

2023 Section Annual Report: Part 1 for Science, Knowledge and Technology (SKAT) Section

Introduction

Annual reports are used by the Sections Committee to assess the health of a Section, measure the Section's vitality, and identify processes, programs, or initiatives that could serve as a model for other Sections. In addition, they serve to provide institutional memory, socialize new Section leaders, and promote transparency to Section members.

This annual report covers the period of Section activity from September 2022 to August 2023 and a fiscal year from January 2023 to December 2023. This portion of the report will be shared publicly.

Section Governance

Provide details of your Section's governance activity during the period between September 2022 and August 2023.

Business Meeting

Copy and paste below (or attach separately) the agenda and draft/approved meeting minutes from the Section business meeting which include a count of members present and summary of decisions made at this meeting. Minutes are not a transcript of proceedings, but a listing of what discussions took place and official actions taken.

Please see attached.

Council Meeting

Copy and paste below (or attach separately) the agenda and draft/approved meeting minutes of all council meetings. Minutes must include a list of council members present and a summary of decisions made. Minutes are not a transcript of proceedings, but a listing of what discussions took place and official actions taken.

Please see attached.

Awards

Provide a list of Section awards and awardees conferred in the past year.

The Hacker-Nicholas Mullins Graduate Student Award

Mira Vale, University of Michigan, "Algorithmic Affordances: The Relational Construction of the Electronic Health Record."

The Robert K. Merton Book Award

Soraya Boudia (University of Paris), Angela N. H. Creager (Princeton University), Scott Frickel (Brown University), Emmanuel Henry (Université Paris-Daphine – PSL), Nathalie Jas (French National Research Institute for Agriculture, Food, and the Environment (INRAE)), Carsten Reinhardt (University of Bielefeld), Jody A. Roberts (Independent Scholar). *Residues: Thinking Through Chemical Environments*. Rutgers University Press. 2021

The Star-Nelkin Paper Award

Larry Au, Cristian Capotescu, Gil Eyal, and Gabrielle Finestone. 2022. "Long Covid and medical

gaslighting: Dismissal, delayed diagnosis, and deferred treatment.” *SSM – Qualitative Research in Health* 2: 100167.

Ida B. Wells-Troy Duster Award

Rosa, Fernanda. 2022. “From Community Networks to Shared Networks: The Paths of Latin-Centric Indigenous Networks to a Pluriversal Internet.” *Information, Communication & Society* 26(11): 2326–2344.

Emancipatory Practice in Science, Knowledge, and Technology

Alondra Nelson (Institute for Advanced Study)

2023 Finances

Provide a narrative on how the 2023 budget matched with actual expenses and income from 2023. Please account for any substantive differences.

We started with a balance of \$17,936 in Jan. 2022, which was similar to the beginning of the previous year. Our expenditures included reception, plaques, award prizes, membership fees for Ida B. Wells-Troy Duster Award winner who was not an ASA or SKAT member, and web domain renewal. Our balance as of September 2023 was \$18,192. We are in good financial health moving into 2023.

The Previous Year

Describe Section activities during the period between September 2022 and August 2023.

Provide an overview of the Section’s communications with its members and include explanation of how your communication strategy meets the goals and values of the Section. Include links to the section website, newsletters, and any other electronic media used.

ASA had adopted ASA Connect during the 2022-2023 period. SKAT members regularly posted to ASA Connect to share job advertisements, updates about publications, calls for papers, etc. In addition, SKAT published three newsletters: [one in the fall](#), [one in the spring](#), and [one in the summer](#). These newsletters were very rich in content, including information about the SKAT 2022 award winners, interviews with authors of recently published books, profiles of graduate students, reflections on the academic job market, section news about recent publications, as well as information about the 2023 ASA Meeting in Philadelphia. We also updated our [website](#) as needed, including the blog, and posted news to social media using [Mastadon](#). Our communication strategy was successful in keeping members apprised of section activities and creating a shared sense of community for SKAT scholarship and professional development.

Describe the Section’s diversity, equity, and inclusion goals. What steps were taken this year to achieve those goals?

The section now has a standing Anti-Racism in SKAT committee. This committee is charged with selecting winners of the Emancipatory Practice and Wells-Duster Prizes as well as continuing to identify ways to advance anti-racism in and through SKAT. Beyond this committee, we also worked more broadly on DEI goals by encouraging self-nominations for all of our awards,

highlighting the work of graduate students in our newsletter, and encouraging participation in SKAT activities through broadly eliciting volunteers for SKAT committees.

