

Members

Update on the Program Committee



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Kerry J. Sulkowicz

Dear Colleagues,

Following a controversy that arose within the Program Committee in early February, which brought to a head longstanding concerns on the part of APsA's Executive Committee about the functioning of the Program Committee, we would like to announce a significant transition for APsA. The existing Program Committee

is being disbanded effective immediately, and we are now beginning a process of reconstituting it in a way that is consistent with the new direction and culture of APsA , characterized by greater openness, collaboration and transparency.

A polarizing question was raised in the Program Committee about whether to invite a well-known and controversial figure in our field to present on a panel at our upcoming virtual meeting in June 2023. She is a member in good standing of APsA. She has also been the object of passionate supporters and passionate detractors, as a result of reports of alleged actions in the context of her teaching role at George Washington University, and public statements related to the intractable conflict in Israel-Palestine.

After careful consideration and consultation with a range of experts, as well as extensive and difficult discussions within the Executive Committee and between members of the Executive Committee and the Program Committee, we decided that it is not in the best interests of APsA at this time to extend an invitation to her to speak at our conference. We felt that the Association could not "contain" a session with her on it, and some of us also felt uncomfortable with having a presenter who has been on record as making what some believe are statements that may constitute hate speech.

The decision not to extend an invitation to her at this time was determined on the basis of the escalating controversies surrounding her public statements regarding the Israel-Palestine conflict, and her alleged actions at George Washington University. We are aware that some critics of our decision will view this determination as being on the basis that she is a woman of color. We believe this is a gross mischaracterization of the rationale for this decision. We recognize that these decisions invite polarized responses from all sides of such controversies. We have subjected our decision to careful review and reflection, and we remain open to critique from others, but we believe this is the most prudent decision for APsA at this time.

In response to our decision, the Program Committee has informed us that it is refusing to put on our June 2023 meeting altogether, which has contributed to our decision today to disband the Committee and focus on rebuilding it. Our deliberations on this issue have brought into sharper relief concerns about the way the Program Committee functions in the context of our Association. We feel it is crucial for this committee to function in an open, transparent and collaborative way that coordinates proposals for our major panels and plenaries with input from other committees that all work together to develop our annual meetings, including the Membership, Public Information, Social Issues, Psychotherapist, and Executive Committees, along with the DPE and APsA staff. During this transitional period for the Program Committee, the Executive Committee will work with our members to ensure that our upcoming June meeting occurs smoothly.

While APsA has over the past several years made what is sometimes referred to as a "turn to the social", we have gotten considerable feedback about our conferences not having enough direct clinical programming , and we believe this feedback should be taken seriously so that there is a better balance between clinical and applied psychoanalytic sessions. The Program Committee should have some degree of academic freedom as a committee of the Membership Department, but unlike a peer-reviewed scientific journal, it does not have editorial independence.

We also believe that, going forward and in accordance with common practices at other professional associations, members of the Committee should generally refrain from presenting at our conferences altogether, in exchange for the privilege and intellectual stimulation of proposing sessions for our programs, which should then be discussed by the other groups involved in putting on the entire conference. The new Program Committee will actively solicit and encourage proposals for sessions from our entire membership instead of from a select group of insiders and Program Committee members. We also plan to open up membership on the Program Committee to what is now becoming our norm for major organizational appointments, which is to seek applications of interest from all our members.

At our upcoming APsA board meeting, we plan to propose to our board that we implement clear term limits for all major committees, probably one five-year term, or three-year terms with the possibility of one renewal after the first term. This will send a clear message to our younger members who aspire to leadership roles in APsA that they have a chance to step into them earlier in their career.

Thank you for your understanding of this complex matter.

Kerry and Dan, on behalf of the Executive Committee

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