the materials in the future, researchers will only be able to look at what was published, not what had been rejected. He feels the Association should persuade the University to continue to hold the rejected materials but not permit access for a certain amount of time (e.g., 50 or 75 years).

The Committee discussed the research merits of these rejected articles and the difference between top-tier journals and third- or fourth-tier journals; the first-tier is likely to be researched if the material is available. Vallas suggested retaining only American Sociological Review files. They also discussed if revise and resubmits would be included in the rejected files and wondered if digitizing all of the materials is a possibility.

Hillsman noted that it does not appear to be common editorial practice to retain rejected manuscripts and that allowing public use may violate agreement with reviewers and authors. She also noted that since ASA legal council has provided advice, ASA Council will need to be included on the discussion. If there was a decision to retain, the Committee could provide advice on what could be done.

Brown noted that SAGETrack allows editors to record some information about reviewers and reviews. The Executive Office will see what SAGE is archiving through the online submission software.

**Report from the Secretary**

Berheide stated that the final report for 2011 is not yet available, but that membership is up from 2010, a “down” year partly because of the Atlanta location of the Annual Meeting. Members are increasingly subscribing to only one journal, instead of two or more, because they have online access to journals through their universities. The only journals that did not experience a decline in subscriptions from renewing members were Contexts and Teaching Sociology.
Institutional subscriptions are up overall according to SAGE; *Contexts* declined as a result of transfer to SAGE but the publisher is optimistic that it will be up in coming years.

**Reviews of Reviewers**

Lowney reported receiving a request from a university to provide feedback on a *Teaching Sociology* reviewer. She responded, on advice from ASA, that she was unable to do it based on ASA policy. The Committee discussed whether any other editors had received similar requests.

Umberson said she has started sending a thank you e-mail to reviewers if they do a great review. She noted she has been asked to write more tenure review letters and always includes relying on that person as a good reviewer if that’s the case; however, that should only be part of a bigger evaluation package. Hegtvedt said she sends a similar e-mail to reviewers.

Jasper felt that it would be okay to say yes, this person has reviewed for the journal, but not to write or provide a qualitative assessment of that person as a reviewer.

**Contexts Discussion**

Jasper started the discussion about *Contexts* pricing, stating there is a problem with newsstand/nonmember pricing, which traditionally cannot be priced less than member price. The price is now part of the SAGE contract and he proposed there should be a two-part proposal—changing the bylaws to reduce pricing for individuals and asking SAGE to consider a different kind of pricing structure.

Hillsman stated that there is no bylaws restriction, but the pricing issue is a matter of contract and is part of the negotiation between ASA and SAGE. Edwards said that nonmember pricing was part of the contract. If a subsequent price change is negotiated, the ASA revenue and support from SAGE could change, but this is always open to the discussion.

O’Brien discussed initiatives they have been thinking about in terms of marketing the *Contexts* content in different ways—including finally indexing the journal so that it is searchable online. This may produce some proposals for the Committee at some point.
Jasper mentioned the possibility of developing writing workshops and conducting one at the Eastern Sociological Society (ESS) meeting in the spring and he wondered if there were other things ASA could do to help authors improve their writing.

Hillsman stated that writing workshops were proposed in the *Contexts* budget. *Contexts* could have trial runs of the workshop at ESS and the Annual Meeting, and then use the workshop materials to develop a webinar script. The webinar could be on the *Contexts* website and run multiple times.

O’Brien stated they are spending a lot of time rewriting because people do not know how write for *Contexts*. They plan to have journalists come to ESS and the ASA Annual Meetings to discuss how to write. There are currently templates on how to write for the magazine posted on the *Contexts* website.

Lowney said she conducted a “How to Publish in *Teaching Sociology*” seminar at the Annual Meeting in Las Vegas and 65 people showed up. Also, there will be a special issue in 2013 on teaching writing (Suzanne Hudd will be the editor, Liz Grauerholz will also be involved, and a call for papers will be in the January 2012 issue).

Cerulo wondered how often poor writing leads to rejection and if SAGETrack has a system for grading writing and style when a paper is reviewed. Several editors noted that with some revise and resubmits they request that the author use a professional editor.

Brown expressed interest in the idea of providing more templates for authors and wondered if the editors could show a *Contexts* article before and after it was revised. O’Brien noted that when the guidelines are explicit, the editors can go back to the author and request the author follow those guidelines.

Jasper stated he would like to compile ideas on improving writing in the discipline and come up with a more detailed proposal for the Annual Meeting.

**Mental Health Monograph**

Hillsman provided a background on the ASA policy regarding book proposals from sections. The Committee usually looks at prospectus that goes to the proposed publisher; editors have control over the content but the prospectus gives the Committee some idea of what is going to be published. The Publications Committee makes the decision whether the ASA logo is going to appear on the book. The section’s book editors can work out the contract with the Executive Office.

The Committee members supported the Mental Health section proposal and encouraged the section to move forward.
Editorial Board Nominations

The Committee discussed whether the number of assistant professors on current editorial boards should be of concern. It was noted, however, that some members do not update their information in the ASA database so they actually may no longer be assistant professors.