Provide an overview of the section's programming at the annual meeting and include explanation of how this programming meets the goals and values of the section (e.g. intellectual exchange, professional networking, mentoring, inclusion).

There were five SKAT sessions at the 2023 ASA Meeting in Philadelphia. Those sessions were titled, (1) "The Politics of Data and Quantification in the Public Sector," (2) "Environment, Knowledge and Technology," (3) "Global and Comparative SKAT," (4) "Technology and the Body," and (5) "Section on Science, Knowledge, and Technology Roundtable Session." These sessions highlight the section's commitment to the sociological investigation of science, knowledge, and technology. Additionally, one of our sessions was originally an open session that was open to any paper relevant to our section members. We did this to maximize the possibility for section members to submit papers regardless of their specific topic of study. Only after papers had been submitted did the organizers decide on a specific theme that would work to group strong submissions. As part of our programming, we also held a reception off-site, which provided an opportunity for professional networking and intellectual exchange. We had an estimated 55 attendees at this event.

Provide an overview of the Section's programmatic activities outside of the Annual Meeting (e.g. webinars, networking events, mentoring initiatives, resources for dissemination) and include explanation of this programming meets the goals and values of the Section.

The SKAT section organized a virtual Authors Meets Readers session this year. It was held on Friday, April 7 at 3pm ET. The session focused on Dr. Amit Prasad's book *Science Studies Meets Colonialism* (Polity Press, 2022). Dr. Prasad is an Associate Professor in the School of History and Sociology at Georgia Institute of Technology. His most recent book focuses on how science and technology studies (STS) has been inattentive to the importance of colonialism in shaping knowledge, and it illustrates how colonial legacies and sensibilities continue to shape STS scholarship. The Readers for this event were Dr. Dwai Banerjee, Associate Professor, Program in Science, Technology & Society, MIT; Dr. Susan E. Bell, Professor, Sociology Department, Drexel University; and Dr. Joy Y. Zhang, Reader in Sociology, Founding Director, Center for Global Science & Epistemic Justice, University of Kent. We had 24 participants attend this event, and the book generated an excellent discussion about ways to decenter colonial models of studying science, knowledge, and technology. This event met the programming goals and values of the Section by highlighting a recent book in the field, and it contributed to our DEI goals by facilitating a long-over discussion about colonialism in the field.

Council Meeting

Aug. 19, 2023

11 members attended the council meeting: Susan Bell, Jill Fisher, Nicole Foti, Kelly Joyce, Aaron Panofsky, Joan Robinson, Oliver Rollins, Tim Sacco, Alyson Spurgas, Yu Tao, Janet Vertesi

- Introduction
- Kelly thanked everyone for their service to SKAT.
- ASA Connect, going back to listserv on Sep. 1
- Membership info: SKAT membership is experiencing decline. All sections are experiencing a decline. There were 608 SKAT members in 2021 but 556 in 2022. Newsletter: can include a chair's column about membership, which might help with membership growth.
- Other sections have invited SKAT to do a joint reception, but we do not want to do this. Our reception creates a sense of community from the section.
- Piloted a virtual Author Meets Reader session on 4/7/2023, with 24 participants. Amit Prasad did it in April. The audience is beyond the U.S. Alyson Spurgas will do it in Fall. Kelly will send out a call. If there is enough interest, we could form a committee for this effort, with three readers for each session.
- Awards: need for transparency and fairness. Will present the awards at the business meeting. Regarding the Emancipatory and Wells Duster Awards, they are relatively new, so how to nominate is unclear. The committee did a lot to be more inclusive and transparent. In the long run, the section can have something in writing to achieve that goal. Need to have a template for nominations for future years. The committee adapted wording for Wells-Duster award; it doesn't have to be a book but can be a chapter. Only received 3 nominations by the original deadline; extended deadline and received more nominations. The committee did not reach out in the past year, but in the end of the process, the Committee or other SKAT members can tell people to nominate someone or themselves. The committee recused people who had a conflict of interest.
- The 2022 Wells-Duster award winner was not an ASA member. SKAT paid her ASA and SKAT membership fees but did not cover conference registration. She also raised the question how could registration be covered if future award winners did not have the privilege of having their department pay for that. We could ask if ASA can waive the registration fee. Follow up—Tao checked with ASA Sections after the ASA meeting and received the response that section funds could not be used to cover registration, and ASA could not waive registration fees for award winners.
- Possibly more fundraising activities for Wells-Duster and Emancipatory award in order to ensure their sustainability.
- Joan asked more about the nomination process. Letter vs. the work itself. It was agreed that for the Merton, Star-Nelkin, and Hacker-Mullins Awards, we would not require or evaluating nomination letters for those awards.
- Merton book award: smooth process; a lot of nominated books. Larger committee this year worked well.

