

**Summary of the Final Consultation Report on NASSS written by Dr. Alma R. Clayton-Pedersen, American Association of Colleges and Universities**

by

Stephan Walk, President  
North American Society for the Sociology of Sport

For some time, the leadership and a portion of the membership of NASSS have raised concerns and begun acting upon issues related to both the compositional diversity of NASSS as well the climate of the annual NASSS conference. To date, these actions have included establishment of a Racial and Ethnic Diversity Committee (now the Diversity and Conference Climate Committee); meetings at the annual conference to discuss diversity and conference climate issues; a survey about the racial and ethnic climate of the conference; creation of a the Graduate Minority Scholarship; and establishment of the Saturday Spotlight session featuring emerging scholars whose work focuses on critical race theory.

As a continuation of these efforts, in 2005 NASSS retained the services of Alma Clayton-Pedersen of the American Association of Colleges and Universities. She was asked to consult with NASSS and assist in making it a more diverse, inclusive and intellectually vibrant organization, focusing in particular on issues of race and ethnicity. She was asked to prepare a final report and to suggest strategies for change. After conducting a number of interviews with members and sub-groups of NASSS at the 2005 conference in Winston/Salem, as well as an examination of NASSS documents and other resources, Dr. Clayton-Pedersen issued her final report in late February 2006. The Report was then forwarded to Louis Harrison, Chair of the Diversity and Conference Climate Committee (DCCC) for distribution to that committee. This piece represents an effort to summarize the key points of Dr. Clayton-Pedersen's report and to focus attention on next steps in the ongoing process. It concludes with a set of action items developed by the DCCC in concert with the NASSS Board of Directors.

**Summary of the Final Report**

Dr. Clayton-Pedersen utilized inter-organizational collaboration theory as part of her analysis of NASSS, and started with two primary assumptions: First, that NASSS as an organization wishes to weave the resolutions and consensus it achieves on these issues into the fabric of NASSS and, second, that NASSS wishes to institutionalize the outcomes of this work into efforts it evolves/sustains over time. Overall, she observed a consensus among those with whom she spoke that NASSS wishes for a more cohesive organization—one that is unified and serves its members.

Dr. Clayton-Pederson observed three “internal forces” within NASSS that are behind the efforts to resolve these issues:

1. NASSS member dissatisfaction with the status quo, which included those who felt isolated and not included in NASSS activities;
2. The interest of NASSS to increase membership, particularly among those from underrepresented racial and ethnic minority groups; and
3. The need to develop the resources that would support better delivery of services to existing and new members of NASSS.

In Dr. Clayton-Pedersen's interviews with NASSS members and leadership, she concluded that, in general, the primary goals of individual NASSS members relate to

1. Intellectual needs for scholarly and collegial affiliation;
2. Professional needs to present and publish scholarship, particularly in light of employment, tenure and promotion concerns;
3. Affiliation needs related to social identity groups within the context of scholarship;
4. Modeling actual engagement/participation in sport/activity while at the annual NASSS Conference, in addition to analyzing them as a part of society and culture.

She also noted goals identified by those in leadership positions in NASSS. The included:

1. Organizational needs related to expansion and diversity of NASSS membership;
2. Organizational needs related to increasing the prominence of NASSS with larger communities of scholars than are not currently being reached

She also observed that some NASSS members were actually unaware of concerns with racial and ethnic diversity and were surprised that a survey on these issues had been conducted, stating that they did not see a problem with NASSS in this area. Dr. Clayton-Pedersen observed that the purpose of the survey may not have been clear to the membership, but also noted the more general divergence between the goals articulated by individual members and the NASSS leadership, as seen above. She concluded that linkages between the goals of individual members of NASSS may not articulate well with the goals of the organization as a whole and recommended that these linkages need to be developed.

