International
Meeting Program
Committee

Society of Biblical Literature

This document describes the role and activity of the International Meeting Program Committee and lays out policies for management of the SBL International Meeting program.

Handbook

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Thanks

Thanks for your willingness to serve the SBL by chairing a program unit. The quality of sessions at our meetings is the result of your leadership; you serve in a vital and demanding position. You cultivate opportunities for the community of scholars that is SBL, advancing the academic study of biblical literature from a wide spectrum of methodological approaches and a variety of professional contexts.

On behalf of this community of scholars, we thank you for your efforts and look forward to your continued service. We also provide several benefits to you as the chair of a program unit.

- Reservations: as a Society VIP, you are guaranteed a sleeping room reservation at a headquarters hotel, which will ensure that you are close to the action at the meeting.
- Program Unit Chairs' Breakfast: on the Tuesday of the Annual Meeting, you are invited to a breakfast with other Program Unit Chairs, the Annual Meeting Program Committee, and staff. This meal will feature an annual program update and time to discuss program-related issues.
- Letter to your dean or department chair expressing appreciation for the service you provide biblical, religious and/or theological education. These letters help accentuate one piece of support for promotion and tenure at many institutions. If you are an independent scholar or hold a job outside education, we will express appreciation to a designated person.

International Meeting Program Committee

The International Meeting Program Committee (IMPC) approves, reviews, and renews program units for the International Meeting (IM) and works with Council and Executive Office (EO) to set policy and procedure for the IM.

History

The IMPC was created in 2010 because of the growth of the IM and the need to evaluate and shape its direction for the future. The IM itself began in 1983 in Salamanca, Spain. The meeting was held in one day with six sessions and twenty-four participants. By 2024, twenty-three different countries hosted the meeting. The 2024 IM in Amsterdam, the Netherlands marked the 41st SBL meeting held outside of North America and involved over 150 sessions and over 500 participants.

While Europe remains home to the majority of SBL members outside of North America, the IM has been held outside of Europe nine times (1986 Jerusalem, 1992 Melbourne, 2000 Cape Town, 2005 Singapore, 2008 Auckland, 2015 Argentina, 2016 Seoul, 2020 Adelaide, 2023 Pretoria), and discussions with institutions in South America and Asia are ongoing. How the IM functions as a part of the Society's general strategy of internationalization is continually under discussion. The IMPC plays an important role in discussing and shaping this strategy with Council and the EO.

Description

With assistance and coordination from the EO, the IMPC approves, reviews, and renews program units. The IMPC works with the EO and Council to set policy and procedure for the IM. The IMPC encourages diversity, collegiality, and mutual respect. It seeks to set policies that develop innovative scholarship, scholarly conversation and community, and the efficiency of overall program management.

The EO maintains detailed historical data on participation, sessions, program units, and other specifics that inform the IMPC's work. Reports will be provided by the EO for this work, and it is essential that the IMPC discuss with the EO what information is needed. The EO makes decisions regarding location of the IM and all financial matters pertaining to its operations.

Relationship of International Meeting to Annual Meeting

Following the aforementioned responsibilities, the IMPC should develop a program representative of the entire discipline so that the IM grows as a leading vehicle for keeping SBL members abreast of latest developments across the discipline and provides significant opportunities for professional development in terms of research, teaching, networking. The IM and AM share this general goal and many other similarities but differ in significant ways.

The IM is comprised of program units just like the AM, but IM program units are reviewed and approved separately from AM units. Policies for the two meetings are similar but separately considered and set.

The primary purpose of the IM is to highlight local and regional scholarship. Program units are encouraged to incorporate local participation and to interact with the local programming. The IM meets whenever possible with local and regional bodies.

Membership figures in 2023 show that SBL is predominately composed of scholars from North America and Europe, as just under 89% of SBL members hail from the two continents. Moreover, 71% of members reside in the United States or Canada. Of SBL members outside North America, then, half reside in Europe and half reside in all other regions.

Therefore, for reasons of relative proximity to the largest number of members, sustainability, and affordability, the IM tends to be organized in Europe. The Annual Meeting Program Committee (AMPC) and IMPC act autonomously, though when appropriate, the committees may converse about overall program strategy.

Responsibilities

Working with the EO, the IMPC should address both specific strengths and weaknesses of current program structures and policies and anticipate trends that could influence such structures and policies over the next five to ten years.

