

NAASR

Method Today

NAASR 2016 • San Antonio, TX • November 18-19, 2016

With the success of the 2015 NAASR program—devoted to examining the current state of theory in the study of religion with four main papers plus responses—the 2016 program will retain the same format but turn its attention instead to the closely related topic of method. And because of the wide variety of methods used in the cross-disciplinary study of religion we're proposing narrowing the focus to four key tools that all scholars of religion surely employ, regardless their approach to the study of religion: **description, comparison, interpretation, and explanation.**

The program committee is therefore inviting members to consider the place of each of these in the study of religion—recognizing that examining each opens conversations on far wider topics of relevance to NAASR's mission, such as description being intimately linked to ethnography, viewpoint, first person authority (to name but a few). In much the same way, detailed consideration of the other three tools also leads into conversations on the basics of the field (E.g., Having survived critiques of comparison as ethnocentric, what is the future of comparative studies and how ought they to be carried out? Given the once dominant, but for some now discredited, place of hermeneutical approaches what is entailed in the interpretation of meaning today? And, despite their once prominent place several generations ago, what does one make of the continuing lack of interest in the academy in naturalistic, explanatory theories of religion?) This focus on method, by means of these four basic tools, therefore provides us with an opportunity to assess the current state of the field.

As with the 2015 program, three scholars who work in a variety of subfields will respond to each of the four main papers (thereby involving 16 participants in total). The four main, pre-circulated papers will only be summarized briefly at their sessions and a large portion of the sessions will again be reserved for open conversations; the goal is that all of the papers will then be published in a special issue of *MTSR*. Unlike last year, however, the Program Committee will commission the four main generative papers (based on hopes that they eventually contribute to a new NAASR book series, to be announced soon).

The call this year, then, is for 12 respondents who are willing to each tackle the statements made by one of the four main papers. A successful proposal to be a respondent must address only one of the four tools—description, comparison, interpretation, or explanation—briefly demonstrating how you understand the term, challenges for its use today, and what, for you, is at stake in its deployment in a specific historical, textual, or behavioral situation. Successful proposals, then, should briefly demonstrate an awareness for how one of these tools intersects with the history of our field and our current practices, which simultaneously demonstrates your preparation to offer a challenging and thought-provoking response at this year's upcoming meeting.

***Send your 250 word (max.) abstract to
NAASR's Vice President, Aaron Hughes (aaron.hughes@rochester.edu),
by no later than March 01, 2016***

Note: based on the success of the 2015 workshop, a NAASR jobs workshop will also be offered in 2016, organized again by Mike Graziano; more information on this will be circulated at a later date.