From Monmouth to Brazil: Strategic Considerations for the ISCSC

Our 2014 Conference will be at Monmouth University in New Jersey, USA, within driving distance of 60% of the graduate students and faculty in America, and our 2015 Conference will be in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. That will be our first conference south of the Dominican Republic and Jamaica. Both hosts are working hard to minimize costs at each location. The purpose of this note is to highlight why benefits and costs have become critical to the future of the Society.

For decades support for interdisciplinary education in the USA has declined as Universities have become ever more focused on narrow specializations. Whole departments of classical studies have been dropped, others merged into language, history or other departments, and support for junior faculty travel (much less graduate students) has been limited to core “disciplines.” So, most of our participants attend at their own expense, which is getting harder all the time.

Despite our origins in Austria, followed by years headquartered in Europe and a small presence in Asia throughout, a majority of our members are now from North America. We try hard to have conferences on other continents, as we must to remain international. But this has not been easy since attendance drops off when we visit Dublin, Paris, St. Petersburg or Ritaku U in Japan. We gain some members abroad, but they then face multi-thousand dollar expenses to continue participating by flying to North America for a couple of years before we venture forth again.

Members of the council have struggled with this for all of the 20+ years I have attended the ISCSC. Meanwhile, core support from universities continues to decline. Most of you reading this are well aware of that dynamic. So here is the practical purpose of this essay.

Monmouth will be our least expensive option for some time. They will be providing dormitory accommodations for those who don’t need fancy hotels, and travel costs will be low for a majority of our members. But we MUST stay international, and we must reach out to those who have borne high costs attending our North American conferences for years. Like our Brazilian friends. So Rio de Janeiro Brazil is next – our first conference south of the equator. Because of travel costs, this will be more expensive for many, despite local efforts to find low cost but convenient housing near the main conference venue (which is quite lovely by the way).

We risk the death of many aging, academic societies however distinguished, as senior faculty retire while junior faculty get no support outside their core disciplines. Graduate students must have angels if they hope to attend, or rich parents who are also rare, since schools seldom support such travel to interdisciplinary events anymore. So I urge you all to make maximum efforts to attend June 11-15, 2014, at Monmouth University in West Long Branch, New Jersey, USA. I also urge you to consider the bigger picture and to plan to attend Brazil also. Those who are growing in experience might consider hosting a future conference—I would be happy to talk about how that is done, and how to find some support from host institutions that can help a lot.

But most of all I urge all members to consider how we can help the young, aspiring students of our time who have global vision to attend. The young are our future; they are the ones who must face the cascading global crises that Andrew Targowski talked about last year in his presidential speech, and they are broke as goats, if not up to their eyeballs in debt already.

Best wishes to all, Michael Andregg, VP Young Scholar Development, St. Paul, Minnesota, USA