November 17, 2021

Dear ASA Publications Committee:

We are pleased to submit our application for the editorship of *Contexts*. We do so with keen awareness of our nerves, we must admit, as we have followed the journal since its inception. *Contexts* has a unique role in the family of ASA periodicals. It’s a journal-magazine hybrid with many more sections than a standard academic journal. Features, Q&As, trends, policy briefs, and photo essays animate, communicate, and circulate the sociological imagination to audiences far beyond the academy. *Contexts* is singularly exciting in this regard.

With this recognition as our baseline, we are pleased to say that we have thought carefully about how we can carry forward the exceptional work done by past editors, and also how we can make a meaningful contribution to its future pages. If selected, we will build on the existing strengths of *Contexts* while helping the magazine to achieve its aspirations of reaching a more diverse readership who wishes to be current about social science knowledge, emerging trends, and their relevance.

In this letter, we will provide a snapshot of our scholarly records; editorial experiences; vision for the journal, including remarks about the editorial board and tasks; and the considerable institutional resources that will enable us to smoothly run the magazine.

1. Candidate Qualifications.

Dr. Amin Ghaziani is Professor of Sociology and Canada Research Chair in Urban Sexualities. He researches problems that range from how to measure urban sexual cultures to the dynamics of neighborhood change and new forms of inequality. He is author or editor of 5 books and 60 articles, chapters, essays, and reviews, many of which he has published in the top journals of our discipline—and 4 specifically in *Contexts*. Dr. Ghaziani is a devoted public intellectual who has penned a half dozen opinion-editorials, including in the *LA Times*, and who has given more than 200 interviews to members of the media from 7 different countries.

Dr. Seth Abrutyn is Associate Professor of Sociology. He is a broadly trained theorist with interests in suicide/mental health, social psychology, emotions, cultural sociology, and organizations/institutions. He is author of 47 peer-reviewed articles, 2 books, 3 edited books, and 17 book chapters. His work is well-represented in major ASA journals, including the *American Sociological Review* and *Sociological Theory*, and he has received 7 ASA paper awards. A significant part of Dr. Abrutyn’s career success has been due to something sociology often undervalues: collaboration. His most insightful contributions to the discipline have come through synergy, and thus he does not see journal editing as a chief sees a village: he instead imagines *Contexts* drawing from the brilliance of junior and senior folks across the academy.

In light of our scholarly records, public profiles, and because we are tenured faculty members, we believe that now is a propitious time for us to devote our intellectual efforts to editorial leadership for the American Sociological Association.
II. Editorial Experiences.
While Dr. Ghaziani has not yet edited a journal, he has many cognate experiences, including serving on the editorial boards of the *American Sociological Review* and *Sociological Methodology*, among other journals; editing books with premier presses like Oxford and NYU; editing journal special issues in *Theory & Society* and *Women’s Studies Quarterly*; organizing 2 international conferences in Vancouver and Santa Barbara; and coordinating a symposium in *City & Community*, the official journal of the CUSS section of the ASA.


Most recently, Dr. Ghaziani collaborated with Dr. Matt Brim, a humanities scholar in New York, to co-edit 2 interdisciplinary volumes on “Queer Methods.” They managed submissions from 30 established and emerging scholars who hailed from all corners of the academy. NYU Press published *Imagining Queer Methods* in 2019. These examples show that Dr. Ghaziani has a rich background of editorial expertise.

Dr. Abrutyn has not edited a journal before either, but he, too, can point to a litany of positives that counterbalance and surpass this limitation. First, he was trained as a general theorist by Jonathan Turner. This meant being agnostic on his theoretical perspective, and reading widely and deeply. In addition, he has published work using quantitative, qualitative, and historical methods. In fact, his extensive publication record shows that he is well-equipped to evaluate submissions from scholars who approach their work from wide-ranging backgrounds.

Like Dr. Ghaziani, Dr. Abrutyn has also served on several editorial boards, including the *American Sociological Review, Sociological Perspectives*, and *Social Psychology Quarterly*. In addition, he has edited 3 books. This has helped him to develop practical skills as an editor, including meeting deadlines, staying organized, and communicating with authors. Dr. Abrutyn has grown comfortable interacting as an editor with junior scholars, who need different things in style and substance, and senior folks. The array and diversity of authors with whom he has worked points to his commitment to a modern approach to sociology. As a book editor, he could have easily reproduced his own work. Instead, he chose to step out his own box and give authors voice and freedom. Moreover, the recruitment of authors helped Dr. Abrutyn make wider and deeper connections in the discipline. This will serve both of us, as the next editors of *Contexts*, well in recruiting editorial board members and in soliciting reviewers.

In common, we feel it prudent to express that we would not embark on this journey alone. Each of us is professionally connected with former editors of ASA journals. We count in our network editors such as Drs. Rich Carpiano, Mustafa Emirbayer, Neil Gross, Omar Lizardo, Deirdre Oakley, and Iddo Tavory. They will serve as confidants, consultants, and editorial interlocutors for us as we edit the *Contexts*. 
III. Vision Statement.