Dr. Clayton-Pedersen observed that resource issues figure prominently in the prospects of NASSS to address these issues. Resource issues include the sole reliance on volunteers to conduct the business of NASSS, although she acknowledged "how the size of NASSS's membership limits the pursuit of its goals." Since pools of volunteers are often small and overworked, as well as potentially self-perpetuating and exclusionary, they may fail to develop a diversity of individuals who see the work as fruitful or worthwhile. To address this need, the report recommends that NASSS begin in earnest to develop a broad base of volunteers sharing common goals. One way this could start is by more directly accommodating the career interests of new student members (e.g. in sport management or journalism) who can then be groomed as future leaders of NASSS. More generally, the report concluded that NASSS must do a better job of developing and

highlighting the “benefits” of membership in order to both grow in size and develop its leadership.

Dr. Clayton-Pedersen also cited clear communication as a limitation on NASSS’s capacity to develop a membership that feels both enfranchised and involved. This includes better and more widely accessible communication of outcomes of NASSS efforts, including those that address diversity and climate issues (e.g. such as the survey). The report sees the NASSSnews newsletter and NASSS.org website as the most prominent and accessible forums for keeping the membership informed, and particularly emphasized the website, given the potential of blogs and other formats to stimulate ongoing and focused interaction. In this regard, the report also suggests very strongly that if NASSS asks members for feedback on issues, it should also make sure it follows through on the resulting suggestions.

The report sees the annual NASSS conference as the most fruitful resource for establishing and continuing structures and processes that support the membership and foster inclusiveness. Among conference activities that seem to be working, but which need further development and attention, are the *Take a Student to Lunch* tradition as well as the more recent sessions in the conference that address ongoing issues of concern. In both cases, the purposes of these activities need to be clearly stated and need to evolve with the evolving interests of the participants.

Finally, the need for transparency in NASSS’s organizational processes was a theme found throughout the report. Examples included, most notably, a lack of clarity among some NASSS members about how one becomes part of the Editorial Board of *Sociology of Sport Journal* and the criteria and processes used for the review of abstracts submitted to sessions at the NASSS conference. These key decision-making and gate-keeping activities were seen as places that both limit the acceptance of new forms of scholarship and may discourage the scholars that produce such scholarship. One suggestion would be to devote sessions, perhaps annually, to the characteristics of successful submissions to journals in the field, as well as successful conference abstracts, including discussion of the processes by which these forms of scholarship are reviewed.

Overall, Dr. Clayton-Petersen concluded that NASSS needs to become more compositionally diverse in its leadership, needs to develop leaders by fostering the development of students into scholars and office holders, needs to make organizational processes inclusive and transparent, and that all efforts to make NASSS more diverse and inclusive must link the goals of individual members with the goals of NASSS as an organization.

### **Diversity and Conference Climate Committee’s Proposed Action Items**

In response to the Final Report, members of the DCCC and the NASSS Board of Directors developed a set of potential action items that will serve as starting places for discussion on Thursday evening, November 1, at the NASSS Dialogues session at the annual NASSS Conference in Vancouver, BC. These items are as follows:

1. Develop written goals for diversity and embed them into the goals for NASSS as a whole;
2. Explore the consequences of a visible lack of compositional diversity in NASSS leadership and membership;
3. Establish processes whereby students are developed into scholars and NASSS leaders;
4. Increase levels of awareness of diversity issues by NASSS members;
5. Explore consequences of “whiteness” for intellectual hierarchies, journal contents, membership, loyalties, and decision-making with regard to faculty, students, curricula, and climate;
6. Improve communication related to interdisciplinary dialogues and raising the profile of NASSS, and make discussions about diversity public;
7. Examine gatekeeping issues with regard to scholarship, as seen in the processes by which members of the *SSJ* Editorial Board and the Conference Program Committee (including how conference themes, session themes, and paper themes are determined and how they are related to NASSS goals) are selected, and how these gatekeepers conceptualize and frame discussions with respect to race;
8. Expand the focus on the conference climate from that on social interactions to inviting people to link scholarship to NASSS goals as well as with praxis.
9. Consider publishing the full text of journal articles in languages of existing NASSS and potential future members of NASSS, including French and possibly Spanish