Student Director

The Student Director serves a two-year term. The Student Director is a member of the Board of Directors, representing the student and graduate student constituencies. They also work closely with the Graduate Student Committee and serve on the Planning Committee.

Elonda Clay

Robyn Henderson-Espinoza

Elonda Clay is a doctoral student in religion and science at the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago. Her research interests include critical approaches to hip-hop and religion, intersectionality, and public theology. Clay has presented several papers at regional and national meetings of the AAR. Her presentations and publications focus on the ways in which hip-hop culture has been used to challenge dominant discourses about religion and race. Clay also attended the Summer Leadership Academy at Harvard Divinity School.

Clay is a cofounder and steering committee member of the Critical Approaches to Hip-Hop and Religion Consultation. She has also served as a member of both the AAR Technology Task Force and the Ritual Studies Group steering committee.

Statement on the AAR

For the full century of its existence, the American Academy of Religion has been an organization that has both encouraged and represented the study of religion. It is part of a wider community of active professionals that engage topics related to the practice of scholarship on religion.

If elected, I would work to enhance what the AAR does to strengthen the public understanding of religion, research, and the role of religion in society. This includes ensuring that the Academy is committed to diversity and inclusivity in terms of membership, theoretical perspectives, and methodological approaches.
As I see it, the Student Director of AAR should have three primary practical goals: 1) Provide useful programming and resources for students, 2) Foster a sense of community and belonging among graduate students, and 3) Advocate for the interests of emerging scholars. While engaging the interdisciplinary settings of science and religion as a graduate student, I have observed the unique challenges and opportunities that arise in this space. Years of experience in information technologies, academia, and community service have equipped me with the skills necessary to address these challenges.

Robyn Henderson-Espinoza, born of a Mexican woman and Anglo man, is a joint doctoral student at the University of Denver. Her research focuses on the intersection of religion and ethics, with a particular interest in the materiality of the body. Henderson-Espinoza's master's thesis was a systematic and chronological study of the theology of María Pilar Aquino. She currently serves as the Graduate Coordinator of the University of Denver's Latino/a Center for Religion and Social Justice, where she explores the role of religion in contemporary society and the materiality of the body as a site for ethical discourse.

Statement on the AAR

Being a graduate student is akin to living in the Borderlands: we engage in multiple contact zones and are always in the process of adaptation. I believe that communities like AAR are extremely beneficial to the success of the graduate student. It is in this ethos of community and support that I find the AAR to be an invaluable resource. I would also like to see the Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion be a conversation partner in this component of mentoring and highlighting the importance of relationality among students and the professional guild.

I would like to continue this very important work. Being trained at an institution that focuses on mentoring and scholarship, I am well-equipped to serve as the new national Student Director, providing a space for graduate students to explore themselves and their work, and learn ways to engage the profession as they negotiate their scholarship.