

Thoughts from the SHAFR President

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It's a singular honor to pen this message as SHAFR's fifty-sixth president. The Society has been my professional home for thirty-five years. I attended my first SHAFR conference in 1987 in Annapolis and gave my first SHAFR paper four years later at American University. Since I first joined and became active in the Society, it has changed in many ways. The program is now much bigger and broader than it was during my first several conferences, when a folded sheet of paper listed the few panels that were on tap, the audiences were much less diverse, and the scope of the field's inquiry was much less expansive. But SHAFR's core importance to me has remained salient. It's brought me lively intellectual partners, kindred spirits, valuable sounding boards, sympathetic shoulders, treasured mentors, and even, on occasion, partners in crime. I am humbled and honored to serve this year as SHAFR president and hope to use that time to give back to an organization that's been integral to my personal and professional life.

It's no secret that the last several years have been difficult, for each of us individually and for the organizations and institutions that we cherish. SHAFR is no exception. Our recent conferences have not been immune to the challenges wrought by the COVID-19 pandemic. We saw our 2020 conference, on which then-president Kristin Hoganson, Program Committee co-chairs Gretchen Heefner and Julia Irwin, and so many others had devoted a great deal of time and energy planning, fall victim to the pandemic's early chaos. The program planned for 2020 was outstanding. It was truly a shame that it was ultimately unable to proceed. We held a fully online conference in 2021, expertly organized by Megan Black and Ryan Irwin, that allowed us to connect intellectually but reminded us that there's just no substitute for face-to-face contact and interaction. And in 2022, Emily Conroy-Krutz and Daniel Immerwahr planned what amounted to two conferences: two days of online events as well as a complete in-person conference in New Orleans, which had been slated to serve as host city in 2020.

Planning for the 2023 conference is well under way. We'll be returning to the Arlington Renaissance Capital View for the fifth time overall and the first time since 2019, when few of us knew much of anything about the coronavirus or had stashes of facemasks and hand sanitizer close at hand. Program Committee co-chairs for 2023 are Jeannette Jones and Jason Parker; together with a stellar committee they're planning a full slate of panels and sessions that will hold broad appeal for SHAFR members. Director of the National Security Archive Thomas Blanton will deliver a keynote address at the Saturday luncheon. And our Conference Coordinator Kaete O'Connell is hard at work planning a social event befitting of our return to the DC area but also one that's affordable. Meeting the latter criteria has been particularly challenging given current inflationary pressures, but we're hoping to bring attendees something special. I hope to see many of you in Arlington.

Unlike last year's conference, the 2023 gathering will not include a virtual component tied explicitly or directly to the in-person event. After considering the results of the member survey conducted after our meeting in New Orleans, Council voted

to discontinue virtual conference events timed to the annual meeting in favor of a variety of such events scattered throughout the year. These events might feature a panel of SHAFR members discussing an important anniversary or event, provide an opportunity for work-in-progress discussions, or constitute other kinds of events of particular interest and assistance to our graduate student members. Watch for information about these online-only events in the new year.

If the recent pandemic forced some changes in the way our past few conferences unfolded, its accompanying economic upheaval exacerbated problems that were already evident across the US higher education system. Although SHAFR's mission does not formally or explicitly extend to issues of employment, our stated interest in "the scholarly study of the history of American foreign relations" certainly puts them on our radar and speaks to the need for our involvement. As a result, we've worked over the past several years to address employment uncertainty for our members and better prepare graduate students in the field for a variety of professional positions. These efforts, of course, are ongoing. Interest in the Job Search Workshop that has been a part of our annual meeting since 2013 has waned over the years, suggesting that that initiative may have run its course. But our initiatives in the area of jobs and employment can and must continue. One way we can accomplish this is through the periodic virtual professionalization sessions I mentioned above. Others might include more generous support to graduate students presenting at our annual meeting. (Watch for more on this coming soon.) I would encourage those of you who, like me, cut their professional teeth in SHAFR to respond positively to fund-raising efforts designed specifically to assist our graduate student members. We've always been a welcoming organization for graduate students, leading the way among professional societies in adding graduate students to our governing Council and creating a dedicated Graduate Student Committee. It's more important than ever that these efforts continue—and even expand.

If addressing the needs of our newer members is vital for SHAFR's well-being, it's also fitting that we recall the long and storied history of the organization. Last year, SHAFR turned fifty-five. In the day-to-day struggle of simply managing operations during the pandemic, we missed marking this important milestone. Watch for ways to mark our past at the summer conference, when we can look back at all that the organization has accomplished. The minutes of the most recent Council meeting posted elsewhere in this issue detail one initiative in this direction. You'll be able to discover others in Arlington.

I'd like to close with a reminder of how vital it is that we staff SHAFR's many committees with willing and able volunteers. The scope of the Society's activities is truly vast, and there is certainly something of interest for each and every member. Please consider this an appeal to indicate your interest in serving on one of our more than two dozen committees by completing the short form available at shaf.org/volunteer. Interested volunteers are also invited to contact me directly at mheiss@kent.edu.