

This year, the AAR has created a Status of People with Disabilities in the Profession Committee (PWD) to assure the full access of people with disabilities in the Academy and to advance their status within the profession. The committee's aims include:

- Consulting with AAR staff regarding best practices for accessibility related to the Employment Center, the website, the *Program Book*, and the Call for Papers
- Addressing accessibility issues regarding Annual Meetings through advance site visits and proactive efforts to ensure access for all members
- Providing advisory assistance to Program Unit Chairs, including best practices for promoting the full inclusion of members with disabilities
- Supporting students with disabilities seeking advanced degrees in religious studies and theology, assisting with mentorship and career planning, and encouraging their full integration into the Academy
- Addressing employment barriers faced by scholars with disabilities and facilitating scholars' advancement within the profession
- Assisting employers with best practices for interviewing and hiring candidates with disabilities, including resources for addressing preconceptions, avoiding illegal questions, and providing reasonable accommodations during the interview process at the Annual Meetings as well as at home institutions
- Promoting the full inclusion of people with disabilities in the Academy and the profession, highlighting the importance of disability cultures and Deaf cultures, and emphasizing disability as an oft-overlooked diversity issue
- Collaborating with the other AAR committees to ensure the full inclusion of all members of the Academy and to explore the intersection of disability and Deaf culture with other identities

This new committee builds upon a number of AAR efforts to support scholars with disabilities within the Academy and the profession. In 2003, the AAR appointed a Task Force on Religion and Disabilities, which worked to improve accessibility issues at the Annual Meetings, provided advisory assistance to AAR staff and Program Unit Chairs, and began important initiatives related to employment concerns of scholars with disabilities in the profession. Recognizing the importance of this work and the importance of sustained attention to disability concerns, the Task Force urged the creation of a permanent committee devoted to addressing disability issues and facilitating full access for people with disabilities.

The PWD Committee members are:

- Julia Watts Belser, Chair

- Sharon Betcher
- Debbie Creamer
- Mary Jo Iozzio
- Judith Plaskow
- Darla Schumm
- Kirk VanGilder
- Soraya Shahrak, AAR staff liaison

The committee will host a Special Topics Forum at the upcoming Annual Meetings in Baltimore, inviting all interested members of the AAR for conversation about the committee's initiatives and plans. You can keep up-to-date on this committee's activities by visiting [our Facebook page](#) .

We are excited and honored to be serving our colleagues in this way and we look forward to hearing from you about how we can advance the status of people with disabilities within the field.