Responsibilities include the following:

- To ensure a varied and diverse program
- To encourage international and diverse representation in program units, chairs, and steering committees
- To review program unit renewals and proposals
- To evaluate the distribution of topics and sessions among program units
- To set and evaluate participation policies
- To maximize participation without compromising quality
- To consider the structure of the meeting and its capacity to incorporate new ways of thinking or methods of research
- To consider alternatives to conventional lecture and panel formats

Principles

Program units comprise the IM. These units are working groups of SBL members that are approved by the IMPC to organize sessions at the IM. Program units issue calls for papers annually and are responsible for reviewing presentation proposals, organizing sessions, and providing program information to the EO for scheduling and publication. Therefore, program units are integral to the IM, and the IMPC must maintain an intimate knowledge of and connection with program units.

The following principles inform the work of program unit chairs and can be found in the *Program Unit Chair Handbook*.

The role of a program unit chair involves strategic thinking and intentional balancing of its topics of inquiry, as well as careful planning about how the program unit will develop. This role can be described by four continua.

Multiple Methodologies and Approaches

Find a way to balance traditional or well-established methodologies and topics with cutting-edge or innovative ones. Core topics should be balanced with emerging trends.

Senior Voices and Junior Voices

Find a way to balance senior voices with junior voices, providing opportunity for dialogue and professional development.

Marginalized Voices

Care should be taken to ensure that program units, and indeed the meeting as a whole, seeks ways to highlight and amplify voices of scholars from historically marginalized groups.

Receive and Pursue

Find a way to balance receiving proposals from open calls for papers and pursuing participants important to the unit's topics.

Program Unit Review

Attendance and participation at the International Meeting fluctuates based on location, even within Europe.

The committee manages this growth and the vitality and quality of the program by setting terms for program units. Program units must submit renewal materials in the fall of the unit's expiration. The committee will receive proposals and renewals by September 1 and will review them and remit feedback to proposers by November 1. These dates will ensure that program units can provide up-to-date information to the IMPC in their proposals and that the IMPC can remit feedback in time for accepted units to participate in the call for papers.

Method of Review

Renewal and new unit proposals are submitted to the committee via the EO. The EO collates proposals, sends them to the committee for review when they are submitted, and coordinates the committee's review by setting up conference calls.

Initial review

1. When a committee member receives a proposal, the committee member reviews the proposal and makes notes for discussion, including whether to accept, reject, request revisions, or discuss.
2. Several days prior to the conference call but after all proposals have been sent to the committee, the EO will coordinate a simple poll of the committee about decisions to accept or reject proposals. Any proposals accepted or rejected by two-thirds majority will be removed from the conference call agenda.
3. The committee will review all proposals via conference call, sharing notes and discussing the merits of proposals vis-à-vis the needs and standards of the program.

Further review

1. If proposals require further discussion, the committee will organize a follow-up conference call and ensure that proposals are reviewed in a timely fashion.
2. The EO will coordinate informing the proposers that an initial review has occurred and the committee requires further review.

Response to proposers

1. The committee will coordinate letters of response with the EO.
2. Contact should be made with proposers no later than October 5.

Options for Response

The committee has several options in its decisions regarding program units.

Renewals

1. **Accept**: the unit will start its term as proposed

2. **Reject**: the unit cannot sustain participation for the duration of a new term; the unit's topic has run its course
3. **Needs revision**: idea is promising, but questions exist about some aspect of the unit's organization, focus, topic, relation to existing units, etc.

New proposals

1. **Accept**: the unit will start its term as proposed
2. **Reject**: the unit cannot sustain participation for the duration of a new term; the unit's topic has run its course; the unit's topic is inappropriate or too much of its purview duplicates an extant unit
3. **Needs revision**: idea is promising, but questions exist about some aspect of the unit's focus, topic, relation to existing units, etc.
4. **Special session**: idea is promising and proposal is clear, but questions exist about attendance, participation, or other matters. In this case, the committee may offer the proposers the opportunity to organize a session at the upcoming International Meeting and to report on that session as part of a revised proposal for the following year. This option does not guarantee acceptance of the unit in the following year but provides an opportunity to introduce the unit to the program and gauge its appeal.

Criteria for Program Unit Review

Proposals for International Meeting program units, whether new or seeking renewal, will be evaluated based on the following criteria.

