

Collegium

An Association for Liberal Religious Studies

Report from the June 2005 (post-GA) Consultation

Members of *Collegium* met with one another and invited guests in three sessions in June 2005, near the end of the UUA General Assembly in Fort Worth, as follows:

Monday morning, June 27	8:00 – 9:30 am
Monday evening, June 27	7:30 – 9:30 pm
Tuesday morning, June 28	9:00 – 12 noon

Participants included (not all were present for all sessions):

Jay Atkinson	Richard Boeke	Elz Curtiss	Rebecca Parker
Lee Barker	Orlanda Brugnola	Roger Gillette	Aaron Payson
Kim Beach	Barbara Coeyman	Susi Pangerl	Paul Sawyer
			Arliss Ungar

We began with the results of last winter's *Collegium* membership survey in front of us. Based on those responses, ideas expressed at the October 2004 meeting, and subsequent communication among *Collegium* leaders, topics slated for discussion were organized into four broad categories:

Mission/Purpose/Vision

UUA think tank?
for the UUA as an institution?
for the UU movement?
UU studies: does this mean scholarship
by identified UUs? ... OR
relevant to UU tradition done by anyone?
self-serving or outward directed? to whom?
GA programming
publication

Connections/Relationships

seminaries
ML & SKSM
Harvard
Andover, Wesley, Union, Perkins, Iliff,
Claremont, United, PSR, etc.
UUA as institutional umbrella?
prof. orgs: AAR, SCSC, SRR, AHA, APA
Highlands Institute (HIARPT)
IRAS
ARIL/Cross Currents
Ministerial Study Groups

Constituency

ministerial and independent scholars
academic scholars (seminary and secular)
seminarians
others?

Operational matters

organization: officers, staff
paid coordinator/administrator?
website development
meetings
rotating or fixed venues?
different time of year?
sustainable funding
membership
requirements
two-level ?
contributing scholars
readers only

Seminary Perspectives

Meadville and Starr King presidents, Lee Barker and Rebecca Parker, joined us at our first consultation session to give us their perspectives on closer relationship with *Collegium* and with the challenges of UU scholarship generally. Also present was Meadville's newly appointed academic dean, Susi Pangerl.

Rebecca spoke of the "tremendous resources" needed to sustain original scholarship and the theological schools' challenge to find sufficient time and funding for pursuing that primary aspect of their mission. We need a "culture of research" within the UU movement generally as an attitudinal starting point. Rebecca identified five elements necessary to "vital and embodied scholarship":

1. fostering and sustaining relationships in the scholarly community: publications, internet, etc.
2. time for research, and material resources to undergird it: money, libraries, archives;
3. places: centers for research and scholarly gatherings
4. practices: what we do to foster scholarship and the channels for doing so (internet possibilities)
5. opportunities for interchange: meetings, internet communications, symposia

Susi stressed the need for more imaginative use of electronic communication and publication and the cooperative possibilities that might be explored between *Collegium* and other groups: HIARPT, UUHS, IRAS, localized ministerial study groups, etc.

Lee pointed out the lack of anything between congregational adult RE and full seminary enrollment to meet the needs of both laity and clergy who want serious but non-degree study opportunities. More conferences with specific topical foci might partly fill this need, but a quasi-residential center for UU studies, while visionary, would provide an inestimably valuable resource for ongoing programming, interchange, and publication.

Mission and Constituency

Initial discussion focused on clarifying what we want *Collegium* to be. There was deep concern for the general state of liberal religious studies and a resolve that *Collegium* should address itself broadly to the organizational, financial, developmental, and programmatic needs of UU scholarship. In the spirit of this vision, we formulated the following mission statement:

"The mission of *Collegium* is to bring together our best intellectual resources to bear upon the intellectual life of Unitarian Universalism through generating, sharing, and disseminating scholarly work."¹

Implicit in this, we agreed, was the broadest possible constituency relevant to UU studies: ministers, seminary and secular academic faculty, secular and seminary students, and independent scholars.

In regard to broadening our constituency, three major problems were identified.

- (1) A broader database of scholars working in relevant areas is needed. We concluded that a major search for scholars via their congregational affiliations and parish ministers was the most likely to produce results.
- (2) Even when *Collegium* meetings are held at retreat centers close to seminaries, most students lack the time and money to attend. Special sessions held immediately on the seminary campuses are needed to draw in student participation.
- (3) For all constituencies, lack of external funding continues to be a major obstacle to broader participation.

¹ Other words mentioned but not incorporated were: nurturing, advocating, mentoring [emerging scholars].

Programming

Recognizing that much previous dissatisfaction with *Collegium* has stemmed, not so much from disagreement over our mission as from both qualitative and quantitative limitations in our programs, we gave considerable attention to new programming ideas that might carry out the mission in more varied, effective, and imaginative ways. Against a suggestion that *Collegium* should hold its annual meeting in conjunction with GA and downsize its vision, the energy among consultation participants was clearly in the opposite direction. Ideas were focused in three areas: (A) strengthening present activities; (B) short-range innovations; (C) long-range, visionary ideas.

A. present programs

1. annual meeting — continue with
 - a. tighter organization
 - b. further advance planning
 - c. rethinking
 - i. sectional structure
 - ii. venues
 - iii. time of year
 - d. wider, more intensive publicity
2. GA presence (stronger? more focused?)
3. publications — pursue joint arrangement with JLR for periodic proceedings volumes
4. identify, encourage, mentor emerging scholars

B. new ventures capable of short-to-intermediate range implementation

1. topical conferences in cooperation with seminaries, ICUU, UUHS, HIARPT, etc.
2. recognition awards for scholarship
3. advocacy for the needs of scholarship
4. improved, different kinds of publicity
5. transmission of ideas into congregational life, adult RE, etc.

C. longer-range vision

1. a center for UU studies, with library, archival, residential resources

Operations and Internal Structure

We recognized that moving ahead on many of the above ideas is labor intensive and may well require rethinking *Collegium's* leadership and membership structure. Further, we need to be more serious and intentional about advocacy for sustainable funding. Although we reached no definite conclusions, the following questions were posed and discussed:

1. Is the present sr/jr chair and sectional chair structure adequate for pursuing our mission? If not, what alternatives should we consider?
2. Do we need an administrator or executive person (≈ 10 hours/month?) to maintain communication, work on outside funding (grants), keep things moving forward, pursue publicity and a strategic membership development plan, etc.?
3. Should we think about a multi-tiered membership structure, distinguishing between productive scholars, reading members, financially generous sustaining members, etc.?
4. Where and how do we seek adequate funding for the support of UU scholarship?