



# Annual Reception of the IRFWP at the 2006 AAR Annual Meeting

## Event Report:

### *Should religious studies scholars engage in applied research with the intention of positively impacting situations of Interreligious conflict or strife?*

On November 18, 2005 the IRFWP held its yearly panel and reception at the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religions (AAR). These meetings have been a staple at the AAR from the earliest days of New ERA (the New Ecumenical Research Association), in the 1980's.

The impact of the IRFWP and its predecessors on the religious academy has been significant, including having been seminal in the evolution and maturation of whole fields of study including African studies, the study of new religions (NRM's), and the study of interfaith dialogue, and religion and peace.

Important and recognized literature has come from the IRFWP community, including the *God series*, and the scholarly journal *Dialogue and Alliance* which was recently nominated as a top ten choice by an independent research group for forthcoming inclusion in ATLASerials, of the American Theological Library Association.



The IRFWP panel and reception at the AAR always seeks to break new ground and distinguish itself from tendencies in the academy to treat matters carefully, indirectly, and obliquely. Scholarly papers and reports from these IRFWP sessions include such topics as Israel/Palestine, the religious writings and global impact of Osama bin Laden, Apartheid, and other topics of high-impact relevance.

The freer dynamic of IRFWP, AAR sessions, and for the need to keep the IRFWP brand explicitly associated with this work causes us to register our sessions as "Additional meetings." These always occur prior to the formal start of the AAR convention. This "Additional meeting" status, combines with its long history and constancy, to create atmospheres of openness, straightforwardness, and trust, in explicitly constructive environments. Every meeting has a good number of "old friends" on hand.

This year unprecedented elements came to the fore marking this panel as a watershed:

1. A university and university department chose the IRFWP panel, and arranged the presentation for the session. (Usually the panel is conceived and organized by the IRFWP). The IRFWP session was identified as well-suited to the academic vision they sought to present.
2. This presentation included a petition to establish an AAR consultation.

Professor Thomas Selover, and fellow department member Scott Dunbar presented an engaging, and far-ranging inquiry into the limits of "engagement" for scholars and their students, particularly in areas where academic instruments and strengths could contribute to human welfare, even saving lives.



This presentation was entitled *Engaged Research and the Pursuit of Interreligious Harmony, Furthering Applied religious Studies: How far are we willing to go?*

Selover and Dunbar developed their proposal through, "A mandate for engagement," "Institutional priorities," and models from applied anthropology. They noted "3 moments of engagement" that are suited both as the object of scholarship, and potentially the beneficiary of scholarly analysis and prescription. They provided a number of case studies and existing programs in major, north American universities, identified 5 specific goals for this reform, and concluded by presenting the petition of interest.

Selover and Dunbar effectively unveiled the elephant in the living room of courteous and over-refined religious studies, occurring now as they do in a world riven with the demons of religious war, hatred, and destabilization.

Please contact, [IRFWP](#), [Thomas Selover](#), or [Scott Dunbar](#) for more information.