- Star-Nelkin Paper Award: Close to 40 nominations. Have a larger committee next year.
- Newsletter: good work, well received. Larry will continue to be editor for another year.

SKAT Business Meeting Notes

Aug. 19, 2023

- Newsletter: Chair Kelly Joyce thanked the newsletter team, chaired by Larry Au.
- Membership: highest in 2021 but now down to 560. Encouraged more people to join SKAT.
- Award presentation

Emancipatory Practice Award: Alondra Nelson

Presented by Susan Bell

The Emancipatory Practice Award recognizes the often-hidden contributions that Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) make to the production of knowledge and sustaining of community in sociology, and from which SKAT has benefited. The committee selected Alondra Nelson as the recipient of the 2023 SKAT award for Emancipatory Practice. Alondra Nelson has held a series of high-profile leadership roles in institutions of higher education, research, and policy: Dean of the Division of Social Sciences at Columbia University, President of the Social Science Research Council, and, most recently, Deputy Director and Director of the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy. While each of these is an important achievement, the award specifically recognizes the way Nelson has used these roles to pursue the less-visible work of advancing BIPOC scholars and their contributions. Dr. Nelson has a well-documented record of accomplishments as a mentor to fellow scholars, particularly in overcoming the institutional obstacles in dominant institutions of research and education. She has also contributed to lasting change in the institutional fabric of science and technology at the national level. Early in her career, Nelson promoted scholarship on Afrofuturism, culminating with a special issue of *Social Text*. The agenda-setting project countered predominant imaginings of a future without race, by treating the future as a domain for the exploration and redefinition of African and African-American identity. She played a leading role in the ASA report “What Counts: Evaluating Public Communication in Tenure and Promotion,” recommending ways that nontraditional scholarship, particularly public engagement, should be evaluated in the profession. This work addressed an important structural imbalance in the profession, where the work of BIPOC scholars who devote themselves to public engagement is undervalued relative to academic publications. At the SSRC, Nelson led the development of the Just Tech program, which placed concerns of power, justice, and social impacts at the center of research and policymaking on emerging technologies. In her role at the OSTP, among other initiatives, Nelson injected the insights of minority scholars who have exposed the discriminatory potential of Artificial Intelligence into the highest levels of technology policymaking.

Award Committee:

Susan E. Bell (Chair, Anti-Racism Committee)

Daniel Breslau

Taylor Cruz

Daniel Navon

Emily Vasquez

Ida B. Wells-Troy Duster Award: Fernanda Rosa

Presented by Susan Bell

For Rosa's 2022 article "From Community Networks to Shared Networks: The Paths of Latin-Centric Indigenous Networks to a Pluriversal Internet". *Information, Communication & Society* 26(11): 2326–2344.