1. Evidence of advancing biblical scholarship or the relation of that scholarship to contiguous disciplines
2. Evidence of sufficient SBL member interest to sustain the program unit, need for program unit, and relationship to existing program units
3. Mechanisms for evaluation and self-criticism, including critical assessment of the program unit's own method(s), biases, and perspectives.
4. Evidence of quality, commitment, and diversity of program unit's proposed leadership, including a diverse steering committee constituency (e.g., gender, racial and ethnic backgrounds, levels of professional status, institutional affiliations) and commitment to variation in methodological approaches
5. Plans for refereeing proposals, including student member paper proposals
6. Plans, when appropriate, for communication of steering committee between International Meetings

The criteria for renewal shall generally be the same as those for establishment, though achievement (rather than promise) is relevant.   The SBL International Meeting Program Committee evaluates all unit proposals and renewals collectively and comparatively.

Policies

Statement on Participation

By submitting this proposal or accepting a role in any affiliate organization or program unit at the Annual or International Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, you agree to participate in an open academic discussion guided by a common standard of scholarly discourse that engages your subject through critical inquiry and investigation.

SBL Professional Conduct Statement

View the SBL Professional Conduct statement at http://www.sblsite.org/careercenter/policystatements.aspx.

SBL Policy on Scholarly Presentation and Publication of Ancient Artifacts

View the SBL Professional Conduct statement at https://www.sblsite.org/assets/pdfs/SBL-Artifacts-Policy_20160903.pdf.

Chairs and Steering Committee

- **Terms of office**
  - *Program Unit Chair (PUC)*: 3-year term, renewable once
  - *Steering Committee Member (SCM)*: 3-year term, renewable once
  - After fulfilling their term, a PUC may serve as an SCM, or an SCM may serve as a PUC, for one additional term. A person may serve no more than nine years (i.e. three terms) with any one program unit.
- **Size of program unit committee**
  - A program unit may have 1 to 2 PUCs.
  - A program unit may have 2 to 4 SCMs.
  - The total number of persons on a program unit committee, therefore, may not exceed six.
- PUCs and SCMs should hold a doctorate in the field of or a field related to biblical studies that was granted at least three years before the start of the person's term as PUC or SCM; however, as many as one SCM may be an advanced PhD candidate.
- Only SBL members may chair PUs; ordinarily chairs have several years of professional experience beyond the completion of the doctoral degree. No member may chair or serve on the steering committee of more than two program units of the International Meeting.
- Only SBL members may serve as steering committee members. No member may chair or serve on the steering committee of more than two program units of the International Meeting.
- If a program unit chair's term is expiring and the chair has taken suitable steps to find a replacement without success, then the Executive Office may extend the program unit chair's tenure for a single year.

Any grievances against these policies or the conduct of program unit chairs, steering committee members, presenters, or attendees should be immediately referred to the chair of the International Meeting Program Committee in writing.

Program Units

- **New proposals**
  - New program unit proposals must follow the Checklist for New Proposals.
- **Types**
  - *Consultation*: usually the first incarnation of a PU and formed to explore the viability of and interest in a subject; also short-term units responding to current trends or topics/methods/inquires new to the SBL program
  - *Section*: usually more broadly defined; offers presenters most access for unsolicited papers; required to have at least one open session each year
  - *Seminar*: long-range collaborative research topics/papers that require active participation and well-defined research topics or projects; limited membership; papers are generally pre-distributed and summarized and discussed, not read, at meetings
  - *Special Sessions:* Special sessions, including book reviews, should be discussed with and programmed as a part of current program units whenever possible; proposers are responsible for contacting related program units. Some topics, however, fall outside of or beyond the scope of current units and/or require special attention. Special session may also be used to explore a topic and gauge interest in the formation of a program unit. Proposals for such sessions must follow the forms below and will be reviewed based on the criteria for review of program unit proposals and renewals
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- **Terms**
  - *Consultation*: 3 year term, non-renewable
  - *Section*: 6 year term, renewable
  - *Seminar*: 6 year term, renewable
- **Typical Number of Sessions**
  - *Consultation*: 2
  - *Section*: 3; a fourth session may be organized if this session is jointly organized with another SBL program unit or Affiliate organization
  - *Seminar*: 3; a fourth session may be organized if this session is jointly organized with another SBL program unit or Affiliate organization

Program Participation

- **Participation Limits**
  - A person is limited to participate in no more than two regular program sessions as a presenter, panelist, or respondent. Appearances on Affiliate programs do not count towards this total. SBL Committee and business sessions do not count towards this total.
- **Proposals**
  - Proposals **must** be submitted through the online system, including invited proposals.
  - All presentations must be new presentations of the scholar's own original work. *In absentia* presentations are not typically accepted.
  - Papers cannot be repeated in other sessions or at other SBL meetings. Papers presented at an SBL regional meeting, however, can be presented at a subsequent International or International Meeting.

