

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear Colleagues,

During the past summer, the conference program committee, made up of scholars across the field of Jewish studies; Sara Horowitz, vice-president for program; and AJS staff devoted significant efforts to arranging the schedule for our annual meeting. Each year, we receive inquiries regarding the proposal evaluation process. In response to these questions, I would like to explain the route a paper or session proposal follows from submission through placement in the conference program. As the number of submissions continues to grow, we do not have sufficient time or space at the conference to place every worthy proposal. At present, we are unable to accept approximately 20 percent of the proposals submitted to us. This is why it is important for prospective presenters to understand the various factors that affect acceptance and placement, and how to prepare the strongest possible proposal.

In the first phase in the review process, one of the twenty designated division coordinators evaluates each proposal. The purpose of this phase is for specialists in the field to assess the proposal and offer their recommendations for acceptance or rejection to the program committee. Depending upon the field, the number of submissions to a division can range from a dozen to more than eighty. Division coordinators have access to all subject-area proposals, so that if a

coordinator does not believe a proposal fits well under a given rubric, she/he may ask that another coordinator evaluate it. The abstract is the only grounds upon which a coordinator can assess a prospective paper or session, so it is extremely important that the abstract represents as lucid and thoughtful an articulation of the intended topic as possible. While evaluation criteria vary somewhat based upon the proposed format (panel, roundtable, etc.), coordinators in general look for originality of research, a well-defined topic that can be presented within the given time frame, and evidence of a clear argument. It is vital that each participant in a proposed session submit an abstract in a timely way, otherwise the entire panel may be jeopardized.

Among accepted individual proposals—those proposals not submitted as part of pre-organized sessions—coordinators are asked to suggest groupings of three to four papers around a given theme. If accepted by the program committee, these groupings will constitute panels in the conference program. Division coordinators are also asked to list all the sessions in their divisions in order of priority, to provide brief explanations for papers or sessions they recommend rejecting, and to highlight any sessions which should be given special priority. This evaluation process allows the program committee to understand the recommendation and also provide feedback to applicants.

Division coordinators' recommendations play a central role in determining which papers will appear in the conference program, but it is ultimately the program committee, led by Sara Horowitz, that makes the final decisions. In addition to the recommendations of the division heads, the program committee takes into account such factors as time and space limitations,

overlap among divisions, and subject area distribution. One of the most significant constraints is that no more than fourteen concurrent sessions (in rare cases, fifteen) may be held in a given time slot. This limit is in part imposed by the conference hotels, which offer AJS a finite number of rooms. It is also a policy developed in response to members' concern that session audiences not be spread too thinly.

One of the greatest challenges the program committee faces is how to place as many high quality individual proposals as possible in the final program. Each year, there are "orphan" proposals that the program committee must reluctantly decline, simply because there is no appropriate panel or session in which they can be placed. The Call for Papers explains that preference for acceptance is given to pre-organized sessions, because these sessions tend to have a greater coherence and underlying logic than panels made up of individual proposals. This policy is consistent with those of other scholarly organizations. At the same time, the program committee recognizes that graduate students and scholars new to the field or conference may not have the networks in place to easily organize panels. In addition, scholars whose research charts unexplored territory may not easily find appropriate colleagues with whom to form panels. To assist members in forming panels, AJS has created a "Request for Papers Board" on our Web site, where scholars can post a call for papers on a given topic. This year, in fact, several successful sessions were organized through this virtual bulletin board. Scholars have also turned to the listserv, H-Judaic, to post calls. These venues are not only useful ways of soliciting proposals for a session, but also of sharing one's work with other scholars.

After the program committee has reviewed the division coordinators' recommendations, it drafts a preliminary conference schedule to ensure that the maximum number of proposals have been placed and to avoid scheduling sessions of the same subject area in one time-slot.

With a finite number of spaces and days, as well as A/V considerations, this can be a great challenge, but every effort is made to ensure that panels on a particular subject area are spread out across the conference. Once letters have been sent to applicants announcing the

decisions, the vice-president for program works closely with the AJS office to review and refine the schedule, ensuring that the program is as fluid and exciting as possible.

Rona Sheramy
Association for Jewish Studies

37th Annual Conference of the Association for Jewish Studies

December 18-20, 2005
Washington Hilton and Towers
Washington, DC

ADVERTISERS

American Academy for Jewish Research
Bar-Ilan University Press
Baylor University Press
Cambridge University Press
Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum
The Center for Cultural Judaism
The Center for Jewish History
Continuum International Publishing Group
The Goldstein-Goren Diaspora Research Center
Goldstein-Goren International Center for Jewish Thought at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev
Harvard University Press
Hendrickson Publishers
Indiana University Press
Institute for Jewish Studies/Emory University
Jerusalem Books, Ltd.
The Jewish Publication Society
Jewish Theological Seminary Press
Knopf Publishing Group, Random House, Inc.
The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization
Mohr Siebeck
National Foundation for Jewish Culture
National Yiddish Book Center
New York University Press
Purdue University Press
Rowman & Littlefield
Rutgers University Press
Sage Publications
The Shalem Center/Shalem Press
Society of Biblical Literature
Stanford University Press
Syracuse University Press
University of California Press
University of Pennsylvania Press
University of Pennsylvania Press Journals Division
University of Texas Press
University of Washington Press
University Press of New England
Vallentine Mitchell Publishers
Yale University Press
Yale University Program in Judaic Studies
Wayne State University Press

EXHIBITORS

Association Book Exhibit
Brill Academic Publishers
Cambridge University Press
Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum
The Center for Cultural Judaism
The Center for Jewish History
CET Academic Programs-Jewish Studies in Prague
Continuum International Publishing Group
Dan Wyman Books
The Feminist Press at CUNY
Index to Jewish Periodicals
Indiana University Press
Jerusalem Books
Jewish Lights Publishing
The Jewish Publication Society
Jewish Theological Seminary Press
The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization
Merkos Publications
Mohr Siebeck
National Yiddish Book Center
New York University Press
Random House, Inc.
Rowman & Littlefield
Rutgers University Press
Schoen Books
The Scholar's Choice
The Shalem Center/Shalem Press
Stanford University Press
Syracuse University Press
University of California Press
University of Pennsylvania Press
University of Texas Press
University Press of America
University Press of New England
Wayne State University Press
Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company
Yale University Press
YIVO Institute for Jewish Research

For book exhibit hours and information on exhibiting/advertising at the AJS Conference, go to: www.brandeis.edu/ajs.