

March 31, 2000

To: Executive Board, AAA  
From: Executive Committee, ARS  
Re: Section Name

The Executive Committee of the Anthropology of Religion Section has unanimously agreed to change the section's name to the Society for the Anthropology of Religion. However, we are constrained by an Association policy adopted in 1995 that prohibits the use of the term "society" in the naming of new sections such as ours. This policy was part of a set of provisions adopted during a period in which new sections were proliferating within the AAA. As we understand it, the restriction on names was an attempt to circumvent the appearance of undue autonomy of sections from the AAA.

The climate within the association has moderated since 1995, and we are aware that as of October 1999 you as the current board have begun to relax some of these constraints. These include the repeal of the prohibition against new sections carrying budget surpluses into the next year, and repeal of the requirement that all members of new sections must subscribe to AA (we recognize this latter as a separate issue from the decision that all AAA members should receive AA). It is along these same lines, in order to move toward uniform policies for all sections new or old, that we are now asking for reversal of the naming policy as well.

We have no intention of separating ourselves from our fundamental identification with the discipline of Anthropology and with the Association. Where possible, we have collaborated with like-minded sections in organizing our annual meeting. We are also working to raise the visibility of anthropological approaches to religion among sister organizations in related disciplines including religious studies, history of religion, and sociology of religion. However, when we engage in these efforts, identifying ourselves as a "section," our current name becomes unwieldy because it makes no sense unless it specifies what we are a section of Anthropology of Religion Section of the American Anthropological Association. This unwieldiness comes into play in all except the quite narrow contexts in which the status within AAA is evident, such as meetings of the Section Assembly. A prime example is our joint meeting with the AES last month, which had to be billed as "The American Ethnological Society and the Anthropology of Religion Section..."

Again, we do not regard this change in any way as an attempt to create an artificial autonomy from the AAA, but simply as a matter of facilitating communication. Although the term "section" appropriately describes an organizational status (the American Ethnological Society is similarly a 'section'), it is less appropriate for an organizational name. The new name brings us in line with the majority of other sections that refer to themselves as societies and consequently reinforces a holistic vision of the association and our common discipline.

On receiving notice of a policy change by the AAA board, we will submit the new name for ARS

members' approval on the 2001 ballot. Thank you very much for your consideration.