

SBL Policy Update: Participation of Student Members at the Annual Meeting

In the summer of 2010, SBL membership began a lively discussion on the identity and mission of the Society. In response to this discussion, the Council proposed several policy changes concerning the participation of student members at the SBL Annual Meeting. The proposal stipulated that student members were required to submit a full paper to the program unit chair(s) during the call for papers period each year they maintained their status as students, regardless of how many times they may have presented a paper at the Annual Meeting in the past. The participation of student members at the Annual Meeting was also to be limited to one paper presentation, with one other possible appearance on the program as a president, panelist or respondent. These proposed changes arose from a sincere dialogue among Council members on the mounting academic and professional challenges facing current student members.

The SBL Student Advisory Board (SAB), as representatives of student membership with a mandate to advise the Council regarding issues and opportunities relating to student membership and participation in the Society, spent four months in discussion with students and faculty through a variety of media in order to fully draw out how the proposed changes might impact student membership. The professional, thoughtful feedback SAB received from student and full members of the Society allowed the Board to compile and present a report to the Council in March of 2011 requesting the reconsideration of the proposed changes. In the fall of 2011, the SBL Council renewed their discussion of the policies concerning student members based upon the feedback SAB was able to compile in our request. The result of this discussion was very positive; in a statement from November 2011, the Council resolved that all first-time presenters at the SBL Annual Meeting (full and student members) must submit a full paper (specifically, the paper to be read at the Meeting) to the program unit chair(s) during the call for papers period. Subsequent presentations do not require the submission of a full paper. Student members are limited to one paper presentation, and to two appearances on the program (one paper presentation, and one appearance as a panelist, respondent or president).

These modifications fully take into account the concerns expressed in SAB's request to the Council regarding student participation at the Annual Meeting and opportunities for student professional development. The Council's discussion of these issues, combined with the Annual Meeting Program Committee's review of the policies and procedures concerning program units at both the International and Annual Meetings, resolves any challenges regarding the implementation of the policy changes. The revised program guidelines will also provide new opportunities for student mentorship and development due to an increase in communication between student members and program unit chairs.

The members of SAB would like to express their sincere thanks to all of those members, student and full, who responded to our call for feedback with thoughtfulness and professionalism. This feedback had a direct impact on the Council's decision to reconsider the proposed policy changes. We would also like to thank the Council for their gracious and careful response to our concerns and for their dedication to considering the challenges and opportunities facing current student members. SAB continues in its commitment to providing an

earnest voice for student members of the Society and to providing increased opportunities for student academic and professional development. Thank you for your ongoing support.

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