Registration and Membership Requirements

- **SBL Program**
  - o SBL Membership is required at the time of a proposal for the SBL program.
  - o SBL Membership will be checked by **May 1**, and non-current members will be removed from the program at that time.
  - o SBL Membership must be current at time of the International Meeting.
- **Affiliate Organization Programs**
  - o Affiliate organization membership is required to participate.
  - o If a member of an Affiliate organization intends to participate in an SBL session, the member is required to have current SBL membership.
- **Registration for Meeting**
  - o All meeting participants must be registered by **May 1**. Registration will be checked, and those not registered will be removed from the program.
- N.B., the dates above are rough time frames. The exact dates will vary year-to-year depending on the dates of the meeting.

Waivers

Program unit chairs may submit waiver requests for scholars who are not members of SBL. The consideration for waiver is not simply whether one is or is not a "biblical scholar," but whether one works regularly with the literatures, histories, and cultures (material and social) that interface "Bible," broadly construed, for this is the milieu from which persons join SBL as members regularly.

- Membership waivers for participation are granted to those from "outside the discipline." Those who are within related disciplines must become SBL members to participate on the program. (Related disciplines include religion, archaeology, ancient near eastern studies, etc.)
- Membership in other related organizations (e.g., AAR, ASOR) does not qualify one for a waiver.
- Waivers are granted on a one-time basis only. If a waiver recipient wishes to participate on the program a second time in subsequent years, he or she must join the SBL.
- Waivers will not be granted to those with expired SBL memberships.
- A waiver for the International Meeting includes:
  - o Complimentary membership through the month of the International Meeting;
  - o Complimentary meeting registration;
- The waivers program is administered by the Executive Office in consultation with the International Meeting Program Committee.

Appendix I: Responsibilities of Program Unit Chairs

Communicate with Executive Office

- Program Unit Chairs (PUCs) are the primary communication link between the EO and the program unit.
- All listed chairs will receive automatic emails generated by the PU Management System for the program unit and all program-related notices the EO generates as reminders.

Manage Unit through the PU Management System

- Enter call for papers (CFP) into online system.
    - The program unit chair needs to enter the CFP each year, even if it remains the same year to year.
    - It is expected that the steering committee will work with the chair to develop the CFP
    - The chair must also designate the CFP as "open" or "closed" to outside proposals each year.
- Enter decisions on papers into system and communicate with proposers.
    - All papers will initially show the status of "Submitted." P
    - Papers can be designated as Pending, Accepted, Rejected, or Withdrawn.
    - Changing a paper to Accepted or Rejected immediately generates an email to the paper proposer informing him/her of the decision.
    - All papers must have a decision entered by the deadline below.
- Create and organize sessions in system, including adding presiders.
    - The chair must assign and arrange the papers in each session and should assign times for each participant.
    - A presider is required for each session.
    - Ensure that participants, especially invitees, are aware of requirements for participation. This includes the requirement that all meeting participants register. If a participant does not register, he or she risks being removed from the program. The program management system does not notify chairs whether participants have or have not registered.

Program unit chairs are encouraged but not required to:

- Attend sessions of their program unit. Program Unit Chair Handbook
- Preside at sessions of their unit.
- Attend meetings in which their units are holding sessions.
- Actively seek collaboration with other program units and the organization of joint sessions.

Organizing the Call for Papers

- Consult with your co-chair and steering committee members during the International Meeting to develop and finalize a call for papers for the following meeting.
- If a CFP will not be used because all proposals are to be invited (e.g., in the case of a Seminar), then the chair should develop a brief, informational description of session plans.

Reviewing Proposals

- Review proposals after the deadline for proposal submission.
- Run the "Proposal Report" available in the Program Unit Management System and send to co-chair and steering committee members for review.

- Consider proposals collectively and comparatively and accept quality proposals. Once review is complete, if there is a surplus of quality proposals, attention should be given to broad inclusiveness in the selection of program participants.
- All proposals must be reviewed, and decisions rendered by **February 15**.