The Committee also discussed the ethnic composition of editorial boards. Hillsman reminded the editors that the Council diversity statement not only includes gender and race, but also includes LGBT and type of institution.

Sunshine Proposals

Freese and Jasper provided the following proposals to the Committee to increase transparency:

1. Open all the Committee on Publications meeting to all ASA members.
2. Make full minutes of meetings available to members. If the minutes contain confidential information, it would be removed prior to online posting.
3. All journal editorial applications with names and institutions should be made available online, before decisions are made, with members given the chance to comment on them. Alternatively, if the full applications are not posted, the application should include one-page vision statements that would be posted, along with names of applicants, for members’ comments.
4. If additional financial information for the journals is made available online, it should be either the total amount of ASA contribution to each editorial office operation or the amount of ASA contribution and the host university’s contribution.

The Committee discussed having the Committee meeting open to the public, including how to conduct confidential discussions of editorial candidates or budgetary matters. Hillsman pointed out that the Committee meeting is listed in the Annual Meeting program already and it is not listed as a closed meeting, so if a member wanted to attend he or she could. The Committee also discussed publicizing that the meetings are open and whether non-Committee members would be allowed to speak.

Some members felt that opening the Committee’s executive sessions is a bad idea because committees are elected by the members to make final decisions that often involve confidential information and, even when information is not confidential, the committees are small to make efficient final decision once all the necessary input has been received from the open session.
Edwards pointed out that the upcoming meeting agendas are posted online and in *Member News and Notes*; members are told to contact the chair with questions or concerns, as he or she is the one who determines the agenda.

Jasper said he could remove the portion on opening the executive session from the proposal if there were more publicity about the meeting being open to the public. Wright suggested that people were not likely to come to the December meeting in DC, and they would probably tend to come to the August meeting if there was a significant issue on the agenda.

The Committee members then discussed putting the meeting minutes online after they are approved by the committee.

The Committee then turned to discussing the idea of posting editor applications online. Concerns were raised that this might decrease the number of applicants or convey proprietary information to other applicants.

Some members of the Committee thought that posting short vision statements could be useful, and some thought allowing members to see who is applying and comment on their visions would be helpful. Hillsman said that ASA Council would have to approve this and that it might be reluctant to have editor candidates identified, among other reasons, because it would increase the lobbying of Council.

Some Committee members felt that posting the vision statements online might help members better understand how the process of selecting journal editors works but others felt it would make candidates feel more like they were running for office than offering to edit a journal, and that this could cause some applicants to withdraw or not submit their names. Several editors at the table noted that if their complete application materials had been posted online, their departments might not have provided offers in support of their applications.

Hillsman said that as far as she knew only once in the last decade and a half were the names of editor candidates disclosed in violation of the current rules of confidentiality. It was suggested that posting the vision statements anonymously could be a compromise. It was also felt that posting too vague a vision statement would have little value.

The Committee then turned to what financial information on the editorial offices should be made available. Freese suggested posting on the members-only webpage the total amount of ASA’s contribution to each journal or the amount of ASA’s and the host university’s contributions funds broken down by budget category.

Members discussed whether the university contributions were proprietary and, if not, whether making them public would negatively impact negotiations with universities about providing financial support to a journal editorial office.
Several committee members pointed out that their respective universities view such funding support as confidential and would not allow it to be made public. It was noted that some departments may see this as an opportunity to get ASA to offset some costs they already incur, such as graduate student support, and that such funding should not be posted online because other faculty in the department would be able to see it.

Berheide discussed what financial materials are currently available online and what appeared in the *Footnotes* articles on the Association’s finances. She then turned to how the editorial office budgets are determined when an editor is selected. He or she is provided with the financial information on the current editorial office by ASA, and both the Executive Office and the current editor help the incoming editor plan what will be needed to support the functions of the editorial office. This is built into the ASA Operating Budget which is then reviewed and approved by the ASA Committee on the Executive Office and Budget (EOB) and Council. She also noted that when Council is not in session and financial issues come up that are not already in the budget, the Secretary has the authority to make the decision.

Berheide said there may be a need for some more specific guidelines to clarify what will be provided for editorial office support to ensure there is equity across journals as well as flexibility in the face of varying institutional support. The SAGE partnership has eliminated the need for some types of support (e.g., most copyediting) and also reduced postage as a result of web-based editorial office clerical processes. If departments are more likely now to look at journals as a way to fund graduate students, we will have some new issues to discuss. She posed the following questions to the Committee: What is the cost of a graduate student at a particular institution? What constitutes half-time (which can be only 15 hours per week at some institutions)? When does a journal go with a professional independent contractor? What types of positions do editorial offices need? Are they clerical or professional? Should the editorial office work be done by graduate students as part of their education if subsidized by ASA? Should the ASA be willing to spend up to $100,000 for a graduate student if we cannot hire one without tuition reimbursement (which is increasingly an issue)?

