

25 January 2022

Dear Colleague,

As you begin to make your plans for participating in meetings in 2022, we want to provide you with as much information as possible as we explore plans for the future.

It goes without saying that the major impact on 2020 and 2021 was COVID-19, even as it remains with us. The pandemic has impacted health and safety, commerce and higher education, especially the humanistic disciplines, and of course our academic meetings. SBL responded by holding an all-virtual meeting in 2020 and a dual-format meeting in 2021. We also explored whether a fully hybrid meeting was possible, and in May 2021 I wrote to you why such a meeting at the scale of SBL's Annual Meeting, located as it is in hotels and conference centers, is not currently feasible.

In 2021, the dual-format meeting offered many members the opportunity to participate when faced with travel restrictions and health concerns. However, a dual-format Annual Meeting requires the same staff to manage two meetings simultaneously over four days, compared to a single in-person meeting held over four days or 2020's virtual meeting held over nine days. Such a meeting far exceeds staff capacity. We also face contractual obligations. Anticipating the lingering effects of the pandemic and needing to reduce our minimums without losing our negotiated prices or paying penalties, both SBL and AAR signed an addendum in 2021 with the contracted hotels and the convention center in Denver stating that our meeting would not have a virtual component. Consequently, for the 2022 Annual Meeting, we are planning to return to the in-person model.

SBL takes seriously its role in convening, which provides opportunities for scholarly exchange and professional development and creates community and connection through the networks formed. That opportunity should be available to all members. In that May 2021 letter I mentioned how much we learned from planning a virtual meeting, not least that it opened up participation to more members, and how that experience may become part of our long-term future.

We are continuing to explore ways for virtual meetings to be part of SBL's future, but not as a replacement to the in-person Annual Meeting in November. Rather, it would be a new opportunity, particularly for those who are not able to travel for a variety of reasons, to experience the convening and the community fundamental to a learned society's global *raison d'être*.

In this planning, it is critical to recognize that the medium matters. An in-person meeting has opportunities and experiences that cannot be duplicated in a virtual environment. Equally true, a virtual meeting designed from the ground up can offer experiences, presentation formats, and accessibility that an in-person meeting cannot. Together with our in-person meetings, we want to build what is uniquely the best for each environment.

Stay tuned for more details as we continue to explore ways to make SBL truly accessible and responsive to every member. In the meantime, I hope many of you are looking forward to the July International Meeting in Salzburg and the November Annual Meeting in Denver.

Sincerely,

John F. Kutsko
Executive Director