This award honors sociologist Troy Duster and his pathbreaking grandmother Ida B. Wells and is awarded for written scholarship by junior scholars that develops understanding of Black, African American, or Indigenous intersections with science, knowledge, and technology in the spirit of anti-racism. The Anti-Racism Committee is pleased to select Fernanda Rosa, Assistant Professor in the Department of Science, Technology and Society at Virginia Tech, for the 2023 Ida B. Wells – Troy Duster Award for her article, "From Community Networks to Shared Networks: The Paths of Latin-Centric Indigenous Networks to a Pluriversal Internet," published in *Information, Community & Society* (2022). The article is an exciting contribution to SKAT knowledge about how shared networks work and why seeing them is important for understanding the dynamics of power relations in internet governance and policy. Fernanda Rosa's ethnography of infrastructures identifies how indigenous self-determination, values infused data infrastructures, and the dynamics of opposition to colonialism are embedded in these infrastructures. Based on fieldwork, Fernanda looks closely at what communities developing infrastructures that connect telco networks to end users call "first-mile signal-sharing practices" (in contrast to what telecommunications companies call "last mile"). Alternative networks open up the first mile to extend the internet to communities where connections to internet service providers are unavailable or unsatisfactory. At the same time these infrastructures connect them to the global internet. Rosa takes a bottom-up approach by focusing on the successful efforts among the pueblos of Abasolo (pop. 2,884) and Guelatao de Juárez (pop. 544) in Tzeltal and Zapoteco to build and maintain internet access in the context of digital inequalities. She makes a forceful case for using the term "shared networks" (*redes compartidas*) instead of "community networks" to highlight the sharing practices that capture both the interconnection infrastructure and the values of coexistence that underlie first-mile practices. The committee was especially impressed by Fernanda Rosa's exquisitely detailed decolonial perspective (beginning with her confrontation of terms such as "Indigenous") that connects notions of hybridity with coloniality as well as her expansion of conventional actors within internet governance.

Award Committee:

Susan E. Bell (Chair, Anti-Racism Committee)

Daniel Breslau

Taylor Cruz

Daniel Navon

Emily Vasquez

Star-Nelkin Paper Award: Larry Au, Cristian Capotescu, Gil Eyal, and Gabrielle Finestone

Presented by Oliver Rollins

For Au et al.'s 2022 article "Long covid and medical gaslighting: Dismissal, delayed diagnosis, and deferred treatment". *SSM – Qualitative Research in Health* 2: 100167.

Award Committee:

Oliver Rollins (Chair)

Paolo Parra Saiani

Nilanjan Raghunath

Robert K. Merton Book Award: Soraya Boudia, Angela N. H. Creager, Scott Frickel, Emmanuel Henry, Nathalie Jas, Carsten Reinhardt, and Jody A. Roberts

The committee received 30 nominated books in 2023.

Presented by Joan Robinson

For Boudia et al.'s 2021 book *Residues: Thinking Through Chemical Environments*, published by Rutgers University Press.

Award Committee:

Joan H Robinson (Chair)

Sharla Alegria

danah boyd

Sarah Brothers

Melanie Jeske

Hacker-Mullins Student Paper Award: Mira Vale

Presented by Michael Stambolis-Ruhstorfer

For Vale's manuscript "Algorithmic Affordances: The Relational Construction of the Electronic Health Record."

The committee was faced with a tough job because of the number of excellent papers that we enjoyed reading. Mira Vale's paper was selected for this award because it stood out for the originality of its research question, the strength and appropriateness of methods, as well as its novel and strong contribution to the Sociology of Science, Knowledge and Technology. Mira's ambitious paper takes the case of electronic health records in the United States in order to theorize the effects of algorithms in everyday lives. She goes beyond limitations in the literature on the social construction of algorithms by shifting our focus away from debates about what algorithms are to concerns about what they do and how they do it. She does this by looking at how people who use electronic health records, both patients and health care providers, make what she calls "affordances" for the algorithms that undergird electronic health records systems. In particular, she focuses on affordances for opacity and fluidity. Opacity is the way users and the algorithm's code itself make the logic behind the system mysterious. Fluidity is the capacity of data to move rapidly and easily across systems, which was supposed to be an advantage of electronic health records. As it turns out, this fluidity is sticky and is only overcome thanks to efforts of doctors who work to create affordances that help data move despite its stickiness. I am confident that this conceptualization, which allows us to look at how algorithms are relational without getting bogged down in debates about what, exactly, they are, will help us unpack how people use algorithms in other domains, from transportation and media to education. ChatGPT, I'm looking at you. Mira will no doubt keep us up to date on the publication of her paper so that everyone can read, use, and cite it.

Award Committee:

Michael Stambolis-Ruhstorfer (Chair)

Arvind Karunakaran

Madeleine Pape

Victoria Pitts-Taylor

- Following the award presentations, Chair Kelly Joyce reminded members about the SKAT reception that evening to be held at P.J. Clarke's, 601 Walnut Street from 6:30-8:30pm.

- Chair Kelly Joyce introduced Chair-Elect Jill Fisher who thanked the Chair for her leadership over the past year, solicited ideas for next year's SKAT sessions, and encouraged members to sign up for committees.