Michael F. Brown, President

If you come to a fork in the road, take it. —Yogi Berra

Several years ago, I alerted our board of directors of my intention to retire after ten years as SAR’s thirteenth president. I am now only weeks away from that milestone. Leading SAR has been a privilege and the pinnacle of my career as an anthropologist and educator. One thing I’ve learned over this long career, however, is that institutions need new leadership at regular intervals to meet the challenge of a changing world. That’s why I choose to step down now.

My love affair with SAR has a history longer than many may realize. As an undergraduate, I was introduced to the field of anthropology by a Tewa scholar from Ohkay Owingeh, Alfonso Ortiz, who had strong links to SAR. When I first visited SAR in 1982 as a participant in an advanced seminar organized by the late Barbara Tedlock, I was charmed by the El Delirio campus and dazzled by the erudition of other scholars in the seminar, most of whom were more experienced and better published than I.

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The convergence of the fifteenth anniversary of SAR’s Residential Fellowships and Michael Brown’s ten years of leadership offers an opportunity to look back at the successes and challenges of the program. In short, fifty years in the Resident Scholar program has become an astonishingly successful and sought-out scholarly opportunity. Hundreds of scholars have come and written books and dissertations, resulting in innumerable awards and accolades from National Book Awards to Fulbright, Guggenheim, and MacArthur fellowships. More than just awards, though, books written at SAR such as The Land of Open Graves (De León, 2015) and The Heartbeat of Wounded Knee (Treuer, 2019), among many others, have fundamentally changed the way we see and think about the world.

As of this writing, our fellowship program brings a half dozen scholars to SAR each September, supported by a mix of internally-funded fellowships (the Weatherhead and Katrin S. Lamon fellowships) and restricted fellowships, currently from the Mellon Foundation, the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, and the Paioheimo Foundation. Sometimes our fellows combine a residence with us with another, external non-residential fellowship, such as this year’s Paloheimo Fellow, Margaux Fitzoussi, who is concurrently a Paloheimo and Charlotte W. Newcombe Fellow. In rare cases, such as former Lamer Fellow Dorothy Grant or current Weatherhead Fellow Carl Elliott, we have made semester-long appointments, but we typically have all fellows arrive in September for orientation, and ideally build positive relationships within their group. Even decades later, our alumni often speak of the importance of those cohorts in their own work and intellectual development, as well as the long-term interpersonal bonds they form with each other. Thus, in addition to stellar intellectual projects, we also seek to build strong conversations and community, in which younger scholars can find mentorship and senior fellows are inspired in new directions.

With about twenty applicants for each fellowship, we can and must be extraordinarily selective; in the end, the number of outstanding applications received. Indeed, the current pilot “low-residence” Wenner-Gren fellowship option is crafted around that constraint. All the residences but one are on SAR’s property; we rent one casita on the east side of Garcia Street. Every year, we do our best to accommodate varying family sizes, numbers of pets, allergies, and particular academic needs to the available housing. Let’s just say this is more art than science...

While there are always challenges, such as the increasing rarity of year-long sabbatical support, fifty years in SAR’s Residential Scholar program has a strong foundation, and with continued alumni and donor support, is sure to grow further.

The SAR Board of Directors Introduces Morris W. Foster, SAR’s Next President

SAR’s Residential Scholar Program

Looking Back at Fifty Years of the SAR Resident Scholar Program

The SAR Board of Directors Introduces Morris W. Foster, SAR’s Next President

J. I. Staley Prize

SAR Awards Top Prize in Scholarship and Writing in Anthropology to Tanya Marie Luhrmann

SAR is pleased to announce the recipient of the 2024 J. I. Staley Prize: Tanya Marie Luhrmann, Albert Ray Lang Professor of Anthropology at Stanford University, for her book How God Becomes Real: Kindling the Presence of Invisible Others (Princeton University Press, 2020). Since 1988 the School for Advanced Research has awarded the J. I. Staley Prize to a living author for an English-language book that exemplifies outstanding scholarship and writing in anthropology.

The selection committee states, “With admirable clarity and a directness that belies the sophistication of her argument, T. M. Luhrmann explores the practices that enable people to experience the divine as embodied, tangible, and real. Based on decades of wide-ranging fieldwork with evangelical Christians in the U.S., India, and elsewhere, as well as other denominational communities, she argues that it is action, discipline, and repetition that drive faith, rather than the reverse. Looking at the many ways that devout individuals cultivate a talent for joining private-but-shared imaginative worlds, Luhrmann shows how faith is ‘kindled’ or intentionally brought into being.’”

Luhrmann’s previous book, When God Talks Back, was named a New York Times Notable Book of the Year and a Kirkus Reviews Best Book of the Year. She has published over thirty op-eds in the New York Times, and her work has been featured in the New Yorker, the New York Review of Books, the Times Literary Supplement, Science News, and other publications. She is currently at work on a book titled Voices.