*Contexts* is the most important venue for work that seeks to present sociological research in a captivating, jargon-free way for non-specialist audiences. We believe that it has secured this enviable position in two ways. First, *Contexts* is committed to a vision of sociology with broad reach. Second, the magazine blends peer-reviewed feature articles with non-traditional yet highly creative content in the form of photo essays, culture reviews, trends, and policy perspectives. This makes the journal interesting in a way that is unparalleled in the discipline. These qualities of the *Contexts* inspire us to imagine a vision for the magazine via three themes: continuity (of excellence), expansion (of promise), and inclusivity (of voices).

**Continuity.** Continuity is an under-appreciated aspect in academic publishing. *Contexts* excels in many ways, which we would want to amplify. It is a well-run magazine, with an efficient review process yet exacting rigor. The content is timely, varied, and presented with polish. There are long reads and photo essays, features and book reviews, academic reflections and policy briefs. The covers are beautiful and artistic, the contents page captivates immediately, and the back of the magazine previews the upcoming issue. The magazine makes the sociological imagination accessible. It has an admirable physical and digital format.

None of this needs improvement or intervention. Why tinker with it? It works well. Evidence of its success abounds in the form of increasing submissions. We also note that articles in *Contexts* are cited more and more in traditionally academic venues, and incorporated into course syllabi. If anything, our goal would be to make these strengths stronger.

**Expansion.** We like that *Contexts* has become more international over the years. We see this as an opportunity to expand the journal and improve its global position. If selected, we would be the first international editors of *Contexts*. We would use our multi-national professional networks to circulate wider awareness about the magazine, to raise its visibility among scholars who work outside the American context, and thus to solicit manuscripts that represent more heterogeneous vantage points.

This strategy promises a distinct type of public and intellectual innovation that arises from a global ethos, perspectives, and networks. One idea we have is to create a new section, which we might call “world report” or “global views.” We would invite an international scholar to pen an essay that provides a “view from” their respective country, a place outside the core of sociological production in the U.S. The piece could outline some of the most exciting work, or pressing social problems, in that particular national context. Another version of this idea involves creating a “conversation” between two or among three writers from a particular country, where readers are introduced to place-specific debates, rather than a single view.

We are well-equipped to enhance the international outlook of the magazine. Dr. Abrutyn has implemented this principle in the context of graduate education. He routinely trains our grad students on how to communicate broadly and efficaciously, while packing the sociological significance that is necessary to satisfy those who may read the magazine through a more traditional lens. Dr. Ghaziani has an extensive track record of public engagement, as we described earlier. He trains graduate students on how to write opinion-editorial pieces. As a result, UBC sociology students often have multiple lines on their CV that represent publications in newspapers and magazines.
Inclusivity. Diversity, equity, and inclusion matter – and the choices we make about the composition of our editorial team is a vital, material way to back our commitment to these otherwise philosophical ideas. We are keenly aware of a need to support diversity in knowledge production and distribution. Selecting an established queer scholar of color as part of an editorial team would provide evidence of continued commitment to a racially diverse editorial team, given the composition the current editors. In addition, Drs. Ghaziani and Abrutyn engage in very different types of research. Selecting us as the new editors would also communicate to the discipline that we value intellectual diversity in principle and in practice.

Beyond our own biographies, we also think about diversity, equity, and inclusion in more ambitious ways via three overlapping elements: a commitment to diversity in substance and subfield representations; a commitment to diversity in mediums of expression (e.g., amplifying the presence of Contexts on Twitter, Instagram, and other social media platforms); and a commitment to diversity in the editorial board. We are convinced that realizing this last goal is key to accomplishing the first two—but this will not be an easy task. Success requires sensitivity to representation in multi-scalar ways, including demographic, theoretical, methodological, national, rank, and institutional. We also will cultivate a heterogeneous reviewer pool, evaluate the submissions that we receive, and evaluate the reviews for their substantive contributions and overall suitability for developing submissions to the magazine. Together, these big-picture and granular ideas converge on a shared consciousness: we believe that the pursuit of creativity, and creative writing, demands that we diversify our input of ideas, contacts, connections, and conversations.

In terms of learning the ropes, we will draw on our colleagues and friends who have first-hand experience with editorial work already, as we alluded to earlier. Before we begin our term, we would do what we sociologists do best: collect and analyze data. Based on conversations with the large number of editors we know between us, as well as former editors of Contexts specifically, we would outline a set of best practices to guide us in our first year.

VI. Institutional Support.
A word about UBC as the next home for Contexts: The sociology department has a history of hosting flagship ASA journals. Under Dr. Neil Gross’s editorship, we housed Sociological Theory for many years. We also have a number of faculty who are committed to public engagement and who are regularly profiled in international media outlets. In addition, our faculty have expertise across sociological subfields and methodologies, and we have leading scholars at UBC who work in adjacent disciplines, such as Jamie Peck in geography, who is the editor of Environment and Planning A. The sociology department, where we are based, is internationally renowned as a leading center for research. Diverse rankings consistently place us among the strongest departments in the world. We are ranked #2 in Canada.

These remarks illustrate the intellectual firepower that we have at UBC, and in the sociology department in particular. Colleagues and graduate students in our home department will assist us with running the journal, while we will turn to scholars across the Faculty of Arts for consultative, deliberative, and other editorial resources. As practitioners of interdisciplinarity, we hasten to add that this also promises an opportunity to cultivate synergies between the public face of sociology and that of other disciplines.
Thank you for your time, your commitment to the excellence of *Contexts*, and your consideration of our application.

Yours sincerely, with much hope,

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