

Report on the 2008 ACLS Annual Meeting

By ASTR President Tracy Davis

The ACLS met in Pittsburgh 8-10 May. I found three major topics of discussion particularly relevant to ASTR members.

Fellowships

In 2007-08, ACLS granted over \$9.5 million in fellowships, increasing both the number awarded and the amount of each fellowship: 65 awards went to faculty engaged in 24 disciplines and based in 44 institutions. Competition was slightly more intense than in previous years, with a 1:16 ratio of applications to awards (1:14.4 for Full Professors, 1:18 for Associate Professors, and 1:15.8 for Assistant Professors), compared to last year's overall ratio of 1:15.6 and the year prior, 1:14.7. ASTR members should take note of the various categories of competition — details are available through ACLS's website [HYPERLINK "http://www.acls.org" www.acls.org](http://www.acls.org) — including Fellowships for doctoral candidates (a.k.a. Early Career Fellowships), recently tenured scholars, and more experienced scholars. The Digital Innovations Fellowships program supported by the Mellon Foundation has completed its lifespan, however new categories to support research on African humanities (supported by the Carnegie Foundation) is anticipated next year and a category in to support of collaborative research is expected in coming years.

Student Representation in Learned Societies

I participated in a lively discussion about student representation in learned societies. Several of ASTR's initiatives are in the vanguard relative to other learned societies: we have a Graduate Student Caucus with its own structure of committees and, in addition, its President serves on ASTR's Executive Committee; we support graduate research and travel to conferences through several prize categories; students are a major presence at conferences and present their research in all forums; and we strive to ensure that students' experience at conferences is both intellectually stimulating and socially fulfilling, utilizing mentor match-ups, receptions, and the annual Caucus meeting. Students are involved in the administration of the Society and the planning tasks that effect them most directly, such as conferences. They have "real tasks" and tangible reasons to make ASTR their base.

That said, we lack data that tracks members' longevity in the organization. For example, how many student members renew their membership once they enter the professoriate? Do we retain members after they are tenured? How well does ASTR serve members at various transition points in their studies and careers? Will our decision to down-size the scope of the *Directory to PhD Programs* negatively effect this? We do have data that correlates graduate student membership in departments relative to faculty membership in those same departments but we have not analyzed this in a meaningful way.

Digital Publishing

A lengthy and engaging session was devoted to the "internet revolution" with implications for humanities publication. The National Endowment for the Humanities supported the Digital Humanities Initiative for several years; this has recently been

established as a permanent office of the NEH which is exploring infrastructure and training issues for humanities applications and experts in conjunction with the Department of Energy's Office of Science and Supercomputers. Seemingly unlimited potential exists to store data, but the salient questions are what data warrants storage, should delivery be by open access, and what role(s) should learned societies take in this? Apart from e-journals and e-books that "look like" journals and books, what can digital technology enable? How can scholarly societies aid in this conceptualization and implementation? New forms of digital literacy will be needed, however if the question begins with *what we want to do*, then tools and expertise can be second-order priorities.

Some discussion was devoted to Harvard University's decision to make all its faculty's articles available on open access. In the same stroke, Harvard libraries cancelled subscriptions to 1,000 non-scholarly journals. If other institutions follow suit, we can look ahead to a significant reorientation of how information is distributed and accessed. In such a climate, how should learned societies (and our journals' publishers) regard open access: is there a critical shelf life for a new article, during which time it should be accessible only to subscribers (in our case, ASTR members and subscribing libraries), or do we foresee a situation where open access is desirable and feasible from the time of publication? There are significant revenue issues embedded in all these scenarios. What services does a society like ASTR provide to members (as individual journal subscribers) versus institutional subscribers, and what would be the repercussions if we converted to a digital-only platform? Costs have to be shifted somewhere, be it scholarly societies, libraries, members, or other end-users.

Digital presentation of research offers many advantages for performance scholars, though as augmentations to publication this also presents thorny issues of copyright vis-à-vis reproduction of imagery. How can we balance exploiting these potentials with respect for copyright? How can we utilize computing for humanities applications that are not mere provisions of content, but incorporate our insights into narrative structure, conventions of representation, and sensory reception? What is "fair use" and how do we act within its constraints? How can we think about researching, writing, and editing across a broad array of domains? Not all publishing need be oriented to an end-point, definitively issued by a scholar; instead, it could exist to help generate response, refinement, and transformation. How can our discipline influence practice as well as public policy on these issues by repurposing scholarship into multiple forms (in line with the concept of Web 2.0)?