2008 Annual Report of the Association Operations Committee

Deborah Nichols chaired the AOC for 2008 but she was unable to attend the fall meeting, which was chaired by Katherine Spielmann. This report has been prepared by Spielmann and reviewed by Nichols.

2008 Activities

Mentoring

In November 2007, the Governance Commission Report charged the AAA Executive Board with considering the establishment of a Leadership Training Institute and a Leadership Fellows Program in order to enhance communication within the AAA. The Commission recommended that advanced graduate students or recent PhDs be specifically targeted for these programs and that they include shadowing AAA leadership.

An AOC Fellow/Mentor and Workshop Workgroup comprised of Jennifer Jackson, Virginia Dominquez, Elaine Lynch, and Kim Baker responded to this charge with three detailed proposals (which were included in the May 2 minutes of the AOC):

- Formalization of shadowing and orientations currently in place – This plan would add specific outreach activities and resources to existing practices.
- Mentoring/Shadow Program – This would be a new program designed to encourage future leadership in the association. Estimated funding needed - $3,200
- Leadership and Governance Workshops – this would be a pilot program designed to orient potential leaders to the organization’s governance, policies and practice. Others who may be interested in this workshop include newly elected to committee members, new section officers, and department chairs.

The AOC endorsed these recommendations in its spring meeting. At the November Annual Meeting, the EB sponsored a 2-hour Leadership and Governance in Anthropology workshop with Monica Heller, Geoffrey White, Mac Marshall, Don Brenneis, Kim Baker, and Virginia Dominguez forming a leadership and staff roundtable in conversation with workshop attendees and participants. Although 30 people registered, only 5 attended. The plan is to continue the workshop next year but perhaps charge a modest fee in the hopes of greater commitment by registrants.

Labor Relations Committee

The Labor Relations Committee Workgroup (Virginia Dominquez, Dan Segal, Deborah Nichols, and Bill Davis), in consultation with some of the members of the Labor Relations Commission, determined that there is a need for the AAA to have a Committee on Labor Relations. Such a committee would conduct research on labor conditions relevant to the EB’s decisions about the scheduling of AAA annual meetings and other EB decisions regarding vendors and subcontractors, to the extent that it is feasible.
to do so. It would thus serve in an advisory capacity to the Executive Board. The AOC recommended to the EB that a Committee on Labor Relations be established.

**Five-Year Committee Reviews**

The AOC reviewed and discussed five-year reports of the following committees:

1. **Nominating Committee** – The Committee was re-authorized and requested to maintain a database of members whose names were submitted for nomination but did not win an election.

2. **Long Range Planning Committee** – A great deal of discussion focused on whether this committee should continue. The activities that were described in its 5-year report primarily involved mid-range planning rather than strategic planning.

The AOC recommended not reauthorizing the Long Range Planning Committee, but instead charged the Executive Board with the responsibility for strategic planning. The AOC recommended that an EB task force be created to focus on developing a new process for strategic decision-making and planning within the AAA. The task force was to report back to the EB at the November 2008 meeting.

The AOC in addition recommended that the current members of the LRPC be honored at the annual meeting in November with a farewell luncheon, and be paid the stipend that they would have received if the committee were still active.

**Resource Development Committee**

Their request to increase their number from 8 to 15 was approved by the AOC for a vote of the EB.

**Society for Anthropological Sciences**

The committee approved their request for a one-year extension on their probationary status.

**Interest group on Aging and the Life Course**

The committee approved the creation of this interest group.

**Office of Treasurer**

As requested, the AOC undertook a discussion of the term length of the AAA Treasurer, and recommended that the length remain at 3 years rather than being reduced to two years. Further discussion concerned the lack of clarity concerning the Treasurer’s position. To create transparency with respect to the position of AAA Treasurer, it was concluded that the AOC should appoint a working group that addresses the full range of issues relating to the defining and appointment of the this position. These issues include (but are not limited to):

- Term length of Treasurer
• Term limit of Treasurer; Technical/capacity limits constrain the pool of appropriate people for this position, but the sentiment was that we do not want an entrenched treasurer/ex officio presence on EB
• Whether the Treasurer must be a member of AAA

That working group should include: Ed Liebow (the current AAA Treasurer), the president or president-elect, and one member of the current AOC. This working group is charged with resolving these issues and presenting recommendations to the Spring board meeting.