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Announcing the Appointment of Morris W. Foster as Next SAR President

When Michael F. Brown accepted the role as president for the School for Advanced Research in 2014, he committed to leading the institution for ten years. True to his word, last fall Dr. Brown announced his retirement effective July 2024, ending a tenure of exceptional service in leading SAR in a period of substantial programmatic and fundraising growth that has broadened SAR’s impact nationally and internationally.

After an extensive search, SAR’s board of directors has announced that Dr. Morris W. Foster has accepted the role of SAR’s new president effective July 1, 2024. Dr. Foster holds a PhD in anthropology from Yale University and his research focuses on social history and medical anthropology. He has published on a wide range of topics including Native American ethnography and ethnohistory, processes for community engagement, population and medical anthropology. He has served in a number of other university administrative roles as well as leadership positions for multiple non-profit organizations. Dr. Foster is married to Joan Cuccio, who is a potter. They have three adult children.

Morris W. Foster

University of Oklahoma and was vice president for research at Old Dominion University (ODU), where he led the effort for ODU to achieve Carnegie classification as an “R1” or “Very High Research” institution. Dr. Foster has served in a number of other university administrative roles as well as leadership positions for multiple non-profit organizations. Dr. Foster is married to Joan Cuccio, who is a potter. They have three adult children.

Ken Cole, chair of SAR’s board of directors, expresses confidence that Morris Foster will build on SAR’s recent momentum, which includes its first-ever traveling exhibition of Pueblo pottery, Grounded in Clay, currently at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. “Morris’s anthropological training, administrative experience, and familiarity with Native American issues will serve SAR well,” says Cole. “We are delighted that he has accepted our offer to take the helm of one of Santa Fe’s oldest and most distinguished cultural institutions.”

Dr. Foster states, “I am honored to be selected as SAR’s next president, especially following Michael F. Brown’s decade of outstanding accomplishments. SAR plays a unique role in the intersection of the arts, humanities, and social sciences. Exploring these intersections is critical to advancing the academic disciplines served by SAR. Of equal importance, SAR also has the ability to help frame those interdisciplinary understandings in accessible terms that demonstrate the value of interweaving academic and Indigenous ways of thinking about the world to address critical challenges. SAR is one of only a handful of independent research institutes shaping this interdisciplinary and inter-community space for both the public and academia. I’m looking forward to continuing SAR’s long tradition of scholarly and community engagement.”


It has been an eventful decade, and I leave convinced that 117 years after its founding, SAR is stronger than ever.

Cordially,

Michael F. Brown

SAR President
The Year the Stars Fell

Philip Deloria, 2023–2024 Katrin H. Lamon Fellow, is writing a new book that looks at American epidemiology through shared experiences of the extraordinary Leonid meteor storm of November 1833—which may have generated as many as thirty meteors per second. “This is a perfect moment in America to imagine a continental history of shared experience among many peoples.”

Phil’s SAR project comes out of the American studies tradition of interdisciplinary and his long-term interest in Plains Indian winter counts, pictographic chronicles that Native peoples used to construct relational histories. “When you think about winter counts, you always go to the year 1833 and the Leonid meteor showers because it’s a miniature version of this larger continental history.”

Looking across time brings better understanding to American multicultural dynamics. “The 1830s are a dark time of hardship and trauma and division. We think of the Civil War as the moment where America breaks apart. Well, it all starts before that. The 1830s are a real point of fracture.”

“People can see breaking into their separate groups and jostling with one another about just what this meteor storm might mean. How do we understand it? Through science? Through faith? In that sense, writing out of the present, the moment of the politics of now, the economics of now, the darkness of now . . . all of that is to be found in the 1830s as well, and it’s crystalized by the falling stars.”

Since the early 1970s, the School for Advanced Research has supported over 270 pre-doctoral and post-doctoral scholars with its resident scholarship programs on our historic campus in Santa Fe, New Mexico. With our Katrin H. Lamon Fellowship for Native American scholars, established in 1985, we have long been a significant source of support for Native scholars and scholarship. More recently, the Mellon Foundation pre-doctoral and post-doctoral research fellowships have allowed SAR the opportunity to expand and deepen our support of Latinx scholarship.

Despite having hosted some significant scholarly work in African and African-diaporic studies, SAR has aspired to a greater role in supporting a comparable level of African-American scholarship in anthropology write large. Toward that end, SAR approached the Wenner-Gren Foundation, which is known for its leadership role in helping anthropologists advance knowledge, build sustainable careers, and amplify the impact of anthropology within the wider world. To SAR’s delight, the Foundation made a three-year commitment to support an annual Wenner-Gren fellowship at SAR. Scholars selected for the nine-month Wenner-Gren fellowship at SAR can complete their doctorate degrees or further their post-doctoral work in anthropology. In 2022, SAR welcomed the first Wenner-Gren Fellow in Anthropology and Black Experiences, Paula Ebron, associate professor of anthropology at Stanford University; following in 2023 was Bertin Louis, associate professor of anthropology at University of Kentucky; and we look forward to welcoming this fall Fiori Berhane, assistant professor of anthropology at the University of Southern California. With Wenner-Gren Foundation’s support, scholars whose research draws on Black studies, critical race studies, diasporic African studies, the vernacular insights of communities of color, and other sources of inspiration growing out of global Black experiences, have an opportunity to advance new lines of scholarship in any of anthropology’s subfields.