Organizing Sessions

- Note the number of sessions your program unit is allotted.
- At least four papers, or at least four persons in addition to a presider in the case of panels, should populate a session.
- Papers are typically allotted 15-25 minutes in a session, with 5-10 minutes for discussion; however, innovative ideas for how to organize a session (e.g., shorter paper length, round table discussion) are welcome.
- Sessions are typically 90 minutes in duration.
- Each session must have a presider.
- All session information must be entered by **March 1** so that the overall program can be scheduled.
- All participants must have current SBL (or Affiliate) membership and must be registered by **May 1.**

Program Changes

- Review session information in June with co-chair and steering committee members and finalize participant and presider information, especially participant name, institution, and presentation title.
- Final program changes to be published in the Program Book are due in the Program Unit Management System by May 1.

Fostering a Collegial Environment

It is the responsibility of program-unit chairs to ensure that their committees maintain professional conduct as outlined in the [SBL Professional Conduct Policy]. This includes running collegial sessions at SBL meetings. Personal or personalized attacks are unprofessional and should not be tolerated. Program unit chairs are encouraged to let people who have experienced harassment know about SBL's processes for reporting and handling such behavior.

Assembling a Steering Committee

Steering committees should be assembled with an eye toward increasing diversity, paying particularly close attention to gender, ethnic, and religious diversity. Program units should also take care to include members in a variety of career paths and stages, in order to provide opportunities for junior scholars both to be mentored and to have leadership opportunities. Attention to these matters is important in light of the fact that SBL membership is roughly 25% women, with an even smaller percentage coming from underrepresented racial and ethnic minorities.

In addition, other than those program units that focus on perspectival criticism, steering committees should represent a diversity of ideologies and methodologies. Those focused on perspectival readings should also reflect the diversity of practices and practitioners within those fields of study.

Importance of Diversity in Session Planning

SBL membership is roughly one quarter women, with an even smaller percentage coming from underrepresented racial and ethnic minorities. With the goal of not just matching but increasing these numbers, participants in sessions should, to the extent possible, reflect gender, ethnic, ideological, and methodological diversity.

Sessions should be arranged with diversity in mind, in order to increase the active participation of minority groups and to encourage greater diversity in the field. This applies to both open and invited sessions.

Appendix II: Guidelines for Session Presiders

The following guidelines are intended to help those who are moderating sessions encourage a professional and respectful environment.

Before the Session:
1. Confirm that presenters are able to access previously requested A/V. If there is a problem, come to the registration desk.

Beginning of the Session:
1. Welcome the attendees to the session.
2. Be sure to mention the name of the program unit(s) sponsoring the session and any theme that the session might have.
3. Announce that the first row of seats is prioritized for those with medical and accessibility needs. Attendees without such needs should be prepared to give up those seats upon request.

During the Session:
1. If all seats are taken, leaving some attendees standing, presiders should scan the room between papers to see if anyone with accessibility issues might be provided a seat by someone seated. Since disabilities are not always visible, this should include asking if anyone needs a seat.

Presentations:
1. Address. Refer to all panelists equally. Studies show that it is more common for women to be referred to by their first names even when they have a professional title. Demonstrating respect, you should confirm ahead of the session how panelists would like to be introduced. We recommend having you announce the first name and last name, so as to avoid using titles that some presenters/respondents might not have.
2. Sound. If there are microphones in the room, ask each presenter to use the microphone. Even if a presenter thinks that he or she speaks loudly enough, microphone amplification helps all audience members, especially those who have a hearing impairment.
3. Time. Managing time is critical so that each person in the session or on the panel has an equal opportunity to present. Before the session, reiterate the expectation for each presentation's length. Presiders should sit near the podium, in order to communicate with the speakers presenting. We recommend having a five-minute warning, a one-minute warning, and a "time is up" sign for you to use.

Discussion:
1. Try to allow for a question-and-answer period appropriate to the length of the session.
2. During Q & A, remind the audience to avoid jargon, speak briefly (no more than 30 seconds), and ask a question. Repeat the question after it is asked. This also 14 Program Unit Chair Handbook makes sure that the person asking the questions knows that they have been heard.
3. To ensure parity, please be mindful of who is asking questions. Research shows that when women or gender non-conforming people are called on first, there tends to be more gender balance among subsequent questioners.

Please also be sure to familiarize yourself with SBL's Professional Conduct Policy.