It is expected that Board decisions based on the working group’s recommendations would be brought to the AAA membership as amendments to the AAA bylaws.

**Student Representative Assembly Charter**

The AOC discussed the draft of a Student Representative Assembly Charter. The EB in past conversations has highlighted the importance of student participation in the AAA and the need to attract students to the organization. While there is currently an ad hoc student assembly, there is less participation in that entity than desired. The hope is that a formal student assembly would make participation more attractive, and would encourage sections that currently have no student representative to appoint such a member.

Some concern was expressed over the use of the term “assembly” as it might be confused with the Section Assembly. AOC members agreed that “caucus” would be a suitable alternative. The AOC unanimously recommended approval of the charter of the Student Representative Assembly with the following changes: the name of the group to be Student Representative Caucus, and the term referenced in the section on Membership to begin at the end of the annual meeting.

**Commission on World Anthropologies**

The number of members was changed from 9 to 10 to include an archaeologist.

**Whistle-blower policy** (Elaine Lynch presented the information)

In response to an auditor recommendation that a whistle-blower policy be in place to protect AAA staff, the AOC reviewed and approved a draft of such a document. This document will be incorporated into the AAA employee handbook and all current staff will be given copies of the policy.

**Ethics of AAA Job Listings**

In response to an email to Setha from NAPA president Dennis Wiedman regarding her request that they remove a particular job announcement from their website, the AOC undertook a lengthy discussion of the relationship between certain types of employment and anthropological ethics. There was a strong sense that the AAA had been clear about
ethical dilemmas posed by certain kinds of employment. In particular, AAA documents such as the final report of the Commission on the Engagement of Anthropology with the US Security and Intelligence Communities and the October 31, 2007 EB statement on the HTS project discuss “conditions which are likely to place anthropologists in positions in which their work will be in violation of the AAA Code of Ethics.”

There are, however, no clear AAA guidelines or policy concerning the vetting of job ads. Following the recommendation of the Commission on the Engagement of Anthropology with the US Security and Intelligence Communities, the AOC recommended that the EB establish a small working group to develop guidelines for vetting job ads for the AAA that can be sent to sections to use as well. This working group should consist of TJ Ferguson, Charles Briggs, and Richard Thomas.

The AOC also strongly suggested that the final report of the Commission on the Engagement of Anthropology with the US Security and Intelligence Communities be made more visible within the AAA due to the depth of discussion it provides about the ethical dilemmas posed by certain military jobs.

With regard to the NAPA letter, the AOC recommended that the President’s response include:

- An expression of appreciation for their request for clarification:
- A declaration that the statement on their website and their practice consistent with their statement, are inconsistent with AAA policy and are in fact “inimical” to the association’s interests. Reference the relevant policy/EB statement

**Process for evaluating requests that the AAA support advocacy letters:**

Over the past year the EB and the President have received a number of requests for support of various human-rights issues across the globe. Some process whereby these requests can be evaluated and acted upon is necessary. The importance of oversight at the executive level was emphasized due to the concern that any letter or mailing going out under an AAA committee’s authority would appear to come from the AAA itself.

The AOC recommended a modification to the current procedure for vetting advocacy letters such that any AAA entity requesting that their letter receive the AAA President’s signature or any advocacy letter generated by an AAA committee is dealt with by: The President circulating the letter draft to an ad hoc Executive Committee that should consist of the AAA officers (secretary, treasurer, president-elect) and the section assembly convener. Ideally the letter is circulated within 24 hours of receipt. This group decides whether to

- Reject the letter
- edit it and return for consent on edits (with the EC having final say on the wording)
- ok the letter but have only the unit sign off on it
- ok the letter and have the President sign off on it.
The AOC felt it was important that EB members be informed as to what letters have been signed off on in this expedited procedure. Damon was asked to keep track of whether the board has been notified. Monthly or quarterly reports to the EB on such letters would be fine.

In some cases it is desirable to have the entire EB review the proposed letter. In those cases the procedure contained in the proposal that Bill and Damon prepared (included in EB binder) would be followed except that the current procedure (majority of those voting) would be left in place.

It was recommended that, when possible, for those letters that we decide to support, the EB post or provide a link to the evidence given in response to 3a, which requests background information on the issue or concern to be addressed, on the AAA website. The sense was that it is incumbent on any unit who expects us to act on their behalf to provide information that can be disseminated as widely as possible.