The Wenner-Gren Foundation is dedicated to broadening the conversation in anthropology to reflect the full diversity of the field. Dr. Danilyn Rutherford, president of the Wenner-Gren Foundation, reflects: “The Wenner-Gren Foundation is delighted to continue its collaboration with the School for Advanced Research promoting scholars specializing in anthropology and Black experiences. We’ve been thrilled and honored to support important leaders in anthropology, beginning with Paula Ebron, and continuing with Bertin Louis and next year’s Fellow, Fiori Berhane. There are so few opportunities open to scholars of all levels, including tenured professors who need time to navigate important transitions in their careers. This has been a great partnership, coming at a time when there’s wonderful work being done in this area.”

SAR is excited to partner with the Wenner-Gren Foundation to amplify perspectives previously under-represented in anthropology and is most grateful for their support and for enhancing SAR’s resident scholar programs.

Donor Profile: The Wenner-Gren Foundation

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A New Vision for SAR’s Cottonwood Plaza

Recent visitors to El Delirio will have noticed that the iconic cottonwood tree at the center of the campus is no longer. Two certified arborists confirmed what was evident to many of us; that the colossal tree had reached the end of its long life. After the tree’s removal, the former area has been cleared and leveled in anticipation of a face-lift under the guidance of Sites Southwest, a landscape architecture firm.

We expect that some improvements will be underway by late summer or early fall, including planting of several shade trees whose water needs are more modest than those of the cottonwood they replace. The area is likely to receive a semi-permeable crushed-stone surface punctuated by flagstone paths. Also under consideration is installation of a pergola and a water feature. The goal is to enhance this important element of the SAR campus and realize its full potential as an attractive gathering place for staff and visitors.
Interns Rachel and Maie Reflect on their Time at SAR’s Indian Arts Research Center

Over the last nine months, Maie and I have not only expanded our museum experience but also made meaningful professional connections both on and off SAR’s campus. This internship, split among collections, registration, and education, has provided a formidable opportunity for learning and growth as emerging museum professionals.

Rachel Morris and Lorna Maie Thomas Taking Basket Inventory in the IARC

Our day-to-day has been guided by emerging museum professionals. The opportunity for learning and growth as education, has provided a formidable experience but also made meaningful development opportunities, including our time at the Association of Tribal Archives, Libraries, and Museums conference where we connected with both familiar and new faces. On Tuesdays, we have been able to explore even more sections of the museum field at the Poeh Cultural Center, the Museum of Contemporary Native American Art, and the Museum Resource Division of the New Mexico Department of Cultural Affairs.

For our time spent at the IARC and SAR, and we are excited for what is next!

-Rachel & Maie

Philosopher Carl Elliott Questions the Ethics of Medical Experimentation in New Book

In his new book, The Occasional Human Sacrifice: Medical Experimentation and the Price of Saying No (W.W. Norton & Company, 2024), SAR’s 2023-2024 Whistleblower Fellow, philosopher Carl Elliott lays bare the troubling stakes of whistleblowing on abusive medical research.

Trained as a physician and ultimately a whistleblower himself, Elliott “came to understand that whistleblower narratives are not so much moral justifications as stories about the self. For whistleblowers, the decision to blow the whistle is a choice about the sort of person they are and the one they want to be.”

The human losses in every study were extreme and enduring, not only to participants, but to the communities around them. Through multi-year conversations with medical research whistleblowers on six high-profile cases, Elliott found they had in common “a difficulty in coming to terms with this new world that had been exposed to them. Their assumptions about the way the world worked up to this point in their life were undermined and destroyed.”

Elliott’s SAR book project, Degroddition, flips “the traditional philosophical way of deciding what you think about something and then trying to construct as deep and unavailable an argument for it as possible.” Instead, he “started with looking at something and saying, wow, I’m not quite sure how I feel about that. So, I need to explore why.”

Delegation and its variants—such as shame and indignity—are unarguable forces that shape the modern world. Yet delegation is hard to think clearly about. Who determines whether a practice is degrading? To what extent should we be permitted to degrade ourselves?

Carl Elliott’s next book is sure to provoke us into better understandings of ourselves in our time.

“For whistleblowers, the decision to blow the whistle is a choice about the sort of person they are and the one they want to be.”

SAR NOW

The School for Advanced Research gratefully acknowledges the very generous support of the Paháálo Foundation for publication of this newsletter. The Foundation’s grant honors the late Leonora Paloheimo and her mother, Leonora Curtin, who served on the board of managers of the School from 1933 to 1972.