Zussman lead a discussion of the ranges of support provided by ASA and host institutions for the journals. The Committee has not considered institutional support when making decisions about editors, and editors are not required to provide information on such support in their applications. The editor should be determined based on the merit of the application, not expenses. Berheide asked the editors to comment on their experiences with the minimum number of people/hours needed for their offices, the skills that are needed and, if a graduate student is to hired, whether the Association should pay tuition and benefits as well as salary.

Berheide stated that the overall ASA operating budget is fine, but if there are disparities in funding for editorial offices, they should be corrected. If more funds are allotted for editorial offices, fewer funds are available for other ASA activities. But
the leadership of the association is committed to ensuring the necessary support for the ASA’s journal publishing program.

The editors wondered if members were requesting financial information about the editorial offices. The answer was no, but Committee members felt in principle as much information should be available as possible. It was noted that it is misleading to include only the funding ASA is providing and not what universities are providing, but disclosure of the latter is probably not possible. Berheide suggested ensuring budgets are equitable is the first priority.

Page Increase Requests

Zussman started the discussion by stating that the journals have always brought in revenue to underwrite other activities of ASA, and some of the elected Committee members thought more of these funds should be used for the journal content. He reminded the committee that he had asked the editors at the August 2011 Publications Committee meeting for proposals for extra pages. Some of the submitted proposals asked for more pages to publish more articles, others to publish longer articles.

Bills said he asked for up to 440 pages to publish more articles in Sociology of Education. The current acceptance rate is 12% and that would stay about the same—more manuscripts are coming in, for every five or six that are accepted one of comparable quality is rejected.

Umberson said she requested 98 pages for the Journal of Health and Social Behavior; 4 pages are for policy briefs and 94 to publish an additional two articles/year as well as to allow accepted articles to go up to 18 pages.

Brown said that the American Sociological Review has seen an increase in submissions, receiving over 500 manuscripts a year, so they asked for 100 more pages to publish up to four more articles a year and to allow for longer articles.

Hegtvedt said she had looked at the past 11 years of Social Psychology Quarterly and the journal always used more pages than allotted 390 (usually 420); an increase would allow accepted articles to include more theoretical development. Additionally, they should be able to publish two more articles/year.

The Committee was assured by the Secretary that the ASA proposed 2012 budget could accommodate these additional costs. She also noted that the committee’s preferred process for reviewing journal performance and deciding upon on page increases is to do so at the August committee meeting (rather than the December meeting). This is because editors’ provide journal data at the August meeting for the
committee’s review and that the committee’s recommendations to EOB and Council it can be incorporated into the fall process for proposing the next year’s operating budget.

Brown wondered if ASA publishes enough journals. Hillsman stated that when ASA was negotiating with SAGE there was a discussion on potential new journals and new section journals and SAGE was eager to discuss the possibilities. The Committee discussed current section journals and the process for considering other ASA journals.

Ethics in Publishing

Hegtvedt stated she is conducting a workshop on ethics at Emory and wanted feedback from the Committee on what to present. The Committee discussed self-plagiarism, particularly regarding data. Hillsman said principles and standards are what should be talked about and how to interpret these in real-life context.

End of the open session with the editors present.

Executive Session

The Committee on Publications made the following decisions:

• To approved the proposed editorial board nominations. Carried unanimously.
• To support the mental health section proposal. Carried unanimously.
• To make it widely known that the Committee meetings are open to all members (including in the Annual Meeting program and Member News and Notes). Carried unanimously.
  o To open executive session, or portions of, at the discretion of the chair. Carried unanimously.
  o To allow the chair to call for a vote of the elected Committee members during the open session at any time in consultation with the Committee.
• To post anonymous one-page vision statements from editor applicants and invite member comments to the committee; these will be posted after applications the application process is closed. Carried unanimously. [ASA Council approved this for three year experimental period after which it will be revisited; see Council minutes for full discussion.]
• To create a Publications Committee subcommittee (Vallas, Leavitt, Jasper) to draft the letter and guidelines for new editor applications to be reviewed by
the full committee at the August 2012 meeting with input from the current editors.

- To post committee meeting minutes online with confidential information removed. Carried unanimously.

- To post individual editorial office financial information with clarifying details. Carried, 6 yes, 2 no. [ASA Council rejected this request; see Council minutes for full discussion.]
  - To provide honoraria information for each journal, including that it is divided among editors. Carried unanimously

- To recommend to EOB and Council the following page increases:
  a. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 64 pages. Carried unanimously

  [ASA Council approved all page increase requests; see Council minutes for full discussion.]

- To offer editor term extensions of up to the maximum of six years were made to the editors of *American Sociological Review*, *Sociological Methodology*, *Sociological Theory*, *Sociology of Education*, and *Teaching Sociology*. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* and *Social Psychology Quarterly*. Carried unanimously.

- To hold any recommendations on the permanent archiving of rejected manuscripts until further information and options are available. Carried unanimously.

The meeting adjourned at 11:45.

The Committee will meet next in August 2012.

These minutes were approved by the Committee on Publications on May 15, 2012.